

Hovering Between Educational Ideals and Reality: An Ethnographic Inquiry into Beijing  
High School CLA Teachers' Bodily Experiences in Curriculum Change

by

Wei Wang

M.A., Beijing Language and Culture University, 2005

B.A., Jiamusi University, 1998

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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**Supervisor**

Dr. Kristin Mimick, (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)  
**Departmental Member**

## **Abstract**

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The eighth educational reform in China is experiencing a critical period. In the implementation process of this New Curriculum Reform (NCR), teachers become the target of criticism for their failure to act on the new ideas of the NCR. This research focuses on the question, “Why teachers accept the ideas of the NCR yet fail to implement these ideas in their daily teaching?” Through reflecting on my own teaching experience and interviewing a group of Chinese Language Arts teachers in a Beijing model high school, I collected qualitative data to create 8 ethnographic stories, showing teachers’ bodily, emotional and intrapersonal experiences that are rarely published in the academic world. Conclusions show that the coexistence of the new and old curriculum systems causes the discordance of school cultures, and teachers are suffering silently. Recommendations are made for researchers returning to teachers’ bodily experiences for solutions that can integrate reform ideals and reality.

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## Dedication

For my hardworking peers.

When I was working on my thesis, you breathed in the dangerous smog and taught with unhealthy working pressure in Beijing. You are the original motivation and final purpose for me to write down this thesis.

## Chapter 1 From the Misunderstanding

“The New Curriculum will change students’ school life and teachers’ teaching life; students in the New Curriculum will be able to change their whole life journey, and teachers will be able to fresh themselves with new vitality; Teachers will grow with the New Curriculum, grow with their students. Now, let’s start this new type of work and life experience.” (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001, p. 421)

### **The Misunderstanding Between Educational Ideals and Reality in China**

In the past few decades, systematic large-scale curriculum reforms have been carried out around the world with mixed success. China, the world’s second-largest economy with the largest population, has forced its educational wheel to turn forward with enormous difficulty. Inevitably, this reform imprints its mark on every individual who is involved at any level and may not be limited to the Chinese.

The curriculum reform, short for “A New Round of Basic Education Curriculum Reform” (NCR) was instigated in July 2001. The Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) then issued an “Outline of Basic Education Curriculum Reform (trial)” (OBECR, 《基础教育课程改革纲要（试行）》), set a clear reform goal and formulated the standards and instruction of each course. This top-down systematic reform hit a bottleneck recently although “there have been many difficulties along with the advancement of the implementation of it since the reform started” (Yan, 2010, p. 1). Zhang (2011) noted:

In the implementation process of the NCR, problems have arisen out from all macro, middle and micro aspects<sup>1</sup>. . . the curriculum reform has been far away from going deep into the core of the most basic education activity—class teaching, which led to a lot of teaching problems . . . generally speaking, the higher the grade, the more the problems.

(p. 7)

Many teachers and some officials and experts summarize the situation of the NCR implementation as a metaphorical statement—“wearing new shoes to walk on the old path”<sup>2</sup> (Guo, 2010; Wang, 2012, p. 5). In the biggest Chinese search engine, the number of items that describe the new curriculum as “new shoes on an old path” has kept increasing since 2009.<sup>3</sup> Other comments include criticizing the NCR as “radical” (Zha, 2007; 2009), suggesting new curriculum reformers are “too warm” idealists, who “misbelieved the assertions of some humanists and post-modernists.”<sup>4</sup> They “misunderstood that the arrival of the information era will lead to the dispensability of imparting knowledge by teachers in schools” and “misidentified the status quo and historical coordinate of China” (Wang., 2004, p. 11). Guo Hua suggested that

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<sup>1</sup> According to Zhang, the macro aspect refers to the ideas, system and mechanism of the curriculum reform; the middle aspect refers to the reform at school level and the micro aspect the class teaching level (Zhang, 2011, pp. 7-8).

<sup>2</sup> This is a Chinese saying about using old methods to deal with new situations. According to Wang’s (2012) explanation, this metaphor implies “the situation and ideas in the NCR are new, yet teachers’ practical teaching remains old, which leads the advancement of the reform to go bad.” The “old path” refers to the conventional schooling with several features: 1) “knowledge being the main object of school teaching,” 2) “lectures being the most important teaching method in school teaching,” 3) “teachers being leaders in teaching activities,” 4) “the standard of assessment being unified and confirmed” and “teaching being of educational traits” (Guo, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> On September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009, there were 12,700 search results in relation to “the NCR, wearing new shoes to walk on the old path” in Baidu, the biggest Chinese search engine in the world according to Guo (2010). The number of the search result with the same key words reached 292,000 on January 1st, 2013, according to an actual search by the author.

<sup>4</sup> By the two terms, Wang referred to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) in France, John Dewey (1859-1952) and progressive educators in the USA. As for examples of misunderstanding these Humanists and “post-modernists,” he briefly analyzed the failure of the No Child Left Behind Act during the Bush administration and the failure to implement pragmatic educational theory in the former Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s (Wang, 2004).

the features of the “old path” “are defining characteristics of the institutionalized school teaching. If any “new shoes ignore or deny these features they will never get on a real ‘new path’” (2010, p. 9).

Large-scale comprehensive surveys have shown resistance to this reform. The resistance comes not only from “external reasons” such as concern with university admission rate by local governments, “the mismatch difficulties between textbooks, exercise books and examinations” and “the inefficient teacher training,” but also from internal reasons such as the teachers themselves (Huo, 2010; Wang, 2010; Wu, 2012). “The absence of teachers’ responsibility in the teaching process,” “the deviation of understanding the NCR ideas by teachers,” “the shortage of implementers’ experiences and capabilities” and even knowledge, together with “job burnout of teachers” were all identified as reasons for the current plight of the NCR by some researchers (Chen, 2009, pp. 66-74; Yu, 2005; Zhang, 2011, p. 230).

Other scholars joined the criticism of teachers from the perspective of parents. Their condemnation was more straightforward and even stronger. For example, because “teachers’ teaching is out of date, too conservative; the teaching approaches fall behind too much”, and because “so far Language Arts teaching has lied and performed for showing, not only the textbooks but teaching being hypocritical”, and that “kids’ brains are full of rubbish after a half term of learning, we parents have to help these kids to dump out the rubbish during the holidays” (Wang, 2012, pp. 120-122 ).

Obviously the New Curriculum is indeed changing students’ school life and teachers’ teaching life, but not in an inspiring direction. Like an engine with insufficient power, our

delicate educational ideals groggily drag behind the harsh and heavy reality of implementation.

Yet whether because the reformers and policy makers have not paved a bright broad pathway for the implementation, or teachers have not figured out a right choice of their shoes, the easiest identified sinners are teachers, who are the key to finally realizing the reform in classrooms.

However, teachers' voices and experiences in the literature on educational reform in China are rarely heard.

### **The Obstacles against Solving the Misunderstanding**

In contemporary Chinese education, some contextual obstacles increase the difficulty to solve the misunderstanding.

On the one hand, the teachers who are working on class teaching for the NCR hardly have extra time, energy or capacity to write research or academic papers to describe their experiences. Statistics from relevant surveys<sup>5</sup> and my own teaching experiences confirm this

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<sup>5</sup> A large-scale and comprehensive survey that conducted by researchers in the East China Normal University showed that “there were 60.5% investigated teachers worked under huge pressure” and “57.7% teachers had very or relatively heavy workload.” The heavy workload came from “excessive working hours.” The survey report explained, “Apart from 10-18 class teaching hours, they took an average 30 hours more every week to prepare for classes and correct homework and papers.” “The main teacher in a class had to use almost double the hours mentioned to do ideological work for students.” “Ideological work” (做学生思想工作) is a well known phrase to Chinese main teachers. The work includes solving students' problems of low spirits, inactivity, negative attitudes to learning, or puppy love (it is viewed as disadvantage to learning), unsociability and other problems caused by unruly behaviour. This survey was conducted between March and June 2008, covering 1 municipality and 10 provinces (Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, Anhui, Shanxi, Henan, Heilongjiang, Yunnan, Guangxi and Gansu), 96 secondary schools with different types, 23,698 students, 6963 teachers, 5012 parents and 232 school leaders (Huo, 2010, p. 106). It involved 8699 teachers. An online survey on occupational stress and mental health of Chinese teachers in 2005 showed: “More than 80% of the investigated teachers worked under relatively high pressure; almost 30% of the investigated teachers had severe emotional exhaustion and almost 90% of them had a degree of emotional exhaustion. Nearly 40% of the investigated teachers had poor mental health; 20% of them had poor physical health; and more than 60% of them showed dissatisfaction with their job; some of them wanted to quit (Sina Education, 2005). Another survey, conducted in Jiangsu province and involving 26,200 high school teachers, showed that after six years of NCR, “94.7% teachers could not apply appropriate verbs to express the objectives of their courses” and “74.1% could not tell knowledge objectives from skill and attitude ones” (Wu J., 2012). A report on teachers' “impedance” (this means obstruction) in the NCR from a researcher in the Northwest Normal University also

fact. This means few knew the difficulties class teachers are facing. Meanwhile, narratives and stories are traditionally not of academic value in the Chinese academic community<sup>6</sup>. Most teachers in elementary and secondary schools are neither able to invest in research because of their daily teaching, nor do they have opportunities to publish their stories to provide an alternative view of the reform efforts.

On the other hand, the researchers who are working on this curriculum change in universities are not on intimate terms with grassroots work in elementary and secondary schools. Few if any new curriculum “experts” take jobs or part-time jobs as elementary or secondary teachers. Few “experts” on the new curriculum have done their case studies in fixed classrooms at elementary or secondary schools for a relatively long period, say, a year or more. The long-term large-scale surveys just moved researchers from one site to another, feeding them limited opportunities to expose to demonstration classes specifically prepared for them<sup>7</sup> rather than real classes and school life day to day. Besides, although there have been many theses and some

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showed: “According to the analysis of teachers’ knowledge, the existing knowledge of investigated teachers only reached 72.5% of the required knowledge of the NCR (Note: according to the report, teachers’ knowledge includes subject content, knowledge of general pedagogy and subject pedagogy, knowledge of students and teachers’ “self,” knowledge of educational purposes, values and philosophy). “Subject content knowledge, knowledge of general and subject pedagogy are main factors impacting on teachers impedance and the new curriculum implementation” (Zhang, 2011, pp. 80-89, 230).

<sup>6</sup> Since 2000, there has been more and more criticism about the model of academic research – literature review plus official statistics – coming forward, as well as calls for narrative research (see examples from the works of Ding, 2008; Duan & Chen, 2004; Zheng & Cui, 2001). The criticism and calls, however, have not been received general acceptance in Chinese scholarly culture.

<sup>7</sup> Chinese believes that “domestic shame should not be made public”(家丑不可外扬), which means that Chinese would rather solving problems privately – within a family, a group or a community than revealing the problematic “shams” to “others.” So culturally, Chinese would like to show their best performance publicly, which always is called “have face” (有面子). This is the reason for an open class always being “a show class.” By this word, I refer to a class that has been taught, discussed and redesigned intensively before it is finally performed. The teacher who “shows” the class has rehearsed it for many times, and sometimes pre-fixes some students to answer some questions. Almost every main part of the class is pre-fixed, additionally include of the blackboard notes, opening and ending speeches. So the whole class is more like a TV show than daily class.

doctoral dissertations examining teachers' "conditions of existence," "surviving the state," "job burnout," and so on (see examples in the works of Chen, 2009; Huang L., 2008; Ji, 2010), once the degrees were achieved, the results of these research or follow-up surveys disappeared. Reporting any implementation of their suggestions or solutions is less likely.

In brief, teachers do not fully comprehend this reform that is mainly generated by university-level scholars, whereas the scholars do not quite understand the real life of teachers at basic education level. Thus what teachers experience and what teaching feels like during the reform turn to be hard questions. However, questions like these are vital to explain the new-shoes-old-path phenomenon, or in other words, to explain why teachers fail to act on the new ideas of the NCR in their daily teaching.

### **Coming to the Research Inquiry**

Missing teachers' experiences here means missing an important part of truth in an educational change. My research intent was to explore the working experiences of high school teachers in this large-scale systematic curriculum reform by studying myself as well as a group of Chinese Language Arts (CLA) teachers in a model high school in Beijing. The pertinent literature and my six-year teaching experience show me that the NCR puts more emphasis on the transformation of ideas than practising them. So by employing a qualitative research method, this thesis tells ethnographic stories about "reality" rather than assumptions or ideals about the reformed teaching or curriculum. This reality—living experiences in the curriculum change—will include not just what teachers feel emotionally but bodily. I believe these bodily and

emotional experiences can bridge cultural gaps and make Chinese teacher experiences a place in educational communications worldwide. By reflecting on teachers' bodily and emotionally experiences, I shall address a question in the current reform plight: why do teachers accept the ideas of the NCR yet fail to implement these ideas in their daily teaching?

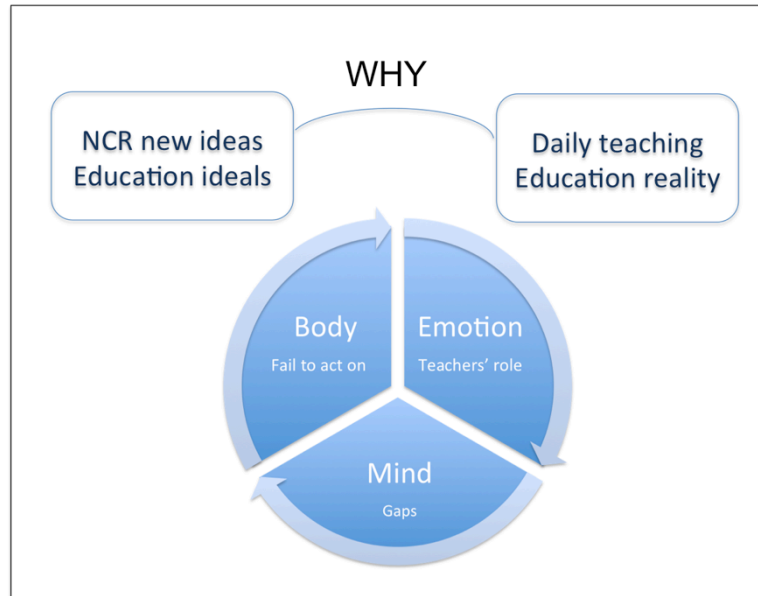
To address this question in depth, I focused on three aspects in Chapter 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

In Chapter 4, I focused on teachers' bodily and corporal experience to inquire: What did teachers experience bodily in this dissatisfied reform? What problems in the NCR implementation can these embodied experiences reveal?

In Chapter 5, I focused on teachers' emotional experience to touch another layer of the main question: What roles are teachers playing in this curriculum change in terms of their emotional experiences at work? What kind of interaction between the NCR and the existing school culture holds teachers back?

Then in Chapter 6, through teachers' introspective experience, my focus turned to teachers' mind to inquire how teachers think of this "idealistic" and "Westernized" curriculum reform and what gaps that high school teachers in China are confronting to realize the new ideas of the NCR.





By using the words of embodied, emotional and introspective experiences, I emphasized in the different foci offered in each chapter, I illustrate the impossibility of separating teachers' living experiences from their embodied, emotional and introspective ones. The process of inquiry into the questions is the process of understanding the whole group of teachers as well as me. The literature review will provide a historical and contextual overview of the NCR in China, the relevant theories, and research on teachers' roles and experiences in curriculum change as a necessary backdrop for understanding the complexity of the experiences and stories of the teachers who are experiencing reform in China.

## Chapter 2. An Overview Of The New Curriculum Change In China

Comprehensive promoting quality education and establishing the strategic priority of the development of education are the keys to achieve the grand goal of “rejuvenating the nation through science and education” of China. The curriculum reform of basic education is the core of perfecting the quality education system in basic education.

*– For the Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation, For the Development of Every Student*

(Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001, p. 3)

### A Brief Introduction to the Modern Chinese School System and Examination Mechanism

Educational reforms have never served only education. They are always the herald and part of social transformation in China; for example, the establishment of the Chinese modern school system. The modern school system in this country was mainly shaped by two nationwide, drastic and tough social revolutions. “From imitating the Japanese school system, learning the US educational experiences, to copying educational mode from the Soviet Union, the establishment of Chinese modern education experienced two large-scale ‘Westernizations’ during the 1920s and 1980s respectively, thus being of strong foreign culture-orientation and exogenous features” (Yang, 2003, p. 4).<sup>8</sup> It is believed that modern Chinese education lost its idiosyncrasy as a consequence of this passive modernization. To catch up with the developed

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<sup>8</sup> The two revolutions refer to (a) the Westernization Movement (1861-1894), the revolution of 1911 and the final establishment of the Republic of China (1912); (b) the end of the Culture Revolution (1966-1976) after the foundation of the new China and the educational modernization during the 1980s. The former set up the basic frame of the existing school system by imitating the Japanese school system and learning from the US educational experiences. The latter oriented the culture and ideology of the existing curriculum by copying the educational mode from the former Soviet Union.

powers of the world became one of the most important priorities of the Chinese government in recent century.

The current Chinese modern school system includes four stages:

1. Pre-school/kindergarten (one-three years);
2. Compulsory elementary school (six years);
3. Secondary school (six years); and
4. Post-secondary school (four years or more in various colleges or universities).

Secondary school includes three years of compulsory junior secondary education and three years of senior secondary education. Students who go to kindergarten and elementary school should go to their neighbourhood schools. Students who are going to graduate from elementary, junior and senior secondary schools have to take examinations to compete for better schools and a better future.

There are two important tests in the period of senior high school: Senior School Unified Examination (*huikao*, “会考”) and College Entrance Examination (*gaokao*, “高考”, also known as the National Matriculation Test). The former is to test students’ eligibility for graduation from high school and the latter, as its name implies, is for admissions of university, which is viewed as much more important by students, parents, teachers and schools. Except a few of special students, the majority of high school students have to prepare for the two examinations in their second and last year of high school. By the end of their senior high school study, they become candidates in the high-stake, standardized and nationwide selection.

Before the NCR, students generally could not select their courses from elementary to senior high, even in a lot of Chinese colleges and universities. Subjects in school are divided into major and minor subjects according to the score proportion that the subjects take in the selective tests. In senior high schools, subjects are further divided into *gaokao*-subjects (高考科目) and non-*gaokao*-subjects (非高考科目). Because Language Arts, Mathematics and English in total take 450 of 750 scores in *gaokao*, teachers and students traditionally call them “the three major subjects.”

At the end of the first year in high schools, students need to choose their future learning direction: science or arts (理科或文科), because *gaokao* designs two different test papers for the candidates in the Science Comprehensive and Arts Comprehensive subjects.<sup>9</sup> Each comprehensive subject takes another 300 of the total scores<sup>10</sup>. Additionally, this learning direction choices leads to a class re-streaming when students start their second year learning. Sports, Music and Fine Arts are all marginal subjects in Chinese school teaching. Briefly, the formal examination design orients the whole curriculum.

The education system in China is a centralized national system. The governance of education is centralized at the MOE in Beijing and geographically distributed to provincial educational departments, local education authorities, and schools. The MOE and the central

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<sup>9</sup> All candidates have to take tests on “the three major subjects” in *gaokao*, and then they take different comprehensive tests according to their choices on science or arts. The Science Comprehensive includes Physics, Chemistry and Biology, whereas History, Geography and Politics are involved into the Arts Comprehensive test.

<sup>10</sup> Beijing Municipal Education Commission revealed in October 2013 that Chinese Language Arts will take 180 out of 750 in 2016 *gaokao*, increasing 30 scores. While English will only take 100, 50 scores less than before, and comprehensive subjects will get 20 more in the total scores. It is predicted that this small adjustment in proportion will make a big change on the landscape of subject teaching and learning. ([http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/detail\\_2013\\_10/21/30516394\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/detail_2013_10/21/30516394_0.shtml))

government exercise substantial control over education governance, financing, curriculum, teacher preparation and assessment (Harris, Zhao, & Caldwell, 2009). The operating mechanism dictates the educational reforms. So the eight reforms are all policy-oriented and top-down.

### **The New Curriculum Reform (NCR)**

The NCR is a response to the chronic problems in the domestic educational system and to the up-to-date international and national changes that have taken hold in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The changes include but are not limited to “the appearance of the multi-polar world,” “globalization,” “rapid development of technology,” “the need of creative talents in the rising knowledge economy,” “industrialization,” “urbanization,” “the rapid economic growth,” “people’s improved material and spiritual life,” “widespread and severe environmental degradation,” and “the widening income gap and social injustice” (Guan & Meng, 2007; Paine & Fang, 2006; Wang B., 2009; Wu D., 2010; Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001). All the changes, good or bad, can logically settle on the subject of education. This means that education always had to supply citizens who can adapt to the changing world and solve new problems.

In terms of the chronic problems in the domestic educational system, the reformers mainly attempted to solve the problems caused by the “exam-oriented” education system. In 1985 and 1999, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued two decisions to fundamentally change the fact that domestic education “is divorced from the need of the development of economy and society” (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1985) and “cannot meet the needs of improving the national quality” (State Council of the Central Committee of Communist Party of China, 1999). The main problems

included: “the contents of a number of curriculums are out of date, teaching methods are inflexible, and practice is unvalued” (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1985); and “our education ideas, mechanism, structure and talent cultivation mode are relatively lagging behind” (State Council of the Central Committee of Communist Party of China, 1999).

Another government document in 1988 put it more directly:

The tendency toward exam-oriented education in the practice of basic education has already spread from the junior middle and senior middle school phases, as in the past period, to the primary school phase, and the situation is extremely severe. Our country’s educational practice has already entered a phase of all round exam-oriented education. (Xin & Kang, 2012)

A scholar commented on this exam fever:

From the widespread drawbacks such as mechanical memorizing and drilling, the absolute authority of teachers, grade worship and divorcing theory from practice in the majority of schools, we can easily sense the educational atmosphere in the age of the Civil Imperial Examination<sup>11</sup> (*keju*, 科举; Yang, 2003, p. 3).

In order to address these domestic problems and catch up with changes in the world as soon as possible, Chinese policy makers gradually started preliminary work on creating the NCR.

- In 1996, the Basic Education Department in the MOE issued the *Curriculum Plan for*

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<sup>11</sup> The Civil Imperial Examination was devised in the Sui Dynasty in A.D. 607 and finished after the Qing Dynasty in 1905. This is the most important examination of the civil service selection for the imperial regime. Because this is the only way for the Chinese ancient literati (士大夫) to start their official career, the competition was fierce. For more literature on this topic, please see the works of Chen H. , 2003; Elman, 2005.

*Full-time Senior Middle Schools* (《全日制普通高级中学课程计划》). The plan mentioned some “new” educational ideas such as “improving independent thinking, autonomous learning and innovation,” and “the practice ability of students” (2002). It paved the way for further reform.

- In 1997, the State Education Committee of China began to promote “quality education” (*suzhi jiaoyu*) in schools (State Education Committee, 1997).
- In February 1999, the State Council ratified the *Action Plan for Educational Vitalization Facing the 21st Century* (《面向 21 世纪教育振兴行动计划》) formulated by the MOE, and explicitly raised the reform goal as “implementing the cross-century quality education project,” “holisticly promoting quality education, improving civil quality and national innovation ability”.
- In June 1999, the Central Committee of CPC and the State Council jointly published the *Decision on Further Education Reform and Promoting Quality-Oriented Education* (《关于进一步深化教育改革，全面推进素质教育的决定》), requiring that the curriculum system, structure, and content be adjusted and reformed.
- In May 2001, the State Council of China issued the *Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education* (《基础教育改革与发展的决定》), which indicated the necessity of accelerating the construction of the basic education curriculum system to produce quality education.

All these documents initiated and reinforced the reform of the existing curriculum system (Guan & Meng, 2007). In August 2001 the OBECR signalled the basic education curriculum

reform had entered the pilot and experimental stage (Liu & Kang, 2011). By the end of 2001, the MOE had issued curriculum standards for Grades 1 to 9 and in 2003 for Grades 10 to 12. The new curriculum standards were adopted in 38 experimental districts/counties across the country in 2001. This meant that about 270,000 Grade 1 students (about 1% of students at that year level nationwide) and 110,000 Grade 7 students (0.5% of the age group) in China were participating in the new curriculum pilot program in the first reform year and about 3,300 elementary schools and over 400 secondary schools were involved in this stage. By 2005, every initial grade of primary and middle school were required to begin using the new curriculum (Ryan, Kang, Mitchell, & Erickson, 2009). This round of basic educational reform was anticipated to involve approximately 474,000 schools, 10 million teachers and 200 million students by the year 2010 (Guo L., 2010, p. 13).

Following the upgrade of the younger students, a new high school curriculum needed to be ready. In 2004, the curriculum was piloted in four provinces (Shandong, Guangdong, Hainan and Ningxia) and was scheduled to be implemented across the country by 2010. This program, as a part of the NCR, is known as the “New High School Curriculum Reform Program” (“高中新课程改革方案”, High School Program hereinafter). Beijing joined with Heilongjiang, Jilin, Shanxi, Hunan, Jiangxi, Shaanxi, Henan and Xinjiang to be involved in this program in 2007. The involvement of the capital city, in particular, “attracted the attention of the public and academic circles. To some extent, this is viewed as an important signal of the further implementation of the new curriculum” (Liu & Kang, 2011, p. 36).



The High School Program entailed a move from the “two basics” (basic knowledge and basic skills) in an exam-oriented education to “quality education” (*suzhi jiaoyu*, 素质教育, below will introduce) and “the promotion of new and innovative teaching and learning approaches that aim to develop autonomous and collaborative learners” (Paine & Fang, 2006; Zhu & Kang, 2002, p. 43). This goal is summarized in the slogan “Independence, Cooperation and Exploration” (Basic Education Department of Chinese Ministry of Education , 2002, pp. 247-248).

The concrete aims of the reform agenda include:

- ◆ *Developing a comprehensive and harmonious basic education system:* Changing the function of curriculum from knowledge transmission to helping students become active lifelong learners.
- ◆ *Constructing a new curriculum structure:* Changing the curriculum from subject-centred into an integrated, balanced and optional structure, with emphasis on the whole setup and localization to meet different needs of students.
- ◆ *Reflecting modern curriculum content:* Reducing the difficulty and complexity of the old curriculum content and reflecting the new essential knowledge, skills and attitudes that students need in order to be lifelong learners. Strengthening the relevance of the curriculum content to students’ lives. Promoting a greater variety of textbooks as well as diversified learning resources.
- ◆ *Promoting constructivist learning:* Changing teacher-centred teaching modes to more student-centred modes; changing teaching and learning focus from passive learning, rote and

drills to the “capacity of students to engage in critical thinking, problem solving and creativity.” Fostering in students a positive attitude towards learning.

- ◆ *Forming appropriate assessment and evaluation rationale:* Changing the assessment system from overemphasizing the selected purpose to improving students’ all-round and individual development, teachers’ professional and practical development.
- ◆ *Promoting curriculum democracy and adaptation:* Curriculum administration is decentralized toward a joint effort of central government, local governments and schools to strengthen the relevance of the curriculum to the local situation (Guan & Meng, 2007; Guo, 2010; Ryan, Kang, Mitchell, & Erickson, 2009; Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001).

In summary, “Three Transformations” were highlighted by a series of reform policies: (1) “transforming the power of curriculum policy-making from centralizing to decentralizing;” (2) “transforming the curriculum paradigm from ‘scholasticism’ to ‘social constructivism;”” and (3) “transforming the pedagogical mode from unidirectional transmission to research centred pedagogy” (Zhong, 2005, p. 19).

The most important thing for the new curriculum, according to Liu and Kang (2011), “is the fundamental reform of curriculum culture, classroom culture, teacher research culture and the administrative culture” (p. 34). The essence of the reform aim is “to establish new constructive partnerships and relationships . . . that are democratic, open, scientific, equal, dialogic and consultative” (p. 34).

In order to realize these ideals, the reform measures in the high school program include:

1. Curriculum in high schools mainly keeps the subject-centred structure, but meanwhile

sets up comprehensive practice-based courses, professional skill-training courses and diverse selective courses, piloting a new modular and credit system<sup>12</sup> in senior high schools.

2. Facilitating the wide application of information technology and the integration of technology and discipline pedagogy in order to realize the changes in learning, teaching and presenting modes.
3. Promoting the connection between schools and society, introducing curriculum resources within and out of schools; encouraging diverse textbook compilation based on the national textbook requirements.
4. Building up an assessment system to facilitate the all-round development of students, with an emphasis on both academic achievement and diverse developing potential. A combination of a formative and summative evaluation approach is required in the new curriculum.
5. Changing the test content of the College Entrance Examination (*gao kao*), stressing the aspects of skills and qualities of students; exploring selective methods with merits of multiple chances, two-way choices and comprehensive assessment.

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<sup>12</sup> The Curriculum Scheme for the Senior High School (Experimental Manuscript) suggests that “Senior high school curriculum is composed of three levels: learning areas, subjects and modules.” There are 12-13 subjects in 8 learning areas including Language and Literature, Mathematics, Humanities and Social Science, Science, Skills, Arts, Sports and Health, and Comprehensive Practical Activities. Each subject consists of several modules with clear objectives of education. And “each module is organized around specific content to integrate students’ experiences and relevant materials, thus constituting a relatively complete learning unit.” “Generally, learning each module requires 36 class hours.” So provided there are generally 4 class hours per week, a module can be generally finished in 9 weeks, this means two modules a term. “A student who finishes his learning of a module and passes the examination is able to get 2 credits; the credits are recognized by schools.” “A student should get a certain credits in every learning area during every year; with 116 compulsory credits, at least 6 credits in optional courses II, and 144 credits in total, a student can graduate from his high school” (Ministry of Education, 2003).

6. Implementing a three-level curriculum administration system that involves coordination and communication structures between and among national, provincial and school levels.
7. Adjusting the content of teachers' professional training with the focus on the NCR; local education departments take on the responsibility to make plans for teachers training.
8. Building up an assessment system to facilitate sustaining the professional development of teachers with an emphasis on self-analysis, reflection, and self-assessment-based, multi-participated assessment. (China's Ministry of Education, 2001)

According to these measures, the NCR is supposed to assemble all the main powers in the whole curriculum system to initiate major change in order to solve inveterate exam-related problems and catch up with international education. However, not only did the former turn out to be a tough fight but the catching-up part also ignited controversies on a number of fronts. This observation will become evident to readers as this thesis unfolds.

## **Different Pictures of the NCR**

### **Picture 1: A challenge from the "Western World"**

The New Curriculum reformers declare that the new ideas to facilitate this reform are basically from the "post-modern" educational theories in the "Western World"<sup>13</sup>. These

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<sup>13</sup> This judgment is agreed on by both its supporters and opponents. The difference is that the supporters and advocates would call it "integral constructivism" (统整的建构主义, Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001, p. 23) to avoid the nationalist sentiments that the word "Western" would cause and the aversion that the "post-modern" might bring to Chinese society, and on the other hand, to emphasize the advancement of the "new ideas" and the processing for Chinese utilization with a new term "integral." The "integral constructivism" integrates "radical constructivism," "social constructivism," "sociocultural cognition," "social constructionism," "information-processing constructivism," and "cybernetic system" (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001, p. 23). In these theories, the new curriculum reformers suggested, "The teaching innovation oriented by the social constructivism is worth pursuing for us" (Zhong Q.-q. , 2006, p. 18). Besides, Jean Piaget, John Dewey, Lev S. Vygotsky, Howard Gardner and Robert, J.

propositions keep challenging the modernism, scientism, rationalism, even Marxism (Xiao, 2004; Zhou, 2004), which have influenced power relations in Chinese society. Yet Chinese education was recognized as part of the Marxism education system (Lu, 1997)<sup>14</sup>. The importance of Marxism in influencing Chinese education research has gained broad consensus in the Chinese education research circle (see examples in Yu W., 2008, p. 51). This could be the reason for the offensiveness of the post-theoretical turn to some Chinese educationists. They argued that “it was the Chinese educational modernity that has developed as seriously insufficient” so it was too early to turn to post-modern criticism (Wu Q., 2003, p. 4). As the reason for this misjudgment, they suggested that “some repudiators lacked communication with the Chinese local education context,” making “the other” as “the image of the self” thus ignoring the “authentic curriculum and pedagogy” and “damaging the valuable reference” (Wang, 2004, p. 15; Wu, 2003, p. 4; Yang, 2007, p. 26; Yue, 2006, p. 2). They called for research based on local problems, building on Chinese theories on educational reforms and “maintaining cultural

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Sternberg were all involved in the theoretical construct of the reformers. But the fact is, however the reformers played with words, the opponents looked through the tricks. A representative view of them is “Supported by the interpretation of the NCR policies, post-modern theories on curriculum and pedagogy solemnly turn into the official authority and basic standards to judge the existing theories and practice, meanwhile strongly interfering with the exploration of curriculum and pedagogical practice. The most apparent representative is the reform on learning approaches instructed by the constructivism theories” (Wang B., 2009, p. 17).

<sup>14</sup> Lu Youquan, a representative of educational researchers in 1990s, has located Chinese education reforms in the context of the education evolution of the world. In his famous book *One Hundred Years of Restless Movement: The Course of Development in Education during the 20th Century*, Lu identified three educational reform streams: (a) the reforms in the United States and the European countries oriented by the thoughts of Bourgeois democracy, (b) the reforms in Russia and the Soviet Union based on the Communistic ideal, and (c) the reforms in Germany, Italy and Japan dominated by the Fascists. He also labelled two types of educational thoughts: one came from the Marxists and the other from the Capitalists. Chinese education was part of the former (1997). He believed that in the way that Chinese education stepped into Modernization, although multiple educational views were introduced to the nation, the introduction and spread of the Marxism will eventually drive the whole country to being an independent modern country, and “the development of educational theories and practice based on Marxism educational thoughts is the mainstream and direction during the 20th century in China” (p. 6).

flexibility to integrate Chinese traditional education thoughts into the ongoing educational reform” (Shi, 2004, p. 5; Yu & Liu, 2005, p. 86).

Although some solutions have been worked out by domestic scholars,<sup>15</sup> this controversial discussion sowed seeds in the soil of reform, which grew into the problems of today, for example the conservative attitude to engage in practices of change in Beijing.

### **Picture 2: A successful predicament of statistics**

One wave surges after another – the implementation of the new curriculum has encountered a more bewildering road than the controversy about its theoretical basis. A strong dispute occurred about the Mathematics curriculum standard<sup>16</sup> in 2005. As a trigger, this dispute led to a series of large-scale investigations.

The MOE, together with the Central Propaganda Ministry, the Human Resources Ministry and the Social Sciences Institute carried out a year-long systematic review of the education system in the same year. Their final report indicated that the basic education curriculum reform has brought about the “fundamental transformation of school education” and

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<sup>15</sup> For example, some peace-makers advocated turning back to Marxism as the unwavering theoretical basis to launch the reform (Jin & Ai, 2005), but were doubted because of the opinion that Marxism never had a specific theory for educational reform (Cui & Hu, 2005; Gao, 2005, 2006). There also is a voice to support diversified theories as the basis of reform, including Marxism, constructivism, post-modernism, pragmatism and multi-intelligences theories (Ma, 2005), and a voice to integrate more “Western theories” such as complexity theory from Edgar Morin to solve the current problem (Yu, 2008). Meanwhile, the problem was diagnosed as “Chinese education aphasia” and attributed it to “the imitation of western thoughts,” “the learning of Western vocabulary and speaking patterns” (Lu, 2009, p. 21), “the absence of local position” and “local confidence,” and “the relative weakness of innovation consciousness” (Yang X., 2007, p. 22).

<sup>16</sup> In 2005, a number of congress members and consultative committee members jointly proposed an immediate halt to the pilot Mathematics curriculum standards project at the People’s Congress and the People’s Consultative Committee meetings. They complained through the presses including the Guangming Daily, Sichuan Daily and the Mathematics Journal, claiming that the new Mathematics curriculum standards have ruined a Mathematics system that has a history of over a thousand years and arguing that it is now difficult for teachers to teach and students to learn Mathematics and that the quality of teaching in Math has dropped dramatically (Liu & Kang, 2011).

“[has] resulted in positive and profound changes in terms of teachers’ teaching and students’ approaches to learning” (Liu & Kang, 2011, p. 33).

Sponsored by the MOE in the Mainland China, researchers at the Hong Kong Institute of Education conducted a questionnaire survey on teacher empowerment and receptivity in the NCR from 2007 to 2008. Involving 1,646 teachers in six municipalities and provinces (Chongqing, Guizhou, Yunnan, Tianjin, Henan, and Fujian), with 701 respondents in elementary schools and 945 from secondary schools, the survey result showed that although teachers could see the necessity of the NCR and had positive behavioural intentions about implementing the reform and perception of reform outcomes, they tended to abide by the state’s principals to fulfil their job and did not perceive themselves to be involved in making school-level decisions. The researcher concluded that in the reform context, “Chinese teachers may already be very busy, so further involvement in school-wide decisions may distract and even reduce the time and effort spent on curriculum and instruction at an individual or teacher level for the benefit of student learning and reform implementation” (Lee, Yin, Zhang, & Jin, 2011).

Another large-scale and comprehensive survey conducted by researchers in the East China Normal University showed a more worrying reform picture. This survey was conducted between March and June 2008, covering 1 municipality and 10 provinces, 96 secondary schools with different types, 23,698 students, 6963 teachers, 5012 parents and 232 school leaders. In the summary report, researchers made nine conclusions.<sup>17</sup> Some of them were both striking and

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<sup>17</sup> The survey involved one municipality, which is Shanghai, and ten provinces, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, Anhui, Shanxi, Henan, Heilongjiang, Yunnan, Guangxi and Gansu. The nine conclusions of this survey are 1) External reasons push Chinese basic education to pursue university enrolment rates. Local governments played an important

disappointing, such as “local governments played an important role in exam-oriented education,” “the development of teacher teams was in a dismal state,” and “almost 70% teachers did not know how and what they should change in the NCR” (Huo, 2010, pp. 17-25).

Statistics from areas such as Tianjin and Jiangsu similarly showed a less positive picture.<sup>18</sup> However Beijing, as a bellwether in the NCR, published only limited data about the reform implementation. In 2010, Beijing Municipal Education Commission published a book drawing a very positive picture of the first three-year high school curriculum reform (Wang & Lei, 2010). But soon dissonance was apparent online. By July 2010, Sina.com, one of China’s most popular webs, joined with Modern Education News (Beijing) to conduct an online survey of all the principals in Beijing high schools. The result showed that although all respondents had participated in various levels of reform training, no more than 23% of them thought the training

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role for exam-oriented education; 2) Some government policies resulted in the severe lag of connotative development of secondary schools; 3) Rural high schools were facing multiple difficulties to realize the improvement of education quality; 4) The development of teacher teams was in a dismal state; 5) High school students were suffering dull growing experiences; 6) Accessible instructions in psychological and career aspects from high schools were collectively absent; 7) The government did not invest enough money to support the development of regular high schools; 8) Teachers’ professional trainings was inefficient, almost 70% teachers did not know how and what they should change in the NCR, and 9) The utilization of curriculum resources out of schools was low (Huo, 2010, 17-25). Some other relevant results in the survey involved that 1) schools were short of equipment for students to put their hands on, therefore making the knowledge that should be learned from experiments being learned from teachers’ lectures and exercise books, the main learning method was still rote (p. 47). 2) there were 60.5% invested teachers worked under huge pressure, and 57.7% teachers had very or relatively heavy workload (p. 91-97).

<sup>18</sup> The sampling survey in Tianjin chose three high schools at different levels randomly. The results showed that: 1) there were very few teachers could actively adjust themselves to meet the requirements of the NCR; 2) selective courses were mainly taught by teachers without professional knowledge in these areas; 3) the mismatch of difficulties between textbooks and exercise books/examinations exacerbated the difficulty of adaption of high school teachers to the NCR. Negative adaption also existed in the changes from teaching approaches, comprehensive quality assessment system to a three-level curriculum administration system (Wang Y., 2010). The survey in Jiangsu province involved 26,200 high school teachers, with 13699 males and 12501 females. The result showed that after six years of NCR, exam-oriented curriculum was still a bottleneck for teachers. Although the overwhelming majority of teachers agreed with the NCR goals, 94.7% teachers could not apply appropriate verbs to express the objectives of their courses, and 74.1% could not tell knowledge objectives from skill and attitude ones. The report additionally showed that 1) examinations, university enrolment rate, large class sizes (about 45-65 students per class) hindered teachers to teach for every individual learner; 2) lectures were the main teaching method, with experiment, visiting and field trip keeping being far away from authentic pedagogical options; 3) heavy workload, limited inter-school communication and lack of initiative were undermining the professional development of high school teachers in Jiangsu province (Wu J., 2012).



was useful to their concrete practice; 74.5% respondents felt that it was hard or very hard to master the “start point”,<sup>19</sup> depth and width of the new curriculum; and 65.9% respondents chose “old wine in a new bottle”<sup>20</sup> as a comment on the high school program.

This predicament that formed by statistics from official, academic and mass media resources is awkward. Regardless of the purposefully political rhetoric and different stakeholders that academic research served for, it is clear that some puzzles are missing beyond what statistics are able to show.

### **Picture 3: A positive progress**

Apart from the complex domestic situation, it is worth noting that international research literature introduced and reflected the NCR by noticing the steps that Chinese education was taking towards global education trends, in the Chinese expression, a type of “Western progressivism.”

In the past ten years, the NCR has been introduced to the English world as an example of systemic educational reform (Zhao & Qiu, 2010). By introducing and reviewing Chinese educational reforms (Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Guan & Meng, 2007; Guo, 2010; Liu & Kang, 2011; Madelyn, 2008), international researchers described the NCR as a “hybrid model” with external features such as marketization, accountability, decentralization and Deweyism, as well as

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<sup>19</sup> The start point here means where and how the invested principles should kick off the whole systematic reform in their schools.

<sup>20</sup> It is a saying similar to “wearing new shoes to walk on the old path.” Here it means action without fundamental change.

Chinese features such as Confucian philosophy and culture (Paine & Fang, 2006; Seah, 2011; Xu, 2011; Zhao & Qiu, 2010).

In December 2009, the *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* in Singapore published a special issue on the reform of basic education in China. Articles that were collected in this issue mainly manifested the interaction between Chinese educators and globalized education trends.<sup>21</sup> More recent articles and monographs of international researchers contributed closer observations and deeper insights on Chinese reform than their pioneers. For example, scholars in Beijing and Hong Kong collaboratively offered evidence of change in classroom practice in the NCR through observing and comparing reformed primary Math classes and non-reformed ones (Li & Ni, 2011). As another example, Canadian scholar Guo conducted qualitative research to interpret the meaning of this curriculum reform for teachers. She argued that the resistance from teachers was “a necessary and desirable precondition of change and learning” (Guo, 2010, p. 177).

It is also worth noting that although educational research on the contemporary Chinese NCR from international scholars is limited, the external comments offer a way to cool down the ‘fever’ of domestic disputes as to how to best measure the NCR’s effectiveness. While Chinese scholars may suppose that they know Chinese education very well, general impressions and

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<sup>21</sup> International scholars visited Chinese primary and secondary schools in several cities, paying attention to topics from school governance, construction of Professional Learning Communities, learning autonomy, and to the rural school Merger Program. They found Chinese education reforms were benefiting by: (a) school-based institutional structure for teacher collaboration in researching and improving their teaching together; (b) the new teacher induction program to systematically support the growth of novices; (c) a strong emphasis on the moral dimension of teaching and learning; (d) the effectiveness of open class for observation and critique; (e) the investment of time and commitment from teachers to achieve change (Harris, Zhao, & Caldwell, 2009; Ryan, Kang, Mitchell, & Erickson, 2009). The problems recognized by the international researchers in this collection included: (a) high-stakes testing still characterized most Chinese schools; (b) reformed classes were still textbook-based and teacher-dominated; (c) the developing space for learner autonomy in classroom settings remained limited; (d) the gap between teachers’ innovative desire and their practice was big (Halstead & Zhu, 2009; Ryan, Kang, Mitchell, & Erickson, 2009)

statistics from large-scale surveys are no more effective than personal experiences and observation when talking about solutions. Thus some international insights do provide insights into NCR problems, since whether a change is successful or not ultimately depends on whether teachers have the capacity to translate the new ideas into pedagogical actions (Hargreaves, 2005).

Summing up all the pertinent materials mentioned under the umbrella of the NCR, I agree with Guo (2010) that, “as an unprecedented nationwide curriculum in China, the existing knowledge is not sufficient to address the unique problems and challenges that educators and policy makers confront in China” (p. 1), although countries such as Canada, the UK, the USA and Australia have all gone through large-scale curriculum reforms and became role models to China” (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001, p. 29). Huge population, time-honoured tradition and the context of modern development form the resultant force to drive this educational boat.

In positive terms, the goals in the NCR have been widespread; some important and innovative measures in curriculum and pedagogy have been introduced by this reform. Educators and administrators at different levels have also engaged in bridging the gap between curriculum ideas and school reality. In negative terms, the theoretical basis of the NCR still attracts controversies; practitioners are still hesitant to change; and standard, high-stakes tests keep being a strong power to orient the curriculum in educational reform. And as quantitative research can only tell part of the story, we need to find the rest part from qualitative research to get potential solutions of the puzzle.

## An Important Concept in the NCR: Quality Education

“*Suzhi jiaoyu*” (素质教育) has many English equivalents, such as “quality education,” “quality-oriented education,” “essential qualities oriented education,” “competence education,” “competence-oriented education,” “character education,” and “education for all-round development.” An Australian researcher, Dello-Iacovo (2009) commented, “A wide variety of apparently unrelated educational issues are frequently lumped together under the term *suzhi jiaoyu*,” “[T]he multitude of translations reflects the inability of a few English words to convey the broader connotations of the term *suzhi* conveyed in contemporary Chinese” (p. 242). In the literature review of this concept, I select the most popular used one—“quality education”—as its English translation.

“Quality education” (*suzhi jiaoyu*) is one of the most important concepts in the NCR, if not *the* most important one. Yet it is not a new term that has been coined just for the NCR. The long-term application of this term in Chinese modern education history complicates its many connotations.

“Quality” (*suzhi*) was first mentioned in modern Chinese education on May 27, 1985, as the primary purpose of Chinese educational reform—to “improve the quality of the nation” (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1985)<sup>22</sup>. After that, “quality education” was mentioned as a progressive term and the purpose of Chinese educational reform in various

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<sup>22</sup> The meaning of this expression is “education should serve Chinese socialist construction and cultivate professional talents and qualified workers with literacy, professional skills and proficiency” who were “high quality talent” in that context. This decision reified the “Three Orientations” of Chinese basic education – concentration of educational thoughts from the former Chinese president Deng Xiaoping – “education should be modernized, international and progressive”. The “Three Orientations” are then advocated by the New Curriculum reformers to show their legitimate inheritance (Zhong, Cui & Zhang, 2001, pp. 5, 16).

documents, speeches, and articles. Followed by the changing context in China's fast development and social transformation and other interpretations of this term, its meanings were enriched and developed rapidly.

In the NCR, "quality education" is proposed as the macro-goal—"to fully implement the Party's education policies and to comprehensively promote quality education" (China's Ministry of Education, 2001). It was interpreted as seven aspects in the OBEER:<sup>23</sup>

1. Developing patriotic and collectivism spirit of students, loving socialism, to carry forward and develop the good traditions and revolutionary traditions of the Chinese nation;
2. Helping students stick to the socialist democratic system and strengthen the socialist legal system. Helping students abide by the laws of China and social public ethics;
3. Helping students gradually form a correct world outlook, views on life, and values;
4. Developing students' sense of social responsibility and of serving the people;
5. Cultivating students' spirit of innovation and creativity, practical ability, quality of scientific and humanistic cultivation, and environmental awareness;
6. Equipping students with basic knowledge, skills and methods to promote their lifelong learning; and
7. Developing the physical and mental health of students, fostering their healthy aesthetic interests and life styles, and cultivating students to be a new generation with virtues of

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<sup>23</sup> The seven aspects were translated into English by partly referring to the corresponding translation in Guan & Meng, 2007.

“ideals, morality, literacy and discipline” (China's Ministry of Education, 2001; Guan & Meng, 2007, pp. 585-586).

In many ways, the “quality education” expresses an ideal to “prepare a citizenry that can participate and compete in the increasingly global economy,” “to lead to the well-rounded development of the body, the mind, and the heart; and to foster creativity, problem-solving skills, and practical knowledge” (Zhao & Qiu, 2010, p. 350).

However, the term “quality education” has experienced too many interpretations and been stuffed with too many ideals of modern Chinese education in the last thirty years. An educational goal like this with excessive meanings is easily simplified and distorted and becomes lopsided in implementation, because it is too hard to realize completely. This might be the reason for the struggle of “quality education” to orient Chinese education in the NCR.

On June 11, 2001, only a month before the promulgation of the OBECR and more than fifteen years after “quality education” became a Chinese educational goal, China’s former vice premier Li Langqing pointed out: “There was no breakthrough in the implementation of the quality education... [there has been] more words than actions on carrying out the quality education in some areas .... the understandings and implementation of this concept tended to be simplified and unilateral... [and] in a few areas, exam-oriented education [has] become even more violent” (Li, 2001; Wang Z., 2001, p. 2).

Soon after, his judgement was ratified by several large-scale surveys.<sup>24</sup> The most striking results for the public turned out to be the “heavy learning burden” of secondary students, and teachers’ ignorance of “quality education.” Unexpectedly, even though the statistics and policy-makers paved the way for the intensified advancement of “quality education” in the coming NCR, the new round of reform still encountered a “reasonable” controversy with hindsight: “quality” or “knowledge.”

In 2001 and 2004 respectively, a reputable professor, Wang Ce-san in Beijing Normal University, published two articles discussing the side effects of “quality education” in the NCR. He argued, “Our quality education has been simplified to a very narrow meaning,” which was developing “specific strengths in extra-curriculum activities.” (p. 9). So simply advocating “quality education” again does not oppose “exam-oriented education” but would cause the prevalence of “despising knowledge.” Wang thus suggested abandoning the term “quality

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Chinese Children Development Centre spent a year conducting “the largest-scale survey on the quality status of Chinese young children since reform and opening-up” (中国少年儿童素质状况抽样调查情况报告 2001). The survey that sampled 42,000 children and their parents and teachers in 30 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities reported some worrying problems: “elementary and secondary school students generally dislike the courses in schools;” “[there is] too limited leisure time for students” with “average 15.6 minutes helping with housework” and “152 minutes doing homework per day for urban 9-grade students.” Their parents and teachers did not understand what “quality education” looked for; 53.47% surveyed parents viewed the purpose of basic education as a preparation for their children to “enter a college or university;” this percentage was even more than “live a happy life” and “to be a useful person to the society and the country.” “Higher scores became the top expectation of Chinese parents.” Meanwhile, 72% teachers identified “quality education” more in name than reality. “Most teachers had no idea what they should play their own part in the drive to improve education” (China Education and Research Network, 2001; Wang C.-s., 2004; Wang J.-s., 2001).

Another survey in 2001 conducted by researchers in Beijing got similar but more detailed data. Through randomly sampling 1,100 elementary and secondary school students, 1,000 parents and 300 teachers in Beijing, researchers concluded five results: (a) teachers started to respect students, whereas students had not been a centre in school learning; (b) school was far away from being a pleasant place for students, with over half secondary school students having no or little free time or extra-curricular activities in their schools; (c) passive acceptance still dominated school learning process; (d) test scores remained the main method in elementary and secondary schools to assess and evaluate students, and (e) the connotation of quality education was misunderstood by parents and teachers, with more than two-thirds of them viewing “quality education” as developing strengths in the arts, sports or some other specific areas. The journalist who reported this survey in China Education Daily accordingly questioned: “How far away from us is the Quality Education?” (Bao, 2002).

education” and using “quanmian fazhan jiaoyu” (全面发展教育, educational development at all aspects, or all-rounded education) instead to drive the new holistic educational reform. He additionally criticized the phenomenon of blind acceptance of Western and post-modern education theories as a basis for Chinese education reform, and stressed the need to apply teacher-centred education with a lecture-based teaching approach in the basic education period to realize all-round education (Wang, 2001, pp. 62-67; 2004, pp. 8-9).

The New Curriculum reformers responded with a series of articles in the *Global Education* from 2004 to 2005, discussing this issue with Professor Wang. Zhong criticized the messy reasoning and analysis in Wang’s article, labelling Wang’s ideas as demonstrating elite education value and Kairovanism<sup>25</sup> (Zhong, 2004, p. 3). Together with other scholars, he denied the existence of the trend of despising knowledge, arguing that the new curriculum was going to “reconceptualise knowledge, learning and development of students” based on “integral constructivism” (see footnote 14, and Xia, 2004; Zhang Z., 2004; Zhong, 2005;). This discussion makes evident that “quality education” is intertwined with a philosophical issue in education: What is knowledge and how can we learn it better?

More and more problems sprang out of the implementation of the new curriculum and the “quality vs. knowledge” debate escalated as far as the social responsibility of educational scholars<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Kairov, Ivan Andreevich (1893-1978), a famous educationist in the former Soviet Union. *The Pedagogy*, edited by him, has had a dominant influence on Chinese education since the 1950s. His main idea in the book is to form a communist world outlook by mastering scientific knowledge systematically.

<sup>26</sup> In 2005, *Guangming Daily* reported an interview between Education Week and China’s famous Mathematician and Mathematic educator Jiang Boju. Jiang pointed out that “the new curriculum underestimated students’ ability to understand, ruined systematic knowledge;” “neither can this curriculum foster the capacities of inference or



During this debate, the MOE with the Propaganda Department, the Personnel Department of CCCPC, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Central Communist Youth League and National Bureau of Statistics conducted another nationwide survey in 2006. A series of survey reports drew a comprehensive picture of the contemporary process of quality education. In a special report on the school life of elementary and secondary school learners, the research group reported 58% students still felt their learning burden “heavy” or “very heavy” and less than half the students were “interested” or “very interested” in their learning. The main reason for this learning burden still came from “admission test pressure,” and the “high expectation from parents” ranked second (Quality Education Survey Group, 2006, p. 139). What this information shows is that after five years’ endeavour at various education levels, the heavy learning burden and low interest in learning among students had not changed much.

“Admission tests” turned out to be the toughest nut for quality education to crack. So there is no surprise that some reporters in the People’s Daily called “quality education” a “historical task” and the former Minister of Education Zhou Ji declared, “However hard it is to advance quality education, we shall persist in order to realise it!” (Quality Education Survey Group, 2006, pp. 148-149).

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reasoning, nor can it cultivate creativity and quality of students.” Besides, “students were taking a heavier learning burden than before” because “the easy teaching contents cannot match the difficulty of exams” and “the incoherence of learning content needs more supplements” (Cai, 2005). Jiang’s view was used by a number of journalists and scholars. Quite a few educators and educational officials declared that the direction of the NCR was right, although there were many challenges for teachers to overcome (Chu & Zhao, 2005). Other scholars took this opportunity to reflect problems caused by this reform (Liu S., 2006; Yu W., 2005; Wang C.-s., 2006). To respond to these opposing voices, Zhong claimed, “This reform has been an irresistible trend” and expressed the hope that these opponents hold the bottom line of educationists, not to disturb the direction of this reform (Zhong, 2006, pp. 18, 22).

In light of the unsatisfactory results in quality education, more queries and doubts worried the curriculum reformers.<sup>27</sup> Some scholars discussed the phenomenon of “wearing new shoes to walk on the old path.” (Guo, 2010, p. 10)<sup>28</sup> They argued that the old path was a more “practicable” and more “normal” way in current school teaching. “Only when the reformers follow the regulation of education, not merely pursuing new shoes for the sake of newness or extraordinariness, can the reform be successful” (Wang, 2012, pp. 8, 14). They concluded that “the meaning of educational reform was to make school education walk further, broader, smoother and happier” (Guo, 2010, p. 11). Quality education with its new connotation in the NCR was subsumed in the cry of being reasonable, which can be also interpreted as bending to reality.<sup>29</sup>

In summary, the original intention of “quality education” to be reiterated in the NCR was supposed “to make school education walk further, broader, smoother and happier.” However, how to realize “quality education” or “all-round education” in the contemporary exam-oriented curriculum is a knotty issue for academic debate. Exams, especially *gaokao*, as an instrument to propel social mobility and protect fair competition are comparative to the other selective mechanisms so they cannot be reformed in a short period (Yang, 2013).

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<sup>27</sup> For example, some scholars discussed the “soft landing” of reform measures with Zhong, cautioning these radical reformers not to be misled by Western post-modern thoughts (Zha, 2007; Zha, 2009); Some scholars discussed the cost of reform with Sun and Zhang, asking whether China could bear the pain of disruptive breakthrough of new conceptions of knowledge and learning processes, in other words, “new” quality education in the NCR context (Sun & Zhang, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>29</sup> A recent large-scale online survey on teachers’ evaluation of the NCR showed that 75.4% of surveyed teachers chose “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” as their general impression of the implementation of the NCR. After reviewing the main results of this survey, Zha interpreted these result as “ten-year curriculum reform is a basic failure”, “the theory of the NCR has greatly deviated from practice” and called upon the “radical” new curriculum reformers to be reasonable (Zha Y., 2012, p. 8).

Meanwhile, what knowledge is and how to learn knowledge became the key in differences of opinion about implementing “quality education.” The two questions are identified as a “halter” to pull the education reform ox (Quality Education Survey Group, 2006, p. 183). The difficulty of accepting the new ideas about knowledge and student-centred teaching approaches is expressed everywhere in the implementation of the “quality education” (e.g., Huang, 2006; Wan W. , 2003; Zhang, Guo, & Cao, 2010).

### Chapter 3. Ethnographic Inquiry into a Case

“In any event, no reform can succeed without the co-operation and active participation of teachers”. (Delors, 1996, p. 15)

“‘Change is a painful process,’ a senior teacher said emotionally”. (Department of Basic Education, Department of Teacher Education of the Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 138).

#### The Absence of Teachers’ Bodily Experiences

Teaching in China is traditionally seen as a sacred profession. Respecting teachers and teaching has a millennium-old history in the culture of East Asia. In term of recent educational reforms, international research demonstrated that teachers’ sense of professional and personal identity is a key variable in their motivation and commitment to change (Day, 2002; van Veen & Slegers, 2006).

A Chinese scholar, Liu Yunshan, summarized the change in teachers’ roles during Chinese modernization. When he talked about teachers at the basic education level he commented:

During the production and imparting of pedagogical knowledge, teachers are a group of people who were disempowered.... Seldom, in various educational research and even research on teachers, were teachers taken as critical practitioners ... educational research and practice are usually “two sheets of skin,”<sup>30</sup> within the power hierarchy of knowledge,

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<sup>30</sup> “Two sheets of skin” (两张皮), a similar idiom to “having two faces” but can be also used on things or phenomena in Chinese language. When being used on things or phenomena, it means that they should be one but turn into two or more different ones in order to deceive or confuse. It also refers to the discrepancy between phenomena and their essence.

elementary and secondary teachers are passive consumers of university knowledge<sup>31</sup>  
(2006, p. 189).

Though beautiful titles of teachers sound great, such as “diligent gardeners” (辛勤的园丁) and “burning candles that sacrifice themselves to enlighten others” (燃烧自己照亮别人的红烛), they cannot cover the fact that teachers are passive consumers, rather they just rationalize or sanctify teachers’ unnecessary sacrifice (Liu Y., 2006, pp. 197-198; Sun, 2008; Zhao J., 2009). Thinking over these metaphors, it is easy to understand the implication behind the sparkling golden crowns – diligence is necessary and self-sacrifice is a virtue. This implication was especially harmful when the NCR raised new requirements and increased workload to teachers.

In order to realize the change “from authorizing class discourse to democratizing it” and “from making learners learn to ‘I want to learn’” (Miu, 2008, p. 1), the new curriculum asked teachers to transform “from lecturers to facilitators in their classes, ... from soloists to choristers in their teaching research activities, ... [and] from textbook repeaters to knowledge constructors in their curriculum exploration” (Miu, 2008, p. 1). In terms of teachers’ professional development,

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<sup>31</sup> The further explanation for this statement provides a background of power dynamics in terms of teachers’ roles. “An important content of the professionalization of teachers is the improvement of their education background, thus the master’s courses organized by various levels of education committees and universities became a method for the new round of teachers’ training. The after stories are quite complex, both academic powers and money powers being involved.... As for individual teachers, the after stories intimately tie with their survival and improvement—the orientation of this hidden rule, the requirements of school leaders and the competition among colleagues thus became the external pressure for them; renewing knowledge and refuelling for future development became the internal motivation. All the driving forces led elementary or secondary teachers to give up their holidays and spend money on buying knowledge, more precisely, on buying diplomas or certificates. However, teachers’ experiences and wisdom have not been given a proper position in university knowledge. While learning the knowledge that is different from their experiences, teachers seldom felt they were enlightened or awakened. Instead, they felt belittled by the tongue-twister jargon and abstract rules; neither did they feel master of their learning, nor professionally empowered. They were simply humble practitioners in front of researchers in universities” (Liu Y., 2006, p. 189).

a teacher should realize the role change as an instructional, researcher-like and inter-disciplinary educator, “the new curriculum requires more adaptability and flexibility from teachers to face their work” (Miu, 2008, p. 1).

These expectations were expressed not only “for the growth of future educators” (Zhong Q.-q., 2011), but would enable teachers to teach with “more independence, respect, confidence and pride in their careers” (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001, p. 434). These changing requirements need time, effort and constant support to be digested and realized. Recent surveys showed that although most teachers have accepted the new ideas and requirements in the NCR, they are still far away from transforming these ideas into teaching practices (Zhang, 2011, p. 7).<sup>32</sup>

Some reformers partly attributed the problem to the resistance of teachers with “the shortage of implementers’ experiences and capabilities” (Yu W., 2005, p. 9), “the shortage of necessary knowledge,” “the long-term-formed teaching habits” and so on (Hou, 2010, p. 197). Other scholars tried to discover factors that impeded teachers from realizing new ideas, such as problems with the objectives (Wei, 2011), the mechanism of decision-making and participating, and in the teacher education (Huo, 2010; Yin & Li, 2004). Few researchers of educational reform examined teachers’ behaviour pattern changes in their accounts (Mueller & Hovde, 2008; Supovitz, 2008). And noticeably, this is an international phenomenon, “[t]he key role of teachers’ sense of professional and personal identity is almost completely ignored in reform strategies and educational innovation policy” (van Veen, Slegers, & van de Ven, 2005, p. 918).

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<sup>32</sup> See footnotes 18, 19. In the survey mentioned in footnote 30, the survey report showed that although “74% surveyed teachers agreed with the new learning advocacy in the new curriculum of ‘Self-regulated,’ ‘Cooperated’ and ‘Inquired,’” 17% of them did not think that there were any changes in their teaching approaches, and 51% of them had changed to some extent (Zha Y., 2012).

However a few international curriculum researchers have noticed and researched the lived experiences of teachers, as well as the emotional and social geography in curriculum changes<sup>33</sup> (e.g., Guo L., 2010; Hargreaves, 2001, 2002; van Veen & Slegers, 2006). But what teachers' bodily experience in an educational reform is an uncharted territory. These experiences were merely mentioned in case studies without specific awareness of the body. Little research attempts to answer questions such as, for different teachers, what the meanings and prices of a systematically educational reform are from the perspective of their bodies or based on their physical experiences, what the socio-cultural and ideological implications are when teachers are struggling to change in a large-scale curriculum reform, even though we understood (a) the importance of individual teachers' bodies in the reform implementation, and (b) the importance of teacher-student interactions in the implementation of curriculum reform.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore in this research I explored teachers' roles in the NCR based on my peers' and my own bodily and emotional experiences. My Chinese background benefited me at several

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<sup>33</sup> This opinion on curriculum change research is a benefit resulting from the philosophic turn to going back to "body" in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century according to Michael Peters' review (2004). Soon this philosophical turn was widely noticed by lots of philosophers and philosophical researchers (see other examples in the works of Crane & Patterson, 2000; Feuerbach, 1966; Filip, 2009; Habermas & Lawrence, 1990/1998; Henry, 1975). This philosophical call caused embodied pedagogy to surface. "Body" started to be an emerging lens with which to consider issues such as teacher-student relationship, power dynamic within schools, gender and colour in education, in areas such as early childhood education, arts and sports education (for other examples, please see the works of Bresler, 2004; Green, 1999; Johnson, 2007; Levy, 2000; Maouene, Hidaka, & Smith, 2008; Shusterman, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Recent literature showed that by revisiting reform implementation, some researchers noticed that individual teachers played an important role in the variation of reform implementation. They quoted words from Milbrey McLaughlin in 1987, that "what actually is delivered ... depends finally on the individual at the end of the line" (Supovitz & Weinbaum, 2008). Although teachers face the same objectives, standards, and textbooks in China, they do not use textbooks and achieve the goals in the same way. Therefore to study the variation of reform implementations will eventually rest on the different executing processes of teachers, to observe how they act, interact with people around them and how they feel and learn during the process of change.

aspects in this research, such as communication with Chinese teachers and being able to read the relevant literature in Chinese language.

Unlike the “Western” classical philosophy that is based on body-mind division, ancient Chinese philosophy is a “body-ontology” or “body-based philosophy.”<sup>35</sup> Again, unlike the English Language, there is a concept that represents both mind and body in the Chinese language: “身”(shēn, *the whole* “self”).<sup>36</sup> In the Chinese modern character system, there are many mind-related words that combine mind activities with the body experiences, such as “体会”(tǐhuì, embodied understand), “体认”(tǐrèn, embodied recognition) and “体谅”(tǐliàng, embodied sympathy). This is a reason for me to understand “experiences” as body-dominated, feeling-laden, and emotion-involved experiences.

I believe that a kind of “truth” can be expressed by our bodies and this kind of truth is somewhat different from the one existing in our mind in terms of ideas or analytic rationality. Teachers express the “truth” of the NCR every minute in their careers, although it is rarely found in the literature. The fundamental difference between the embodied truth of teachers’ roles and the one in large-scale statistics is that the former is warm, has a heartbeat, can laugh and cry, can feel pain, pressure and happiness, in other words, it is corporal and emotional.

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<sup>35</sup> Thousands of years ago, Chinese philosophers believed in the isomorphism between human beings and our cosmos. A Chinese philosopher Wang Fuzhi (A.D. 1619-1692) suggested that the Dao is in everyone’s body ( 即身而道在, 《尚书》 ) (Zhang Z.-l., 2005, p. 3).

<sup>36</sup> The character “身”(shēn ) in ancient Chinese philosophy referred to a whole individual including both the body and the mind, so another meaning of “身” is “我”(wǒ, the whole “self” ), even in modern Chinese. In the ancient Chinese interpretation system, “身” linked a series of meanings – life (生, shēng), shape (形, xíng), nature and gender ( “性”, xìng), these characters were sometimes interchangeable in usage.



The ten-year implementation of the NCR was successful in terms of spreading new ideas, however as a goal of this curriculum reform, “quality education” failed to increase the quality of teachers’ implementation, partly because the reform stories from a teacher’s bodily and emotional experiences keeps being ignored in research.

### **A Qualitative Inquiry: Autoethnography and Fictional Ethnography**

“The ethnographic life is not separable from the self.” (Laurel Richardson, 2000, p. 255)

When making up my mind to write a thesis on an educational reform, I thought that I had to tell stories of my own and my peers. By doing so, I am not only going to make sense of my own experiences but also find something “real” from the view of high school teachers amid complex and ambiguous images of this educational reform. The “real” is from our whole body and mind, from our emotions and feelings, and intertwining our past, present, and future. I shall start with a brief introduction of my “real” to explain the methodology that I applied in this thesis.

I am a Chinese woman, and lived in Beijing with my family: my parents, my husband and our daughter, who is in her first year in a private elementary school. In 2005, after getting my M.A. in China, I became a high school Chinese Language Arts (CLA) teacher in Beijing. I experienced the unreformed CLA curriculum in the first two years prior to the first three-year implementation of the high school program in Beijing. In 2010, I resigned from this job with pain in my body and disappointment in my mind, choosing to be a graduate student in Canada to study Curriculum and Instruction. What happened to me and my colleagues during the NCR, or more precisely, the Beijing High School Program then became a psychologically smoldering

complex. I hope to understand myself and make sense of what my peers and I experienced in this reform, meanwhile to know the context and the following plots. So after two years, I went back to Beijing to inquire with my personal viewpoint what combines a Chinese background and the so-called “Western” learning experience.

My identity mixes several advantages for this qualitative inquiry:

1. I was a high school language arts teacher in a model school in Beijing;
2. I am a master’s student studying overseas to expose myself to this “Western” and “post-modern” curriculum theories;
3. To experience the current way of teaching, I worked with some high school teachers in the data collection process.

Therefore, my identity makes possible my access to first-hand materials and bodily experiences with multiple perspectives. Autoethnography was employed to recall my experiences of several years ago while now living in the current teaching context. The past and the present, the “self” and the “other” will thus meld together. Grumet (1981) noted:

Autobiographical method was a project of restitution, wresting experience from the anonymity and generalisation that had dominated the social sciences and even literary interpretation in the heyday of structuralism and systems theories, and returning it to the particular persons who lived it. (p. 116)

Autoethnography is more dialogic than monologic. Ellis and Bochner (2000) defined it as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739). Especially when researchers are

insiders involved in a cultural context or daily routines, this subjective narrative genre frees the ethnographers to feel, hear, taste, smell, touch, and embrace their inner and outer world (Tedlock, 2000).

Autoethnography is a way to challenge disembodied ways of knowing and “mature” and “silent authorship” (Sparkes, 2002, p. 100; Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996). It requires emotional immersion in research, rather than using the third person, passive voice, or neutral position. “Memory is tied to emotion; feelings make events significant” (Duquin, 2000, p. 480). By stripping down those old clothes decorated with emotionless numbers, expressionless charts and well-formed rhetoric, researchers such as myself will eventually face the “self” at rational, corporal and subconscious levels. The responsibility to answer my “self” and my research questions is inescapable. Although to reveal a vulnerable self, to touch sensitive nerves and rub delicate skin could be painful, sometimes even humiliating, it is necessary to find my voice and emotions to articulate this pain (Ellis, 1999). More importantly, my voice, senses, emotions and my “self” are part of Chinese teachers, however weak or tiny they are.

Autoethnography demands critical reflexivity so that it can become a way of self-illumination (Sparkes, 2002, p. 90). With critical reflexivity, to write my bodily experiences is not only a way of making more sense of what I did, but also a way of understanding myself—the one of multiple layers and the one in different periods. As Ellis suggested, “Events in the past are always interpreted from our current position” so the “current me” will be a critical role to link multi-layers of me together. Besides, every self is “a social phenomenon.” Church (1995) reflected, “Writing about myself is a way of writing about these others and about the worlds

which we create/inhabit” (p. 5). In this sense, personal stories expose “the complex interaction of various social statuses (for example, class, gender, sexuality) in the emotional patterning of individual lives” (Duquin, 2000, p. 481).

Autoethnography cooperates with fictional devices. “Evocative autoethnographers focus on narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses” (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 451); this means that an autoethnographer should invite herself, her audience and her characters to live “in between” together, that is, between their cultures, beliefs, lives, understandings and texts. As some experienced ethnographers have reminded us, “Evocative forms of writing are not merely desirable; they are essential. The interactionist charge is to involve readers’ imaginative participation with subjects and authors in the described experience” (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996, p. 286).

Fictional devices such as plots, characters and dramatic tension were my invitation. I believe that experiences at the corporeal level have great potential to bridge different cultures, careers and ideologies.

Fictional representation can, in fact, serve for more than my autoethnography. In my inquiry, I am fully aware of the risk of telling the “truth” of this “sensitive educational reform” topic in the current context of Beijing, the heart of China and the guiding force of the NCR. Especially when I show the stories of my peers, I am not sure if some “reality” will bring us trouble in the future. So to decrease the risk to minimum, I choose a fictional ethnography to narrate the education ideals and realities for me and my research participants.

As forms of storytelling, fictional representation and autoethnography are used in the social sciences to convey truths and meaning in research (Hopper et al., 2008). They challenge the traditional view of truth. By deconstructing the authority of truth and knowledge, the versatility of truth is unfolded. Scientific truth as well as magical truth, lyrical truth, visceral truth and the truth that implies verisimilitude, as Rinehart (1998) phrased it, will surface from concrete plots.

According to Agar, “Creative nonfiction is fiction in form but factual in content” (cited in Sparkes, 2002, p. 155). The process of creating fictional ethnography includes a literature review at the start of research, but data collection as a basis on which to create stories, and fictional devices application while writing stories (Hopper et al., 2008). The methods used for data collection in my research include interviews, observations, literature, and images analysis. Data also comes from personal experiences, memories and imagination.

By employing fictional devices to create the feel of “being there,” storytelling makes a powerful contribution to “tell” and “show” lived experiences of silenced, absent and marginalized others (Sparkes, 2002). In my research, the “others” are high school teachers, including myself. Storytelling allows characters, writers, and readers to “be there” in the stories, thus shaping a trilateral meeting among them. Together, they experience “truth” at the emotional and visceral levels, and go to the threshold of the mind to recall their own recollections from deep down.

Since my goal was to inquire into the implementation of the Chinese High School Program at a classroom level while trying to avoid any final verdicts on this issue and to

minimize the risk to my research subjects, qualitative research with fictional techniques was vital for me. When the readers, writer and characters are “there” in the narrative stories, they can communicate at the same stage to find some solutions for this noisily debated reform.

The genre choice frees me from the cold numbers and graphs to analyze “facts.” Behind every number in the comprehensive survey results that I mentioned above, are real lives. Every high school CLA teacher in this reform has his/her personal “fact” reserved in their bodies with warmth, beating hearts and movements. So I would like to try to fill this gap between university professors’ or government policy-makers’ offices and high school classrooms, even though my ethnography is merely a tiny building block.

### **Case Study and Its Pros and Cons**

There is a well-known Buddhist proverb that says “to see a world in a flower, to encounter a bodhi in a leaf” (“一花一世界，一叶一菩提”). Enlightened by this wisdom, I expect to find a society in my case. However small it is, it would be my research case.

The case study is a thriving method in social science, although its definitions and functions vary from research to research (Thomas, 2011). Stake (2000) believed, “[The] case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied.” He continues, “We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods—but we concentrate, at least for the time being, on the case” (p. 435). In Stake’s opinion, “the case” is the object to be studied rather than a methodology.

Even so, a case study includes its own complexity and its complex context. To avoid problems in case studies such as reductionism, simplicity or strenuous motivation to prove something, Simons (2009) offers an insightful definition of case studies: “[A] case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a ‘real life’ context” (p. 21).

So using a flower as a case, it relates to a whole ecosystem; thus, a high school CLA teacher relates to a whole “edusystem.” This is the first strength of case studies that I recognized. Through a month living “real life” with my peer teachers, I explored the complexity of their situations and the uniqueness of Chinese “edusystem.” My case includes introspective, analytic and hermeneutic interpretation by myself and my audience.

Notwithstanding, the problem of generalization always coexists with case studies. Not everything can be a case. The case that is study-worthy should be “a functioning specific” or “a bounded system” (Flood, as cited in Stake, 2000, p. 436). The problem of a case study then arises from the conflict of the specificness and its generalization. Some researchers argue that the specificness of case knowledge is central to human learning (Barnes, Christensen, & Hansen, 1994). “In essence, we have only specific cases and context-dependent knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 224). “More discoveries have arisen from intense observation than from statistics applied to large groups,” Beveridge confirmed (as cited in Kuper & Kuper, 1985, p. 95). These researchers validated case studies as more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals.

I appreciate the specific and context-dependent knowledge from empirical inquiries more in the current situation of Chinese educational research. I have no ambition to generalize my case as a theoretical demonstration; rather, the cases that I choose are critical ones to theoretical analysis or general impressions. If pushed to articulate a goal in my research, my work attempted to discover solutions for the plight of my peers by exploring our teaching experiences through our stories.

Thus both my peers and I will be the cases in my research and substantial narratives are going to form my case report. With autoethnography and fictional representations, my stories cannot always be scientifically “true” but “true” from different angles. As both a subject and an object, the reporter and a character, the researcher and a case in my research I must be aware of bias, prejudice and preconceived ideas. Ironically, one of the purposes of my research is to test my bias and these preconceived ideas and theories. To conduct this field research, my primary curiosity and motivation come from the gap between my previous experience as a teacher and the debates in the domestic literature. In this sense, I would agree with Flyvbjerg (2006):

The case study contains no greater bias toward verification of the researcher’s preconceived notions than other methods of inquiry. On the contrary, experience indicates that the case study contains a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than toward verification. (p. 237)

As I am to create a “being there” sense in my bodily, emotional experience stories, a critical audience will be welcome to communicate with me and my characters. After all, my inquiry is as contextual as my bias and limitation and so are my reported “ideals” and “reality.”



## **Invited Teachers into My Research**

In this qualitative research, I focused on 10 CLA teachers in a model high school in Beijing. There are four main reasons for selecting this type of group as the case in my research.

Firstly, high school teaching is an important tie to link basic and higher education. The effects in basic education and preparations for higher education can be discovered in this period.

Secondly, there are three major subjects in Chinese education: Mathematics, Chinese Language Arts (CLA) and English. Being involved in one of the “three major subjects,” CLA teachers form part of the leading power in high school teaching. Selecting this group of teachers allowed me and my audience to understand the core of Chinese high school education.

Thirdly, the reason for selecting a model high school is that the 74 model high schools in Beijing took the lead in reform experimenting and innovating. The status quo in these model high schools represents the latest achievements and future direction of this educational reform.

And fourthly, because of political sensitiveness, research reports that involve the capital city of China always have to be prudent. Beijing is viewed as the leader of the NCR so the negative elements in mixed research results tend to be filtered out in case they cause adverse effects on the future of the reform. The last two reasons led to the lack of academic reports on the reform situation in Beijing. However, including only the positive side of the case makes academic hypocrisy.

Based on the four reasons, I chose this specific group of teachers to join me in the research. The school in which I collected data has about 20 CLA teachers working in the high school department and teaching 30 classes, with 45 students in each class. Since the size of a

high school class and the full load of a high school CLA teacher in Beijing are ruled by the government, this school is typical of 74 model high schools in Beijing.

In the fall of 2012, I went back to Beijing and visited a model high school to express my research intention to the principal. She allowed me to do my research in that school after voluntarily working as a substitutive teacher for a month. During that November and December, I got used to the whole school environment as a volunteer, and made friends with some CLA teachers. After the university research ethics approval was granted, I sent invitation emails through the Educational Science and Research office in the sample school and soon successfully invited 10 in-service teachers with different genders and teaching years to participate into my research. All of them were very glad to help me collect data as I explained my research process and details, some of them told me that they wanted their stories to be heard by an anonymous way.

Of the 10 teachers, I invited three for tracking their daily working. I explained more about the inconveniences that the research would cause, as they fully understood them and still were willing to participate in the research, I allowed them to sign the copies of the consent form. Then I entered the stage of class observation and interviews.

Class observation was conducted at the end of January. In two weeks, I observed 19 classes, conducted 10 interviews with all teacher participants to explore their experiences including but not limited to their physical, emotional feelings and reflections on the classes<sup>37</sup>. They told me lots of valuable stories about their students and their peers. Then after winter holidays, I spent

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<sup>37</sup> Please see the interview questions in Appendix.

another three weeks in March and April to intensively track three teachers' daily working in the school, in order to record details and routines of different teachers. We talked a lot, in and out of our interviews. These talks and our daily working experiences consolidated my commitment to write down our teaching life.

Apart from inviting teachers to participate in my research, I integrated some segments in my life into these ethnographical stories. Working with the teachers, listening to their stories reminded me of experiences when I was a high school CLA teacher. I kept writing a research journal to record raw materials from my memories, experiences, observation in interviews, casual talks, and photos for analysis.

All data in this thesis was reported anonymously and participants' privacy and confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms and fictional techniques such as creating fictional characters and scenarios. Data analysis in this study was ongoing; I classified and interpreted the data collected from the interviewees and tracking records into different teachers' stories. Teachers' bodily, emotional and introspective experiences were three interpretive focuses. My understandings of teacher's bodily experiences and their cultural and philosophical implications in this curriculum change were generated from the transcribing and theme analyzing of the interviews, tracking records and my research journals. As a case study with the application of fictional ethnography, I then created fictional characters as cases. Each fictional character in a case combined different teachers' stories including my own experience. In several cases, I also made changes on locations and plots, but kept teachers' bodily, emotional

and intrapersonal experiences intact. Together, the individual cases made up a case of the NCR in a Beijing model high school.

All ten interviews and three tracking records were transcribed in Mandarin. The transcripts of interviews and tracking records were given to the participants to confirm the accuracy of their views. Each participant provided his/her corrections to the transcripts and supplementary comments about the transcripts through emails in a later stage.

## Chapter 4. Unexpected Changes: Stories About Teachers' Bodily Experiences

Since 2001, Chinese basic education has travelled a long way in reforming its exam-oriented curriculum system of more than a decade. How the reform goes on then becomes an inevitable question. Surveys showed that the majority of teachers accepted the ideas of the NCR but “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” to the implementation of them<sup>38</sup>. A leader in the MOE interpreted this situation as at least “stirred the long stability of Chinese basic education” (Yu, 2009, p. 33), yet a scholar in curriculum research critiqued it as “basically a failure” (Zha Y., 2012, p. 8).

The problems are why most of teachers fail to act on the new pedagogy in their daily teaching? What held them back from walking on a prosperous teaching way? Similar questions have been raised not only in China, but on the other side of the Pacific as the mixed success of educational reforms are taking place in North America. Educators Nina Bascia and Andy Hargreaves provided the answer from their research:

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<sup>38</sup> The forum was hosted by 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Research Institute, New Education Institute and Beijing Western Sunshine Rural Development Foundation. The survey was a large-scale one, which was launched by the forum organizers and China Education website ([www.Chinaedu.edu.cn](http://www.Chinaedu.edu.cn)). It covered 29 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities in Mainland China and involved 4,000 teachers at elementary and secondary schools at all levels. The title of the survey report is Online Survey Report on Evaluation of the NCR from Teachers in 2011 (《2011年教师评价新课改的网络调查报告》). The three related survey result showed that (a) 74% teachers agreed with the new learning idea of the NCR, which is “Independence, Cooperation and Exploration;” (b) 63% teachers in elementary and secondary schools agreed that the NCR had been actively carried out in their own schools; and (c) 83% teachers agreed that their teaching had changed more or less. Nevertheless, 75.4% of teachers ticked “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”, 73% of teachers agreed that the teaching of the New Curriculum was becoming more difficult. The reason for this difficulty, as teachers ticked, was that the change in subject knowledge systems in the New Curriculum was far from systematic. Additionally, 78.3% of teachers agreed that the NCR had not changed the complicated, difficult, uncommonly used and out-of-date curriculum contents, and 91.5% of teachers believed that the NCR failed to reduce the learning burden on students. Please also see footnote 28 for the reference.

There are two key factors which underpin what Sarason depressingly calls “the predictable failure of educational reform.” The first is that most reform efforts fail to understand the depth, range and complexity of what teachers do. ... They fail to understand the good reasons why many teachers persist with what they already do, or change in ways that reformers do not acknowledge. Second, reformers rarely recognize that what must be changed is an interconnected, highly complex and profoundly political system which shapes and constrains the work of teaching and efforts to improve or transform it. (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000, p. 4)

Although different problems are generated from different contexts between China and North America, a clue to explore the complex of an educational reform is quite clear, to follow teachers. They are the ones who live in the crux of the matter day by day. A teacher told me in our casual chat: “Those reformers wouldn’t understand our teachers unless they work with us every day for at least three years!” I was reading a heap of large-scale survey statistics when she made this statement. Her words stamped on my mind. It was a surprising approval of my research from my peers: what we lack in this bottleneck period of our reform is not another large-scale survey or another debate on the new shoes or old path, we lack stories with bodily experiences and living senses of our teachers to show what their daily life looks and feels like.

In this chapter, I shall tell three stories, and focus on teachers bodily experiences to picture a teacher’s daily working in Beijing – a morning, a day and a class preparation. The literature in the previous chapters presented what a teacher and a school should do in this reform, whereas the following stories will reveal what they actually do. The literature also showed us

what the scholars understand the problems in the NCR, whereas the following stories will reveal the problems in the curriculum change that teachers experienced personally and bodily.

To many reformers who have never been secondary school teachers or never worked with them for a long term, these stories will go beyond plugging loopholes of their professional knowledge. And to those teachers and researchers who have shortly visited model schools in Beijing, these stories will show them another truth that they might not be able to discover with their own eyes.

### **A Teacher's Diary: The Morning Pain**

November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Wednesday

Cloudy

Sometime in the early morning, I floated in and out of my dreams and awoke feeling a dull ache in my shoulders, neck, back, waist and tailbone. They were not strong enough to wake me up, but I could not ignore their existence. Pain was humming in my back, affecting my work as a high school grade three teacher.<sup>39</sup> I felt it almost every morning, so long and so frequently that I could not remember when I had woken up without any pain in my body.

“Listening” to my body’s complaints, I slowly turned around and back again, twisted myself and twisted back the other way. I was bothered by it, trying to relieve the pain by stretching. My body was in a strange position, my knees turning to the left and my torso to the right. Although the grumbling disappeared in my middle, the protesting in my neck got stronger

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<sup>39</sup> Chinese high school grade three is grade 12. Instead of calling the grade in digital order, Chinese educational system name the grades as junior school grades 1-3 and high school 1-3, respectively equal to grades 7-9, and grades 10-12.

and stronger. I raised my right arm from the blanket and suddenly a spasm shot through me. I groaned and awoke.

The pain turned out to be muscular fatigue. It was hard to tell where the fatigue and soreness came from. Finally I admitted that I was not a girl in my twenties any more, when I used to restore my energy with a sound night's sleep. I am thirty now. I have to surrender myself to the morning pain.

Silently, I pulled my legs out of bed with my hands and got up. It was 5:10 a.m. My daughter was still asleep. My husband turned over and mumbled, "Up?"

"Yes, it's still early, go back to sleep," I said hoarsely.

I looked at him, bitterly. To be honest, I'm afraid of him. I'm afraid of his waking, kisses and even embraces. I dodge him as often as I can because I am too tired to be intimate with him. How long have I had lived with no make-up, no perfume, no jewellery and no kisses? It's too exhausting to love.

I walked out to our study, switched on the light, picked up the stack of test papers that I put on the sofa last night, or more precisely, early this morning. My eyes were dry, light sensitive and painful, for I had stayed up late to mark the papers from yesterday's monthly exam. I could not put off the work; my students could not wait. They were expecting my comments, my grades, my interpretation of this composition subject. I simply could not let them down.

But for me, every day has been a sleep-deprived day since I taught grade two in M school. Every morning I feel as though I am already seventy years old. Turning my neck, my cervical bones rubbed against each other, making a noise. I was hungry, but did not want to eat



anything. There was something pressing against my stomach and it was very annoying. Perhaps my students are just as exhausted as I am now, but they will be free as soon as they graduate from high school. They will be much less tired when they go to university. However, as a teacher, I am not able to predict when my suffering will be over. Will it be over when I no longer teach grade three? Or when I am no longer the main teacher?<sup>40</sup> If I can achieve the former however, I will lose a vital opportunity for professional development. A high school teacher without rich teaching experiences in grade three will never be an expert teacher. And if I achieve the latter, I will never be promoted and get a higher salary.

I do the best I can but if I am promoted as a subject group leader, a director or a dean, I do not want to live like them because their life is even harder than mine. They go to school earlier than I do, go home later than I do, and work more often on weekends with or without salary than I do. In recent years, they have even had more accidents than before. My group leader got facial fractures in a biking accident late at night when she was tired after finishing work. She came back to work when her face was still swollen because there was no one else to take her place for the whole grade three CLA group and the two top classes in our grade.<sup>41</sup> My director got a hairline fracture on her tailbone last year because she had too much work to do and ran too fast. She fell down the stairs of our classroom building. She made fun of this accident, saying

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<sup>40</sup> There is a main teacher in every class in China, even in high schools and some universities. As a unit in a school, classes are relatively fixed with students, teachers and class schedules. A main teacher in a class is responsible for all activities that are organized by taking classes as units, the smallest responsibilities could be passing a notice to students, or cleaning up their classrooms after school, the biggest ones may include leading students in their classes to do some type of social field work, or organizing parent-teacher meetings for their whole class.

<sup>41</sup> Top classes are selected by the scores of each student. At the end of every school year in many Chinese high schools, teachers and grade leaders will rank all the students in their grade, and select students with the best scores into top, second and even third top classes, leaving the other “average” students in “normal” classes.

“Don’t be sad when I fall downstairs; you should cheer for me because I am liberated from my heavy burden for a while!” As for our dean, she got a tumour... If I get promoted, will I be like them? I am afraid it is not up to me then. The pain every morning is enough for me. I do not want to be promoted. The only thing I want to know is how teachers survive when they teach grade three for several years.

The morning pain is affecting my hope, I know it. Every time I feel pain, my hope, my energy and my happiness disappear. But today, I have no time to pity myself. I have three 50-minute-long CLA classes and a night class to sit in on. I will not leave school until 9:20 p.m. It’s 6:10 a.m. now. When I close this diary, I should close off my feelings too.

### **A Timeline Story: The Long Day of Teacher Cheng**

Cheng<sup>42</sup>, a 34-year-old male teacher, has 12 years teaching experience and nine-year main teacher experience. He is a father of a six-year-old boy. His wife is also a main teacher in a regular high school close to their home in Beijing. In the summer of 2008, a year after the High School Program was instigated in Beijing, he resigned from a regular high school and got a job in M School. Currently, he teaches Class Three and Class Six in high school Grade 2 (Grade 11), and is the main teacher of the latter.

To some extent, being a model school teacher in Beijing fulfils his ideal. “Because to be a good teacher, it doesn’t only depend on your own excellence, you have to have those good

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<sup>42</sup> To protect participant’s privacy and to show my respect for their participation and contributions to this research, I have used pseudo-surnames and integrate different participants’ stories into one.

‘buds!’” Cheng said seriously, “The excellence of a teacher is shown by the excellence of his students!” This is both the great and the sad part of a teacher, he believes. So he works as hard as his peers to guarantee the excellence of his students. His working always starts from an early morning.

October 17th, 2012, Monday

Sunny

**Table 1**

6:00 a.m.	<p>It was a midwinter morning in Beijing, an hour before dawn. The sky between the tall narrow residential buildings was pitch-dark. In this concrete building complex, lights showed in three or four windows. Opening the door into the corridor, Cheng walked towards the cold darkness.</p>
6:13	<p>Cheng’s home is south of Beijing. Every working day, he has to take a bus to a subway station, take subway line X then transfer to Y to get to M School. The commute takes him about an hour.</p> <p>Cheng coughed a bit and stepped into the subway car. It was warm and light. Folding his down coat as a table, Cheng took out a stack of papers to grade them. It was Cheng’s habit to work on the subway. He had never thought about why he worked so early in the morning; instead, he saw it as managing time well.</p>

6:52

Stepping on old snow and dirty lumps of ice, Cheng walked in through the school gate.<sup>43</sup> The sun had not risen yet. Classroom lights were blazing. With greetings to his peers and some early coming students, he went to the school cafeteria to get breakfast.



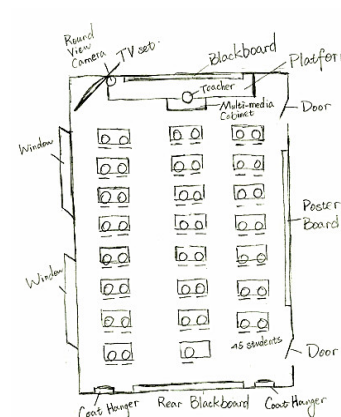
Figure 1-1

Today, he got to school a bit late.

Figure 1-2

7:05

Cheng went to Class 6 to “inspect.” Like most of the classes in M School, the Class 6 room was 60 square meters and held 45 students.



There were almost 30 students there already. The schedule for the whole class<sup>44</sup> was listed on the right side of the blackboard. It was a bit noisy in the classroom but as soon as Cheng appeared at the door, the volume went down immediately. As a teacher, Cheng was satisfied with his “deterrent power.”

<sup>43</sup> There always are fences, walls and gates around campus in Chinese Schools, from kindergartens to universities. These masonry or hollowed-out, high or low walls distinguish schools from the residential communities around them. M School uses iron fence and stone pillars as “walls”, forming a secure atmosphere and a closed feeling at the same time. Once the first class starts in a school day, the main gates are locked. Students can’t go out of the school without a teacher-signed leave note or parents’ presence until the school day is over.

<sup>44</sup> According to the requirements of the High School Program, the compulsory modules should be completed at the end of high school Grade One (Grade 10), and from Grade Two, students should take their optional modules, so there shouldn’t be a class-shared class schedule, instead, different students should own their individual class schedule in accord with their different choices of optional modules.

“Keep your voices down and get your tasks done. Don’t chat!” Cheng ordered.



Almost every main teacher in grade two was in their classrooms.

7:10 The Grade Director, the Head and teachers of School Moral Education Office (SMEO), the Dean and the Principal were touring different floors in this building. Cheng quickened his pace to fetch his papers and textbook.

When he’s back, he saw several students were still doing their homework, but one of them was obviously copying answers. Cheng stood by the student who was copying, glared at her without a word until she suddenly noticed him and was startled.

“This math problem is too difficult. I really can’t work it out...” she said with an awkward smile.

“Then ask your teachers or classmates to really understand it. Be careful not to copy the other person’s name on your own exercise book!” Cheng taunted her.

“I wouldn’t do that! I’m handing them in!” She quickly turned to submit the two homework books to the math



Figure 1-2

representative. Cheng stared at her coldly and walked away through the narrow aisle between packed school bags.

7:20 From 7:20 to 7:40 was morning reading time. Cheng wrote three titles of ancient poems on the board and asked his students to write the poems down from memory. Writing poems from memory takes 8 points out of 150 in the College Entrance Exam, maybe more in the future. So these drills were needed everyday because every point in the exam counts.

The first class started.

7:40 “There are two pieces of good news in this monthly test. The first is,” Cheng paused as he stepped on the platform of Class 3, “you take the highest proportion of those who passed in our grade.”

“Yay!” The students cheered.

“...although the number of passes doesn’t exceed 20...”

The students laughed.

“The second news is that your writing quality has improved in this test. The two pieces of news make me feel very good.” Cheng emphasized the word “very.” “But the bad news is, because some of you didn’t listen to me carefully, so you lost marks on test questions. I hope we can work together next month to make greater progress. Now, we are going to review this paper.”

Cheng paused again, and said seriously, “Class starting!”

“Stand up.” The monitor of Class 3 gave the order immediately.

The class stood up, with the sound of desks and chairs knocking

against each other.

Cheng looked around, waited until everyone stood straightly and looked at him. Then he ordered, “Sit down please.”

After this greeting ritual, the class formally began.

“You may find this test paper is strange, especially in terms of the questions and the relevant time arrangement. The reason for this is we examiners directed this test to be the final exam of this semester. So you may also find that the questions are more difficult and the type of them changed.”



Figure 1-3

Cheng went down the questions. He stood beside the multimedia cabinet instead of on

the platform, for this position made him feel closer to his students and more comfortable in having a conversation with them.

8:30 The bell had rung five minutes before, but Cheng kept his students in to explain the last question he planned to finish. When he left the classroom, he felt excited and happy. Most students listened attentively and followed the class discipline well. He coughed a little and went back to his office where he worked with five CLA teachers in the same grade.

8:35 The second class. Cheng observed his students secretly through the rear door window. Monitoring or surveillance, he didn't care. What he cares is how the students perform in other classes.

8:40 It's a hand-in time. Various books including the attendance record book and teaching plan books should be handed in to different offices on every Monday morning, like students submitting their homework.

The second class was over. Figure 1-5

9:15 As soon as Cheng heard the bell, he ran to Class 6 at once. There usually were Ocular Gymnastics and Radio Calisthenics in this break. But



considering of the ice on campus, M School informed students to change the Calisthenics into an indoors school meeting. Cheers then came from every classroom. Not having to stand on spots in the playground for 30 minutes made the students very happy.

But they still had to sit straight and listen to a presentation on the school radio attentively. Main teachers were required to supervise this process. Teachers



Figure 1-4

SMEO toured on every floor for inspecting, recording, grading and rating, and then published the result.

9:39 A ten-minute break. Cheng hurried back to his office to grab a chair. The following two classes had a group working time of teaching and researching. Cheng and other high school CLA teachers were going to observe a class of a potential teacher.

Standing on the platform was a 37-year-old female doctor from a



9:50 renowned normal university. She started her lecture with the greeting ritual. By asking questions, she tried to break the awkward atmosphere but obviously her questions were too difficult for the students. Nobody responded.

At the fourteenth minute, Cheng and some other teachers lowered their heads to yawn. After the twenty-second minute, two teachers' eyes started to glaze over. Another six minutes later, six students in the last two rows lay on their desks and fell asleep.

10:38 Saying goodbye to the doctor, Cheng and the other teachers started to discuss the class.

“Someone drew watches on his arms,” a teacher said sarcastically to show how boring the class was.

“When the doctor asked which one was better, the introduction or the poem, a student in the last row answered in a low voice that ‘neither one was better than sleeping!’” said another teacher and all the teachers laughed.

“Years ago, students could control themselves and paid respect to teachers' work, even though their teachers didn't teach well,” pondered Cheng, “But now students just don't care.”

“Whatever, this teacher isn't familiar with the level of high school students now. The content's what should be taught in universities!” said the group leader. “So what are we going to report to our principal?”

“I reckon our principal probably wants to keep this doctor because

she's a doctor from a renowned university. But if she's hired, I'm afraid her classes might be weak in any of our class shows<sup>45</sup>," a teacher suggested. "Besides, her class is out of step with the NCR."

"Then I will report it as it happened and leave it to the principal to make up her mind," the group leader finished.

11:08 Cheng started to mark the homework books that had been submitted this morning. In half an hour, he had done more than 40 books, and turned to another heap.



Figure 1-6

11:20 The fourth class was over. Cheng went to his class to ask reasons to the students who hadn't submitted their homework yet.

11:30 The fifth class. Cheng suddenly realized that he hadn't drunk any drop of water in the whole morning. He's thirsty, hungry and tired. It's already lunchtime.

12:10pm As soon as he stood at the door of Class 6, the bell rang. The last class in the morning carried on to the last minute.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

All the classroom doors burst open at the same time. Boys dashed to the school cafeteria. Cheng only had time to yell: "Be back at 1:10!" All

<sup>45</sup> Class shows here means the classes which are showed in an open school day to parents or to leaders at school district level or higher levels. Class shows or demonstrating classes are very common after the NCR. Usually, teachers need to prepare for the show specifically and work after school time.

the students in this school followed the same schedule, so they have to race for lunch. No one wants to wait in lines with the delicious aroma wafting and their stomachs growling.

12:20 It's a lunch break for both students and teachers, but many of teachers were marking homework or solving learning problems with students. Cheng found himself a corner out of the school to take a cigarette break. He called it "snatching a moment."

12:40 Grade two main teachers' meeting. Sitting in an office during lunch break, Cheng listened to the grade director. Teachers were asked to come to school earlier to supervise their students in the last month before the final exam. Three more weeks of classes were planning to carry out in the coming winter holiday.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Adding classes in summer or winter holidays is prohibited by the MOE and Beijing Municipal Education Commission. But for completing textbook contents earlier and getting more time to improve test scores, many secondary schools rather take the risk of principal removal to do so. And this has been a well-known "secret". However, schools just have no choices. On the one hand, regular classes in a semester can only guarantee completing textbook content in the new curriculum, but not consider about the time of test drills. On the other hand, test scores, especially scores in gaokao are still vital to districts, schools and students. After tests, classes are going to rank their students, schools rank classes, and districts rank schools. All of the rankings are based on scores. In this fierce competitive atmosphere, any school would not surrender the time in holidays to let their students "play" and "forget". As long as they are not caught or reported to "the top", this risk is worth it. Moreover, schools have to try to find some "extra money" to pay salaries to the teachers who teach these "extra classes", because schools must offer these classes freely to students in case they are reported by parents. Other than that, schools also need to get agreement notes with parents and students signatures to carry out these classes. On these agreement notes, students and parents should make it clear that students attend these "extra classes" entirely voluntarily and will obey all the relevant rules of their schools. But the fact is, schools add these classes for teaching new knowledge and the contents which are directly related with tests and gaokao. Even if students are not willing to attend these classes, they have no other better choices. School districts usually pretend to be ignorant of this phenomenon, because they are bearing the heavy pressure of test scores competing and ranking too. As long as no schools are reported to their leaders, schools can always carry out the "extra classes" during holidays without the inspection from school districts. One of the reasons for the strict regulation by their leaders, by which I mean the leaders at municipal level can stress on the rights of students and the importance of school holidays, is that Beijing has entered the test-design autonomously time since 2004, so from then on there has been no competition with other provinces in gaokao. Adding classes in holiday therefore owns a magic power, obviously schools have to take dangerous risks and economic loss, teachers' rest time is violated, and school districts are nervous all the time in holidays, but all of them become jubilant after "extra classes" carry out successfully. As for students, they are like soldiers waiting for training, their duty is obedience.

13:10 Cheng went to his class directly from the meeting. When he passed on the information to his students, some were grumbling.

13:30 The sixth class. Cheng was going to prepare his tomorrow classes, but his eyes didn't listen to his intention. So tired and drowsy he was then, any sounds became farther and farther away. Closing his laptop, Cheng lay on his desk and fell asleep.

14:10 The bell. He moved a little, then rubbed his face and looked for his papers and textbooks before his second class today. Only two CLA classes in a day seemed like a light job, but why he felt the day was so long and tiring?

14:20 This was the seventh class of the day. Though the teaching content was the same, the whole atmosphere was different. The air in the classroom was fetid. The power of heaters just made students sleepier. Like him, some had just awoken from the last class; some were ready to sleep in this class. Only about half of the class was alert. It was always difficult to teach the two classes following lunch.

Cheng walked through the aisles between lines, increased his volume and tried to change his intonation frequently as he talked. He



Figure 1-7

pointed to some students who were going to close their eyes to stand up to answer questions, but students were weary. Drowsiness swept through the whole class.

15:00

Finally, the bell rang. Cheng sighed as the sound of Oracle Gym came from the school radio. He taught less content than in the morning class, which made him frustrated. As the students were doing their eye gym, he opened the door. A fresh soft breeze blew into the classroom. “What if they play games outdoors?” The whim of thought flashed through his mind.

15:15

The eighth class. In the office, teachers were chatting. They talked about how they had explained different test questions, how their students respond to them, and how they might have taught this part better. They ate oranges, sat down in a circle, laughed and joked and sometimes pointed to a test question and discussed it. This might be the happiest time of the day.

Through the windows, the sunlight shone on Cheng’s tea glass.

15:55

Happy time always flies. As soon as Cheng heard the ring, he grabbed his coat, ran to his class, and hurried the students to gather in the playground for the collectively physical activity. Finally!

The purpose of the activity was to run three times around the playground, 400 meters each. Every class should keep the same pace and their original formations. Cheng’s class wasn’t good at it.

The first circle was fine, but the second was more difficult. Some were out of breath and slowed down. But they needed to keep in formation! Cheng ran with the last row, cheering his students along. But some girls left them before the third circle and some boys ran faster than the class.

Individuals have a different pace and rhythm while running. Cheng fully understood this but had to show control. “Lack of collectivism spirit,” He thought and started to encourage his students with the words they put on the poster board in their classroom, “There is no me but us!” But inevitably the formation of his class distorted at the last circle and they got criticism from SMEO.

16:23

The last class today in grade two: a school-based elective class. The classroom was a mess. Different students shouted different words, names and numbers of homework pages. Cheng told one who was in charge of studying to go to his office after school with two or three other students. They needed to type the whole class scores of this monthly test into an Excel form and rank them from best to worst.

The bell rang and students swarmed into the hallway. It was crowded with more than 400 students going in different directions.

16:35

Cheng went back to his office. His colleagues told him to fill an online questionnaire about the NCR.

“The top wants to know your evaluation of the NCR,” one of his colleagues told him as she collected her books, a little mockingly.

Cheng sniffed, “They want to know me without coming to me! Then how could they know?”

“Whatever! Fill one in and you’re done.” She left.

Cheng sat down with a sigh and opened the website, ticking boxes with annoyance. He had a lot of things to do for tomorrow’s classes.

17:10 The last ring! All classes in this grade were dismissed. Cheng and the other main teachers reached the hallway again to keep students leaving the building quietly, because the ninth class of Grade Three were ongoing.

Then he went back to his office, working with three students to input scores in computers and rank the class accordingly.

18:24 When everything was done in school, Cheng had to fight for his way to go back home, because it was a rush hour in Beijing. In a subway car, Cheng squeezed and was squeezed, standing at the door of the car. Body odour mixed with food, perfume, and shampoo spread along the car. The right strap of Cheng's schoolbag cut into his shoulder. Forty minutes he suffered silently.

19:52 Closing the door and keeping the winter coldness out, Cheng ended his long day working by being kissed and embraced by his wife and son.

Since last night, his son had not seen him for at least 22 hours, but he was too tired after dinner to talk to anyone, even to his son. He felt sorry for this six-year-old boy. He is afraid of the day when he could educate his students well but could not help his son. For Cheng, the total time that he can make to be with his son every day is no more than 2 hours. He knows his son less than some of his students.

After his wife and son go to sleep, he must put himself together again to prepare his classes until 11 p.m. or later, because he didn't get enough time to do it at school. The following text he's going to teach is an important one in the final test, so he could not teach it in a perfunctory

manner. He knew that he taught two boring classes today. He knew that his students needed to be engaged in class activities.

Now, let him just take a short break after dinner...

## A Drama: Double-dealt Classes

**Act 1:** When Will They Come?

**Time:** A Friday in the winter of 2011, 164 days to *gaokao*, the National Matriculation Test. The last monthly test before the semester final in high school Grade Three (Grade 12)



Figure 1-8

takes place.

**Place:** Grade Three CLA Office in M School

**Characters:**

**Teacher L:** The dean of the high school teaching office

**Teacher P:** The group leader of Grade Three CLA

**Teacher W:** A CLA teacher in Grade Three and a main teacher

**Background:** The CLA test in the monthly test has finished. Students are taking tests in other subjects, and CLA teachers are marking papers in their office together.

**L** (opening the door of the office): Ah, the big heads are all here! Next Monday afternoon, the heads in our district are going to come here and investigate our grade. They're going to observe a class. I checked—nobody in our CLA office can avoid being observed.



**P** (marking papers<sup>47</sup>) ( after hearing the news, she looks up but her mind is still on the papers):

What do you mean? I don't understand! Aren't they only going to observe one class?

**L**: Yes, but they're going to observe ANYONE they want! You see?

**P** (still confused): Next Monday afternoon?

**L**: Right, so we need to get together to prepare the class after we finish marking all the papers this Saturday.<sup>48</sup> Let them observe, but we at least should prepare the big reading,<sup>49</sup> my leader!

**P** (checking on the class schedule for Monday): There're two CLA classes on Monday afternoon—are they going to observe only one?

**L**: Only the class from 2:20 to 3 p.m.

**P**: But what if I haven't been to the big reading part when they come to my class. That's awkward!

**L** (getting impatient): How come you still don't understand? They'll only observe the class from 2:20 to 3 on Monday afternoon! And you'd better do everything well in that class! So you'd get over with every other part and leave the big reading for those observers. I think we'd get together on Saturday morning to prepare this class, got it now?

**P** (calming down): Which level are the observers?

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<sup>47</sup> After formal tests, the test papers are always made into a book, sealing the left part that includes names, numbers and classes of students for marking objectively. Teachers should collectively mark about 13-14 paper books in the grade. Usually, different teachers mark different parts of questions, and report to the whole group.

<sup>48</sup> There are many secondary schools add classes to Grade Three on Saturday, for the grade means the last year that the students have to prepare for gaokao, and every day is counted into this vital examination preparation.

<sup>49</sup> There are four parts of reading in a formal high school CLA test: ancient text reading, poem reading, social or scientific text reading and modern prose reading. CLA teachers usually call the social and scientific one as "small reading" since the texts in that part are short, and call the modern prose reading as "big reading" because the texts are as long as about 1000 words. After every test, teachers will use 2-5 classes to explain test questions, and the New Curriculum does not count these classes within its curriculum time arrangement. This is one of the reasons for teachers always feel short of teaching time and can't complete their teaching tasks on time.

**L** (ticking them off on her fingers): Presidents and deans in teachers' colleges, deans in secondary teaching and research offices and a bunch of section chiefs.

**P** (seriously): Which part of our test is the most difficult?

**L** (confused): What do you mean by the most difficult?

**P** (laughing and joking): We teach what they can't understand! Ha ha!

**L** (shaking her head seriously): Impossible! Four of them've been high school teachers. Don't even think of it!

**P**: Why're they coming to OUR school?

**L** (speaking faster and faster): They're going to visit many many schools. In fact, they come every year, but have never observed classes before, so you didn't know about their visit. I've many things to do (pointing in the air)—write a report for our principal, marking papers, preparing classes, and as they come here on Monday, I have to accompany them during the visit and report this investigation afterward! I'm crazy busy now!

**P**: So you mean we can't leave after Saturday's classes?

**L** (feeling the pressure of so much work, she starts to go to her office, confirms to **P**): Well, you inform all the CLA teachers in our grade, and let's talk about the class on Saturday afternoon together. Not one of us will leave!

**W** (suddenly realizes that they are going to work overtime on Saturday): Saturday? We don't have classes on Saturday morning, why're we gonna prepare the class AFTER school?

**L** (points to **P**): She's gonna do her report, and I'm gonna do mine too! Either teaching classes or attending meetings, I've no time to write the report now. All of my time, including nights is

busy. You take a good break on Saturday morning, storing up energy for the discussion in the afternoon! (laughs) Now I only wanna do work that doesn't need brainpower.

**P** (laughs too): I wanna do nothing!

**Act 2:** Classes for Showing and Classes for Daily Teaching

**Time:** One day in March 2009

**Place:** CLA office of Grade Two in M School

**Characters:**

**Teacher S:** A young CLA teacher with four years teaching experience, a main teacher of Class 2 Grade Two.

**Teacher F:** The group leader of Grade Two CLA, the CLA teacher of the top class of the grade. A senior teacher with almost 30 years of teaching experience, S's instructor.

**Teacher C:** The dean of high school CLA group, a Senior teacher.

**Background:** Not long after the new semester starts. M School is undertaking some activities of the National Secondary School Principal Professional Training for the New Curriculum. Two young teachers from the west of China and the capital are going to demonstrate classes for this training. The principal of M School offered this opportunity to S. She felt a lot of pressure by being asked to represent all the teachers of the capital. Teacher F arranges for her to do trial teaching in every class of the grade and invites every available high school CLA teacher to observe and provide after-class suggestions. After a trial class in the top class, the three of them go back to the grade CLA office.

F (with a chair and books used in the observation in one hand and keys in the other, trying to open the office door): The essay written by Libai<sup>50</sup> is no more than 120 words, but the emotions implied in the short text are complicated.

S (hurrying to help F carry her chair and books): Let me help you!

C: Before the NCR, students only needed to understand the meaning of these ancient texts, but now the New Curriculum requires us to help students appreciating ancient texts as their modern counterparts. Though the teaching difficulty has increased, I believe it's a good thing to help our students learn about literature.

S: I believe so! Literature will enrich their emotions and their life. I got more inspiration from this essay by teaching these trial classes!

F (opening the door and going into the office with the other two): Certainly you do! This is a source of your professional happiness. But I think you still talk too much in class, and your questions are difficult. Besides, do remember that students can't always answer questions as you think they should. You'd respond to THEIR train of thought and base the class on THEIR interests. This's why we say classes are living. (she sits down in front of her desk).

C (sits down on a chair to make a circle of three): Right! And what's more, you'd manage your time in terms of minutes. In the first 10 minutes, you must finish all explanation of the literal

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<sup>50</sup> Libai (李白, 701-762), a great poet in Tang Dynasty (618-907). Some of his most famous poems were selected into the CLA textbooks of the New Curriculum at high school level. His preface essay that mentioned in this act named The Preface for the Spring Night Banquet in a Peach-blossom Garden. And this essay is arranged into a high school CLA optional course textbook, which is Appreciation of Chinese Ancient Poems and Prose, and which should be offered to Grade Two(Grade 11). Other texts that mentioned in this act are all Chinese ancient prose in this textbook. As a optional course, this textbook should be used by the teachers who teach the course and the students who select the course, but since the optional course actually carried out as a compulsory one, all the grade students have to learn the same text at the same speed without any options then.

meaning. So before you use your class to demonstrate, you must provide your students a specific class to preview the text and monitor them to make notes on it. Demonstration classes are different from our daily ones. You and your students must be well prepared.

S (taking notes of the other teachers' suggestions): OK!

C: Besides, after analysing the mixed emotions, you must ask students to read the essay aloud with emotion. They experience the same emotional journey as the writer, and this process will make them realize the resonance and conversation between readers and writers. A demonstration class for principals nationwide should embody the new ideas in the NCR. Give students enough time to do more activities, to discuss, to ask their questions and express themselves. Don't be afraid of the difference of opinion between you and them. Only when they express their ideas does your class understand the many meanings. At the same time you embody your values as a teacher and your teaching skills. Honestly, the significance of understanding the essay means nothing, it won't appear in any test any more. The key is to develop reading skills and comprehension of students.

F (nodding): For sure! The skills and views they acquire will help them to understand more texts, and get HIGHER SCORES.

C (looks at her watch and stands up): Keep up the good work. I believe in you, S! Now, I have to leave. (Walking to the office door) How many trial classes have you taught so far?

S: Five! The whole grade's working for me! (smiling)

F: It's a tough work, but S is awesome! I can feel her progress after every trial class!

S: Well, I've no time to prepare any other class.

**F:** It doesn't matter! We've prepared them for you. (As they talk, they open the office door for C and say goodbye to her.)

**S** (as soon as F closes the door, she gestures): I feel so bad in recent classes, 'cause I'm using all my energy to prepare the demonstration, I can't teach other classes well now. (frustrated)

Yesterday I just criticized my students before the class's over. I felt I had run out of patience. Do you think it's possible that daily classes could be as good as demonstration classes? I really hope so.

**F** (smiles and comforts S): It's IMPOSSIBLE. You're just too tired to teach so many extra classes. And if you prepare daily classes like this demonstration class, you'll burn out. Your students couldn't stand it, either. Just think about their drowsiness after five classes in morning. Class shows and daily classes are different in nature.

**S:** Then there's no hope for me to teach daily classes well as demonstration classes, is it there?

**F:** Actually I think demonstration classes even shouldn't exist! They are just unrealistic shows. Who could use a whole grade to prepare for one class everyday? Who teach a class while counting minutes and watching clock? Classes are living so they're full of surprises. But on the other side, demonstration classes in the NCR are forcing us to practice new ideas. They improve your teaching skills, broaden your views and enrich your pedagogical wisdom. Even though there're no class shows, no observers, no NCR, you'll become an expert teacher in this way. Reforms come and go, you have to find commons from differences. By doing so, you survive in reforms. Demonstrating is just a good opportunity, but daily classes are your lifeblood. Your students are counting on your daily classes to get educated, not just one or two shows.

S (nodding and thinking): Thank you! Those are vital words for my career! I think you are teaching me how deep the educational reform lake is.

## **Reflections**

Recalling and listening the experiences of pain are painful. When I reopened and read my old dairy, a strong feeling to escape from this piece of memory made me close the dairy book several times. But when I heard the similar stories of pain, exhaustion, fear, guilt, frustration and puzzle from my peers, I finally made up my mind to carefully read my dairy and create these stories. Pain, I believe, is a way that our bodies absorb the negative feelings. Pain, is a way that our bodies express warnings to us. In this sense, the first story could be viewed as the result of the others.

In the three stories, I revealed lots of details that may not be known by people who do not teach in Chinese high schools. For instance, how could we understand the relation between a teacher's class schedule and his real workload. For Cheng, he only has two CLA classes in his normal work day, but teachers like him turned out to be a social group that get up the earliest in this metropolis, work more than 11 hours every workday and live in sleep-deprived conditions in a long term. Another example of such details is that the four observers in the drama had been high school teachers. Working as leaders to investigate and even direct school teaching, they are all supposed to be veteran teachers. Details like these are more than I can explain one by one here.

Generally, teachers in these capital model schools are the cream of Chinese teachers. They work hard and seriously. However, it is their very virtues that hurt them under the double

pressures from both the quality-oriented and the exam-oriented curriculums. What I can present here is only one morning and one day, whereas teachers are experiencing their torment, physically and mentally, morning by morning and day by day. This is a cruel reality of an educational change. If the suffering can help to realize our reform ideals, then it might be meaningful or necessary, but it cannot. We are farther and farther away from what the reformers blueprinted for us: to “fresh teachers with new vitality” (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001, p. 421).

The problem in a systemic reform here is when several key points cannot be reformed, they have the potential to fail the whole system. In the Chinese context, module teaching, elective courses, academic credit system and comprehensive quality assessment are supposed to function together to realize the new learning way—“Independence, Cooperation, Inquiry” (Basic Education Department of Chinese Ministry of Education, 2002, pp. 247-248). Unfortunately, the comprehensive quality assessment cannot replace *gaokao* (the National Matriculation Test) for complicated reasons (These reasons will be mentioned in the last chapter). The “reformed” curriculum remains exam-oriented. As a consequence, elective courses becomes a reluctant redundancy and the academic credit system simply exists in name. *Gaokao* still orients the whole teaching and learning process. But something indeed was changed—the learning content in the New Curriculum became richer. Some parts of the new textbooks are even more difficult since they are supposed to be used in elective courses to engage high-level students.

The promise that each learner has a different class schedule has not come into the stage yet, although it was one of the most exciting highlights before the High School Program carried out. Now school districts select elective courses for all the individual students in the district,



regardless of the difficulties for teachers to teach or students to learn. Monthly tests still thrive, but the New Curriculum does not involve the time of these tests and classes for test papers explanation, so extra classes have to be added in holidays. The strange combination of the New Curriculum and the old exam-oriented one is driving this reform in unexpected ways.

Worse, lots of reformers and leaders who might provide instruction and positive coordination to teachers or schools are satisfied with the coverage of schools they investigated. By observing only one or two classes in each school, they limited themselves in understanding the quality of demonstration class(es), rather than looking into the systematic failure in a relatively long term to get a deep understanding and solution. Teachers then specifically prepare demonstration classes to cope with this kind of observation. Demonstration classes minimize variates that teachers may randomly encounter in daily classes. The more accurate the former is designed, the farther it travels from the true meaning of education. It can even not be called as “curriculum-as-plan” (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005), but rather “class-as-plan.” Besides, many leaders and section chiefs in educational institutes have never been teachers. Neither can they imagine how much time and energy teachers use to prepare a demonstration class, nor can they really understand such a class since they do not have enough knowledge on learning context and the status quo.

However, among the depressing scenarios, positive moments sparkles. As a teacher in M School told me in an after-class interview:

I feel that the NCR got very far away from me. In fact, when we encounter difficulties in teaching, we always cut a way through by teamwork. We are forming a teaching and

research atmosphere together, and we solve problems together. It is this kind of teaching and research that might match the NCR culture, which brings me career satisfaction.

(Teacher P, After-class Reflection, 3-12-2013)

Since Chinese teachers traditionally work as a team to teach a grade at the same pace, they always work together to solve problems. The problem left is whether reformers acknowledged the existence of this cooperative culture, or they simply introduced theories as well as problems in some countries where teachers work too independently.

The ideals of this educational reform are inspiring but out of reach. Teachers become victims of this torturous and strange combination of curriculums. Moreover, the literature showed that their struggles were blamed as resistance to the reform or disability to change by some scholars. And by others who were opposed to this imported “Westernized” reform, the struggles were used as strong proof for the inadaptability of “Western post-modern” curriculum theories in Chinese education context. It is obvious that teachers are passively consumed by university scholars (Liu, 2006, p. 189). But if scholars, reformers and policy makers fail to care about our classroom implementers, the unexpected changes and predictable failure of an educational change are almost inevitable. Teachers’ bodily experience is merely a starting line for them.

## **Chapter 5. Cultural Discordance: Stories About Teachers' Emotional Experiences**

“Because the NCR is very professional and complicated, it needs a long period, flexible policies and free social environment. We expect to get social support from all aspects” Chen Xiaoya, the Vice Minister of the MOE (Yu, 2009, p. 34).

By focusing on teachers' bodily experience in the previous chapter, I explored the internal problems in the implementation of the New Curriculum. In this chapter, I shall inquire into the interaction between the New Curriculum and the existing school culture through stories focused on teachers' emotional experiences.

There are always many different systems that function together in a high school. Apart from a curriculum system, administrative management is another important pillar to support school education and create learning culture. When the out-dated curriculum needs to be reformed, the old class managerial methods should be correspondingly updated. Through the mutually reinforcing between class teaching and behaviour management, the new curriculum culture can come into being. This also means that the barriers of a curriculum reform might not merely come from internal problems, but also something external. Yet these external barriers are out of the reach of curriculum reformers but within the responsibilities of class teachers.

In some previous plots, discerning readers might have already perceived the problems in school/class management and the school culture, for example, the time allocation in M School and the work of SMEO showed the close control of student behaviours and the absolute authority

of the school schedule. As Foucault phrased, “the meticulous control of the operation of the body” (Foucault & translated by Sheridan, 1995, p. 149) aims to secure an orderly, quiet and sanitary place for docile learners. The control is just out of step with the NCR which facilitates the learning style of “Independence, Cooperation and Inquiry.” For many scholars, it is hard to imagine how a teacher struggles to educate their students in this contradictory culture.

The following three stories are focusing on this cultural discordance between teaching new curriculum and conducting old management. They are quite confessional, full of memories and emotions in terms of teacher-student relationship and the connection between teachers and their peers. They are powerful ways to address my thesis questions: what hinders teachers to make a positive change in their classes during the NCR?

In 2009, the Vice Minister of the MOE used a Chinese saying to show the official determination to deepen the NCR: “You cannot turn back the arrow once the bowstring is loosed” (Yu, 2009, p. 33). She didn’t avoid admitting that lots of problems had taken place in this reform since it launched, but if there is no way back, to solve these puzzles is imperative. After all the “arrow” of the NCR is affecting more than 200 million elementary and secondary students and millions of teachers in China. These are the reasons why I continue my inquiry on teachers’ emotional experiences in this chapter.

### **Story I: Hair, Love and Text**

Since I became a main teacher, Y is the student I most dislike! Although his main teacher did not write anything bad in his monthly comment of comprehensive assessment, all the teachers in our grade knew his bad record: his main teacher got sick and hospitalized for about

two weeks because he made various troubles and finally blew her up. Thanks to the re-streaming in Grade Two,<sup>51</sup> Y became my student.

Honestly, Y is a tall-rich-handsome boy;<sup>52</sup> his long black hair and a slim white face left me a pretty good first impression. But he did not like me. He didn't like any teacher in fact. In his view, teachers and students were enemies in nature. Our story starts with a rule in our school: the hair of a male student cannot be longer than 3.5 cm. In order to actualize this rule, quoting a teacher in the SMEO to sum up the measures: "The time when the student is up to our standard is the time when he can go back to learn in his class."

Privately, I disagree with this insane hair regulation. It only makes students look more similar after wearing uniforms, sharing the same class schedules, textbooks and learning pace. But rather than being criticized, this uniformity is praised as "the spirit of collectivism" in China's school culture. Then long hair is doomed to be suppressed because it is out of routine.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> At the end of high school Grade One, lots of Chinese high school learners are restreamed according to their learning performances and interests. There are only two options, Liberal Arts stream/classes and Science stream/classes. According to students' decisions, teachers and school leaders rearrange them in different classes, by referring to their ranking in the final exam scores of the school year, their general learning performances and the estimations of individual learning potential. There usually are several top and second-top classes, then regular classes. But according to the Article 22 of the Law of Compulsory Education, the education administrative department of the people's government at or above the county level should not differentiate schools into key schools and non-key schools; Schools should not differentiate classes into key classes and non-key classes. Moreover, the aim of Quality Education is to face all students and comprehensively improve the quality of all students. However, schools usually claim to conduct a level-teaching experiment to classify students into so-called "experimental classes" and "non-experimental classes" instead of using the terms "top" "second top" and "regular" classes. The terms that are used by schools could be different, but their goals of playing with words are the same – to get around the rules. Recently, there have been lots of reports and news to reflect educational scholars' and teachers' disagreements to regroup students into two streams in high schools. Please see examples in Huang & Yu, 2013, p. 1; Qiu, 2013, p. 3

<sup>52</sup> "Tall-rich-handsome" (高富帅) is a recent coined internet catchphrase in China, popularly used in online forums, blogs and even media news, to describe a young man that is perfect in his height, wealth and appearance, who usually attracts girls' attention and win their admirations and love. Similar phrases include "poor-short-ugly" (man, 矮穷丑), "white-rich-beautiful" (girl, 白富美) or "white-slim-beautiful" (girl, 白瘦美) and "silk-holding" (boy, 吊丝), that means a poor and unpromising young man who holds the silk stockings of a "white-rich-beautiful" girl, sweeping her off her feet.

<sup>53</sup> Wearing long hair usually marks the culture of individualism, artistic temperament, fashion, hippies or anti-mainstream culture in China.

A century ago conservative Russians viewed women who rode bicycles as slatterns. Today we are just repeating this funny logic in my view.

Ironically, I was responsible for making my students obey this ridiculous rule. Worse, Y was in my class then. And worst, Y was caught by SMEO while I just taught *A Man Encased* by Russian writer Anton Chekhov.

*“I was horrified yesterday. When I saw your sister, I nearly had a blackout. A woman or a girl on a bicycle—it’s simply dreadful!”*

*“What is it you really want, then?”*

*“I want only one thing, Mikhail Sávich, that is, to warn you. You’re a young man, you have a future before you, you ought to be most careful in your behaviour, yet you are so lacking in caution, so lacking in it! You go about in an embroidered shirt, you’re constantly seen in the streets carrying books, and now the bicycle, too! The fact that you and your sister ride bicycles might come to the knowledge of the headmaster, then perhaps of the board of directors. What good is there in all that?”*

*“That my sister and I ride bicycles is nobody’s business,” said Kovalénko turning crimson. “And if anyone dares meddle in my private family affairs, I’ll tell them to go to hell!”<sup>54</sup>*

I sniffed at Bélikov while a student told me, “*Laoshi* (means teacher), there’re five boys in your class need a haircut, so...ten points off.”

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<sup>54</sup> *A Man Encased* by Anton Chekhov is selected to the fifth textbook of high school CLA required course, in the first unit. The English translation is referred to Anton Chekhov Short Stories (Chekhov, 1974).

“What?” I suddenly came back from Kovalénko’s room. “Who?”

When I heard the name of Y, I rolled my eyes. I knew he must be one! I’ve warned him for weeks, he simply didn’t listen to me. But the last thing I would do was to expel him from my class to have a haircut. I stood up reluctantly.

Before I stepped out of my office, teacher L came in. He was another main teacher in our grade. He came for Y.

I frowned, following him to see what other trouble Y had made. To my surprise, a famous film star and his wife were sitting in L’s office looking serious. The girl S in Class 3, their daughter, was standing beside her parents with swollen eyes and a tearful face.

“W *Laoshi*, I hope we can sit together to solve this trouble!” L started.

I forced a smile. Had Y done something bad? I had a bad feeling instinctively.

“S’s test scores have been lower and lower in recent tests because she’s in love with Y,” L continued.

I held my breath to wait for the bad news. I knew that they were in love for months, but I’d never thought it as problematic.

“We parents didn’t know about this love thing at first, until we noticed her poor school performance and read her cell phone messages. We persuaded her to cut off this relationship with Y, but she said she couldn’t do that. So we wonder whether Y is always tempting her.” S’s mother asked me.

“Could we meet Y today? What kind of boy is he? What kind of family is he from? Is he a good student or not? Could you please invite Y’s parent to solve this problem with us?” S’s

father asked me five questions at a stretch. “I don’t think Y’s parents would allow him to waste precious learning time hanging out with a girl. The influence of this love thing is too bad!”

I politely declined their demand. Though I disliked Y, I should protect his privacy. But I promised to contact Y’s mother to see whether she would be available to come today. S sat down as we discussed her affair, wiping her tears. I taught her CLA last year. Asking her to sit down and patting her back I tried to make her feel better. She just needed to learn how to manage her time, I thought. Then I noticed there was a small bruise on her forearm and asked why. She whispered in my ear, sobbing, “He hit me.”

Not only her words but also her calm intonation startled me. I whispered back angrily, “How can he do this! You should stop your relationship at once!” She hushed me anxiously and looked up at her parents and L. “He’s bad-tempered. Sometimes he blows up. It doesn’t matter. Don’t let my parents know it.”

As soon as the bell rang, I rushed to my classroom and called Y out into the hallway. “So what’s going on between you and S? Her parents are here and they want to talk with you!”

Y looked at me as if he were the boss of the world and sniffed, “So what? It’s none of your business!”

I almost lost my temper seeing his dirty look. I breathed deeply to calm myself down and said, “Will your mother be available today to come here to discuss this issue? By the way, she has to take you to a barbershop.”

“Sorry, this is none of you business either. Hair grows on my head! It’s my right to decide my favourite look! Why do you teachers always pick holes in me? Your task is to tell me



how I can get higher scores in my tests!” He said in disgust, “Haven’t you already asked about our affair behind my back? Don’t think I don’t know! By the way, my mom has no free time to come here! What else are you able to do except call my mom?!” He turned back to class, swearing.

“How dare you!” I bristled with anger, standing in the hallway. If I were not a teacher, I’d have slapped him! But he is right—what else am I able to do except call his parents? I can’t make him listen to me by force. Even, sometimes I don’t think what I’m insisting on is reasonable. If the content of education is unconvincing, the way to carry it out has to be coercion. I looked out of the window, trying to hold my temper.

The afternoon when Y was taken out of class to my office by SMEO, I was teaching the character of Bélikov. Coming and going in class breaks, I saw him standing beside windows, turning his nose up. I was in no mood to say a word with him after our unpleasant conversation, just waiting for his mother’s arrival after school. Then she came.

“It isn’t only my son’s fault! You can’t clap with one hand! You said your daughter’s test scores went down because she’s in love, why didn’t my son’s go down? I can promise you that my son won’t contact your daughter any more, you must make sure that your daughter doesn’t contact my son in return!” S’s parents agreed. They made a decision for their adolescents.

Afterwards, we sat in a circle to witness the breakup between S and Y. “I won’t contact you anymore!” Y threw out a sentence unsympathetically and sat down. As S heard the word “anymore”, tears flooded out. S took out her “Dear John” letter to read sobbingly in front of us. Obviously, after that meeting in L’s office, S knew their love had to be forced an end.

I can't remember how S read through her letter. I don't want to remember, only I felt deaf and numb, hoping time could go by faster. Maybe S would get better scores after this, but what do we lose?

When the meeting was end, the head of SMEO and our grade director came in my office to deal with Y's hair. Seeing the head of SMEO, Y and his mother were aware of the seriousness of this hair issue. The head sat down and smiled nicely at them. "Would it be convenient to take Y to a barber to get his hair cut? If Y can't come back to school for a week, he might have some difficulty catching up with his peers. You know, the classes are so intensive nowadays. Stopping his classes is his loss and your trouble as well, isn't it? Besides, his behaviour of violating school rules will be written into his monthly comment of comprehensive assessment. Once it is input into the database of this assessment, this record will follow his WHOLE future career. Having a haircut will make the young man look more handsome and energetic. It would be great to see a different Y and find out his good qualities," she said amiably, but her words sounded catty to me. She's using scores and records as a threat!

Y's temper seemed to be damped down. He complied, following his mother to have a haircut. I stayed in my office, waiting to check whether he met the standard to go back to class tomorrow. The whole event was replaying itself in my mind as I waiting and reading *The Encased Man* again for class preparation.

Would Várinka look more beautiful and ladylike if she stopped cycling? Would it be good to recognize a different Várinka, to know her "positive" profile? Didn't Várinka merely

ride a bicycle? Why was Bélikov so scared of it? Can cycling damage a country? Can long hair finish a school? No...or MAYBE!

But I shouldn't defend his behaviour, should I? He is a trouble! He is a punk! Because of him, the head of SMEO came to solve this problem in person, revealing my incompetence regarding student control. I am a main teacher! And because of him, I had to wait here in school! It's 7:40 p.m. already! How come they haven't returned yet?

But do I really hope they return? If Y comes back to school and takes my CLA class tomorrow, would he connect his haircut with this text, with cycling? Would he view me or the school moral administration as "the encased man"? Would he ask me in front of the class about it? What am I going to respond? He'd better not come back tonight.

Tonight, how's S spending tonight? She must be heartbroken. If Bélikov were the teacher of Várinka, would she be forced to read her "Dear John" letter? "I want only one thing, Várinka Sávich," I pictured the expression of Bélikov, "That is, to warn you. You're a young lady, you have a future before you, you ought to be most careful in your behaviour, yet you are so lacking in caution, so lacking in it! You performed disappointingly in your study, you're constantly seen in the hallway with your boyfriend! The fact is that your affair might come to the knowledge of media, then perhaps badly impact of your school and your family. What good is there in all that?" I shook my head, hated Y more. He even bullied his girlfriend. If he thought he was tough and strong enough, why wouldn't he fight against the hair rule? Why didn't he talk back to the head of SMEO, rather than me? Bully the weaker and fear the stronger!

As I became lost in thought, Y came back. He had his hoodie on, biting his lip when he saw me. His mother stood at the door, watching him.

“Had it cut?” I asked him trying to pretend nothing had happened.

He only responded me a cold glance.

“The head asked me to check it. Only when it is shorter than 3.5cm can you go back to class tomorrow,” I continued, implying he should take off the hoodie. My original intention was no more than to complete my last task on this issue but when I said that, it seemed as though I were insulting him. I hate myself doing this job!

He froze, standing stock-still and did not speak.

“Be quick!” Y’s mother saw our silent confrontation and started to urge him. “It’s 8:30 already.”

“There!” He put down his hoodie, shouting at me, “You happy now?” His hair was nearly shaved off, as if he were protesting this rule.

“Then go back to class tomorrow.” I pretended to be calm and turned to his mother, smiling at her awkwardly.

Y put on his hoodie angrily. As he turned back, I spotted something glimmering on his eyelashes.

Y had had his hair cut! The school and I finally made this wild horse docile. However, I didn’t feel any sense of success. He dodged me and refused to say anything to me inside and outside classes.

When he became a Grade Three (Grade 12) student, no one paid any attention to his hair length but his scores. Scores were everything. After the national test, I heard that he got a very high score but refused to go to any university. “Evil schools! Evil tests! I hate teachers! I hate schools!” He wrote on his blog.

As his first main teacher did, I didn’t write anything bad into his comprehensive assessment. Although I really don’t like him, I knew the importance of this assessment to him. I cut some pieces of politely commenting formula and pasted them in the commenting tables of our online assessment database. This is the best thing for his quality assessing that I was able to do.

As for Y and S, they never really broke up. One day in the last year, I watched TV and saw S’s family attending a show. When the show host asked her whether she had a boyfriend, she hesitated, and then answered, “No!” The host understood her immediately and he laughed to cover the hesitation. I understood too and laughed. The laugh seemed to be an echo of Várinka’s, only with more self-sarcasm in it.

## **Story II: C and his Journey to Learn Chinese**

A summer night in 2010, my phone rang and it’s from C!

“I’ve never got such a high score in tests!” his voice trembled with excitement, “I got 38 on writing! Freaking awesome! Thanks *Laoshi*, Thanks! I called you as soon as I saw the score. It was just published online minutes ago. I got 86 in CLA! Jesus Christ! You are the first one who came to my mind. I haven’t even told my parents!” He was overwhelmed with excitement.

So was I. “You’re more than cool! Don’t thank me—thank yourself! It’s the fruit of your hard work!” I said frankly and I really meant it.

C was famous in our school, not because he was the Vice President in the Student Union, but because his nickname “Foreigner.” He was born in Beijing, learned in Singapore, USA, England and Netherlands. His father was a scientist and he travelled with his family overseas after three years old. Although being proficient in English, German and Dutch, his Chinese was awful, especially reading and writing. He encountered the NCR when he returned to Beijing at Grade 8. Unfortunately, every teacher was busy on the curriculum reform, nobody helped him learning Mandarin, so he gave up. Three years later, I became his CLA and main teacher.

“I’ve never been able to remember those ancient poems or prose, nor have I understood their exact meanings. I’ve never written a composition since I came back, nor has my CLA got more than 40 out of 150.” He told me as we first met, implying I should prepare myself, because he was a heavy burden to any CLA teacher.

“Do you want to get proficient in the Chinese language?” I asked him.

“Certainly I do!” He stressed “certainly.” “But it’s IMPOSSIBLE!”

“How about being my representative?” I asked him sincerely.

“Geez!” He looked at me, surprised. Teachers usually appointed students with the best scores to be their subject representatives. My instant decision must have intimidated him.

“I’ll screw things up!”

“Oh, you won’t! Being with your CLA teacher as a representative, your grade will rise,” I encouraged him.

He hesitated but finally agreed. So I knew he'd never lost his hope to learn CLA. From then on, he began to work on our assignments. His two-year-long learning journey started.

It wasn't easy to learn a language with thousands of years of history. For him, to learn ancient Chinese was more difficult than to learn Latin. In order to improve his comprehension, he read bilingual books such as *A Collection of Chinese Classical Poetry* with original Chinese poems on the left and the English interpretation on the right. He tried to do some writing from structuring sentences in his weekly journal. He took class notes in four languages and reorganized them into Chinese after class. Nevertheless, he still had one of the lowest scores in every exam.

"The average score of your class is too low!" After a mid-term test, our group leader told me, standing with the class-ranking sheet in her hand.

"I've no tops but several bottoms dragging the average grade down," I said sadly. The average score of my class was two points lower than the other classes.

"Is there the foreigner in your class?" One of my peers recalled C as we talked about "bottoms." "Every time he came here to ask you questions, I got worried about you as I overheard his questions. He should go back to an elementary school to learn Chinese, not in a secondary." She was sympathetic.

"So it's him." My leader seemed to remember something and said, "I marked his writing yesterday, he only wrote five or six lines in such an important exam, with terrible grammar! The writing part is 60 out of 150 marks, and he got 10. He pulled you class average score down by more than one point!"

She soon found C's answer sheet and frown, "Does he know anything about writing? At least he needs to gather enough words in a composition. To really improve his writing is too challenging."

"Writing IS challenging!" another teacher shrugged, "No mention to the foreigner. Look, there's one in my class wrote nothing! Some were off the topic! I can't teach them! Whatever I did to correct them, they'd correct this one while make errors on another!"

"I can't agree more," said the third teacher. "Yesterday I taught new before asking my students whether they understood that part. Everyone nodded. Then I asked what I'd just said. They told me they didn't know!"

In our laugh, I can't help wondering whether C was a special FOREIGNER in our grade. Some who were born and grew up in China got lower scores than his. He is no more special than any others. But as for self-motivated and independent study, C was special. Months by months, he got low scores in tests. Every time when I thought he would give up learning again, he pulled himself together after days or weeks of frustration. Sometimes I doubt whether I could learn a foreign language as well as he did. In this grade, no one like him had to read bilingual books, took quadrilingual notes to study Chinese, nor do they make so much effort to write.

I just finished revising a piece of C's writing. This fruit of his painstaking labour was his second draft of a test composition. When he gave it to me, he said, "It took me over four hours last night. Could you read it again and help me to amend it?"

I was surprised, couldn't believe he used so long time to rewrite it. Though C didn't say anything, I knew he wrote this at the sacrifice of other homework last night. Few students



nowadays would revise or rewrite a composition. Scores simply stopped every further effort after tests, in which their first drafts are the final.

“In fact I always have my thoughts on writing topics, in almost every test,” C tried to explain why he spent so long on writing, “But I can’t put them correctly in Chinese without a dictionary in my hand. I have a room of books but no one can help me to do this! When I think of a word in English, I’ve to look it up in English-Chinese dictionary at first, and then go back to a Chinese dictionary to check whether it expresses my meaning precisely. Sometimes I can’t even recognize words in definition sentences, so I’ve to turn to my Chinese-English dictionary to look up those words! When I finally wrote it out, grammar becomes another challenge!” He shrugged his shoulders. “But I finally made it. This is the first time I’ve written such a long piece. You see, I value CLA VERY much!” His intonation showed his sense of accomplishment.

I looked at his shining eyes, “Then I must read it very carefully and give it a very good revision!” I mimicked his “very”, and enjoyed looking at his joyful expression on completing an 800-word composition. I smiled back, showing my respect seriously.

C was able to stay between 50 and 60 in several important CLA tests during the last semester of high school. His test writing became more complete and integrated. He was making progress by years of endeavour, which could not be spotted within a short period of one or two months.

As we communicated more, I knew him better. I started to learn from him, about different types of cheese in European countries, about different learning ways in England and the Netherlands, such as learning geometry in a swimming pool, writing after playing with

snowballs and reading in the community libraries after school. We even talked about literature and philosophy. *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder left a deep impression. C then brought me an English copy of the book the day after we talked about it and encouraged me to read the English version. By making friends with me, C was also able to get some benefits such as self-study in my classes. I promised that he could learn at his own speed and need not worry about taking notes because I would give him my teaching slides, books and everything he needed after class. However, I could not help him more.

One day C came to me, “*Laoshi*, can I ask you a question?”

“Ask away!”

“Can I use English classes to learn CLA before the University Admission Test?”

“Err...” It violated school rules.

“I can easily get more than 140 out of 150 in every English test. There’s little space for me to improve English before the Admission Test but I need time to learn CLA! So could you please...” He expected a positive answer.

I felt awkward this time, because I knew his request was reasonable but I couldn’t offer him the help. While all the students were learning in classrooms during class time, where could I hide him to learn Chinese alone? Anywhere other than classrooms would break our school rules and outside school was out of the question. In such a large school, I simply couldn’t find him such a place he asked.

“Are you a Vice President in the SU or not?” I had suddenly worked out a place. “You have the key of the activity room in SU! Lock yourself inside secretly. Be careful to not be seen by other teachers. I’ll pretend not to know anything about it.”

C forced a smile. “In fact, I’ve tried that place before without telling you. But a teacher caught me one day and he gave me a good dressing down. Soon after that, my keys were taken back by the SU,” he said with a long face. “Could I learn in your office? Sitting beside you? Pretending that you are punishing me by not going back to the classroom?”

“That’s a bad idea! What would you say to the English teacher?”

“She knows! I’ve told her and she asked me to find you to work out a solution.”

“Well,” I hesitated, “since she knows, you can learn CLA in her class!”

“I am more sensitive to English than Chinese, so I’m always distracted in the English class. Besides, I can’t ignore some class-wide activities!”

I sighed, “Then we can try your idea today since there’re no other options but I still think it’s a bad idea.”

Teachers come and go in our office so everyone gave him an extra look and thought he was being punished. But he looked down quietly, ignoring anything else. Half a class passed, our grade director happened by the office and saw him there. She was the very person who was responsible for this.

“Why’s he here?” She came in and asked me with a low voice.

C held his breath and looked at me.

“I keep him here for...” I said as I led our director out of the office, “His English has been very good so far, but his Chinese is very poor. So could he use the English class to learn Chinese?” I exaggerated a bit, hoping the director could understand his difficulty.

“Er, it isn’t OK.” The director felt as awkward as I did. “I suggest that you send him back. This is the place where teachers work. He can’t learn here, never mind that teachers come and chat, it isn’t convenient to have him here! If he were seen by our deans, it would be bigger trouble!”

I was embarrassed. I knew our school rules, I knew her meaning, I had always known. “Then I will send him back now.” I was blushing.

Our director stepped inside the office before I did, “Gather your books quickly and go back to your class! Don’t try to skip English classes! Learning Chinese, ha? It’s no use fawning on your CLA teacher!”

C followed me to return his English class without a word. I looked at him regrettably.

The NCR promise to let every student choose their own classes and get individual class schedules has failed. Now this school rule! My student only wanted to use English classes to learn CLA and we all knew this wouldn’t hurt his English performance, but it meant I couldn’t offer him any help. How would the NCR promise to “provide more learning freedom for students with various development tendencies?” (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2003, p. 1). “How the hell does the NCR work?” I complained as I returned to my office. For all the hard work we are doing everyday to reform the curriculum, are we just reinforcing the industrialized education that of the same pace and standard to control various learners tighter?

Luckily, C didn't disappoint me. He went to his ideal university because for the first time his CLA didn't drag his average score down too much. We kept in contact after that and became true friends. When iTunes appeared in China, he told me how to use it via a long distance call. When I started to learn English to apply to universities overseas, he encouraged me and taught me many tips on how to learn English well. When he travelled to Tibet, cycling with his friends, he told me about it by sharing hundreds of photos with me. He lent my daughter bags and bags of picture books that he read when he was a child and told her, "These are what kids read overseas!"

How much did learning overseas benefit C, I cannot calculate it, only I believe that C is a good example of the ideal student that NCR expects, though 86 in CLA wasn't a decent score. I doubt how much a score can tell educators about a student's learning performance and process. Would C's university teachers know his invaluable learning experience from this substandard score? When textbooks, assessing system and school disciplines created bumps on his learning way, C made his way out heroically. However I would rather see fewer heroes than more changes in schools to make different learning journeys more joyful, colourful and traveller-friendly.

### **Story III: $\beta$**

The first time I looked at  $\beta$  closely was a day in September 2007, in my office. She stood in a corner. Our grade director was criticizing her angrily:

"Not wearing school uniform! Cursing teachers! How could you be as disobedient like those naughty boys! How did your parents bring you up?"

“...” She looked down, speechless. I couldn't see her face, just a head of matted and frizzled short hair, with a few strands sticking together. A sloppy girl! That was my first impression of her.

As a new teacher, I dared not rescue her when my leader was so angry; let alone she didn't make a good impression. I just sat down on my chair, pretending to mark the exercises. The teacher Duan came in. He was the main teacher of High School Grade One Class 1.

“What's it this time?” He was annoyed.

β kept her silence.

“No school uniform! Cursed teachers! And she's kept looking down like this since entered this office! Could you please contact her parents to ask about her behaviour at home?” Our director almost lost her temper.

β? Class 1? I was quite surprised because I was the CLA teacher of this class. But why had I never noticed her since the new semester started?

“OK!” Duan left but β was still in the corner. The bell rang.

“Why are you still standing here? Go back to your class!” The director dismissed her with disgust.

Suddenly I saw the girl looking up with a cold look and running off. Her eyes were big and bright, but her look was full of hatred. Fortunately, our director didn't notice it.

“Do you think this girl has mental problems?” Our director asked me.

I shook my head, didn't know how to respond her.

After that, I started to observe  $\beta$  in my classes. She huddled in a far corner, never looked up during class. I didn't know whether she was listening or not. But sometimes she'd suddenly stand up, look right at me and start to answer my questions. After that, she sat down and lowered her head again. At those times, she startled not only me, but also the whole class. We thought she must have mental problems. But when we got used to her strange behaviour, we gradually found that she always analysed problems with deeper or different perspectives, thought about things critically and appreciated literature with her rich reading experiences. She was a girl that harboured her own thoughts.

Soon there was a moment when I found myself attracted by her stories, I started to like her.

Learning from other teachers in my office, I asked my students to write weekly journals as their weekend homework. My goal was simple: to free my students to write about their true feelings and their true life<sup>55</sup>. No mark would be given for this homework; I just made some responses and suggestions. I've never restricted the length of their journals. Students usually

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<sup>55</sup> For many years, CLA writing instruction has been harshly criticized by the NCR. In order to make a normal student write an integrated persuasive composition of about 800 words in half an hour to one hour in a formal test, CLA teachers summarized the so-called "argumentative frames". Frames are not a bad thing since every composition has a frame, but only having frames and quoting historical stories to write an essay are problematic. This kind of writing lacks true feelings, damages creative thinking of students, and ruins all the fun and meaning of writing. However it works well in a test. When students face the same writing subject in a test, whether they understand the subject or not, whether they have anything to say on the subject or not, they should be able to write an acceptable composition. It was noted "any style except for poems" at the end of the writing requirements but students tended to write framed essays. Writing in any other styles needs their efforts and time to think from the scratch. They need to gamble between higher scores or being off the topic by doing so. Only with the frames could they complete an essay with a passing score in the shortest time. For students who have no high demands in CLA, this timesaving, energy-saving, and effective way was ideal. Even the students who wanted to get a high score but might take too long to solve problems before writing would use this method. With similar patterns, similar stories and similar points, the writings were like industrial products. They were quick for teachers to mark but reading them becomes a torment.

wrote one to three pages. But  $\beta$  was different; she's always different. Hers were seven to ten pages long.

It's about 10 that morning, with warm autumn sunlight coming into our office. I'd been sitting at my desk for more than an hour reading the journals. A test essay could be finished at a glance, but stepping into students' personal worlds and feelings with them needed time. Just before I decided to stop to do some stretches, I saw  $\beta$ 's journal lying on the top of another stack. I stood up, took it and read with curiosity.

*Three velociraptors are walking on a burning-hot highland of the late Cretaceous Period, smoke billowing out from the top of several volcanos not very far away, lava flowing slowly with a red blaze. One of them was injured by a falling rock a couple of days before when a volcano erupted, another had quite a large piece of the skin on his leg burned off and was limping behind the other two. Barely escaping from death, they are luckier than their peers that were engulfed in flames yet. But surviving in these cruel living surroundings, it was hard to say whether they were lucky now.*

It was clear, elegant script and an impressive start. Totally forgetting my tiredness, I was fascinated to read the next bit. Without a red-ink pen to do corrections, I pictured the scenarios emerged on her dog-eared pages. I didn't feel like I was a teacher who was marking a student's homework. I was a reader who was immersed in the plots from a veteran writer.

*As suddenly as lightning, a velo jumped on the back of the Tyrannosaurus; she dared not fight face to face with this enormous enemy. However, if they failed to beat this Tyran*



*that was plagued by starvation and illness, they had to die together. Yet her peers didn't think so. They merely roared on the sides, anchoring their hopes on holding time.*

Never before had I read such an overwhelming dinosaur fight in a weekly student journal. Never before had I been carried away by a thrilling story written by a student. Her rich description and knowledge of prehistoric life were beyond my scope and imagination. Holding a black pen, I wrote down my appreciation on the last page of the story. I suggested her trying to publish it. This is creation; this is the joy of writing and reading.

On the day of handing back the journals,  $\beta$  looked up in my class for the first time, mixed feelings shining in her eyes. She tilted her head with curiosity. I tilted mine and smiled at her. Then she suddenly gave me a big and brilliant smile that almost overwhelmed her thin cheeks, with her round eyes blinking and white teeth showing, like a three-year-old child who was given her favourite doll by her mom.

Years passed, the memory of her smile emerging every now and then as an old but fresh photo. After she left our school, other students told me she'd never looked up, smiled or answered questions in any other classes. She failed all her other subjects but CLA. Teachers who ignored her were ignored by her; teachers who criticized her were insulted by her.

Because she had cursed teachers and leaders many times, and violated school rules frequently, our director finally asked her father to come to school. This time,  $\beta$  stood in the middle of our office. Teachers sat against the wall and her father sat opposite, close to the door. I just sat in my chair, between them, with  $\beta$  at my side. I cannot recall what teachers said in that meeting but I remember that some teachers politely suggested her father bringing her to see a

psychologist. They claimed that this girl must have mental problems, otherwise how could she be so disobedient; how could she insult teachers to their face in front of so many students; why didn't she look up or listen attentively in classes; why couldn't she understand school disciplines? She had never sworn at me, as I remembered. But I dared not say this while all the other teachers complained to her father. I kept silent in the meeting as she did.

$\beta$  lowered her head. Without tears or any facial expression, she seemed like a clown who had been pushed onto the stage, standing petrified in the middle. She mantled herself in an invisible cloak.

Her father told us that the teachers in her junior school said the same thing – that she had mental problems. So he had taken her to see psychologists several times but the doctors told him this girl was perfectly healthy. He warned the teachers not to claim what they had no proof of.

I kept silent all through this meeting. As a new teacher, I did not know whether I should stand with my colleagues to drive this special girl away or I should agree with  $\beta$ 's father to argue against my colleagues and leaders. I chose to be an onlooker, to be mute, to look after my beloved "education career" and try to take it as a way of dealing with a hopeless learner.

After that meeting,  $\beta$  was not expelled from the school as her teachers expected. Only, she became more silent. She did not say a word and finally teachers did not ask her to. Her weekly journals were still long and attractive. I seriously became her loyal reader who would write responses and commentaries. With a delicate sense, complicated plots and insightful observations, she invited animals and plants in her stories, but never a word on her school and her family.

Sometimes she came to me to have a chat, always when I was alone in office. I did not notice until when my colleague told me that she paced around outside our office, peeping through the door. When there was a teacher passed by and asked her who she was looking for, she ran off without a word. So I understood that every time she paced around outside my office, she paced between her desire and fear to communicate with a teacher.

What's worse, many times after we had finished chatting, there's always someone asked me with a strange smile, "Did she come to you again?"

Did they think that a mental student inevitably clung to this silly new teacher? Were they jeering that I might be insane to chat with this freak? I couldn't help thinking under their smiles.

"You just have no other choice," I smiled back and pretended to be frustrated, although I liked to chat with her.

Then there was a period when she won the second-class award in the National New Concept Composition Contest.<sup>56</sup> The news shocked the whole grade and our school even got the glory from her award. Our director started to look at  $\beta$  with new eyes. Although  $\beta$  still behaved just the same as before, teachers would not investigate these "details" and "tiny problems" any more.

But she was still a freak in our grade. Everyone dodged her, from students to teachers. A subject teacher of Class One used to ask me, "I heard  $\beta$  always chats with you. Is she normal

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<sup>56</sup> The National New Concept Composition Contest was a well-known writing contest that held by Mengya (meaning bud) Magazine Press from 1998. The ideas of this contest are 1) New Thinking – encouraging creative, divergent thinking; encouraging students to break the limits of conservative ideas and existing writing rules; advocating free writing. 2) New Expression – using individual expressions and personal favourite styles; against empty conventional talks; against stereotyped patterns; New Experience – truly, vividly, honestly and genuinely feel, experience, concern and ponder life. (Sun, 2008)

when she talks? I dare not speak a word with her. I'm scared of her! But only a person like her could win an award of the new concept competition—she's a new concept herself!" I laughed with the teacher. "Indeed!" I said heartlessly.

At the end of the first year, there was a week she didn't come to school. Teacher Duan told me that her mom had passed away from cancer. I couldn't believe in my ears. I blamed myself to not care about her even though I had noticed that she'd never written about her family. Consciously or subconsciously, I dodged her too. I was no better than the other teachers, wasn't I?

Not long after that,  $\beta$  dropped out. And from then on, I haven't seen her any more. I even can't remember which chat was our last chat, which class was our last class. The girl who wrote "Dinosaur Fight" disappeared from my life. The thrilling animal stories, wise plant tales, clear and elegant script and dog-eared journal pages disappeared with her.

Three years later, the year that  $\beta$ 's grade graduated from high school, just weeks before the National Matriculation Test, I was called to sign for a parcel from a long distant. There was no sender's name on the envelope and it felt like a book inside. I opened it—*The Secret of Animals' Sexual Life*. "Sexual life?" I was stunned. Then  $\beta$ 's clear and elegant script jumped off the title page:

"My favourite book to my favourite teacher ~ From  $\beta$ "

I caught my breath, tears filling my eyes at that moment. Two years later, she still remembered me, her loyal reader. This was my special  $\beta$ , distinctive  $\beta$ ! I smiled.

Yet I cried too.  $\beta$ , did you know or not know that I shrank back when the teachers attacked you in that meeting? Did you know I sneered at you when other teachers complained about you? Did you know I dodged you and avoided knowing more about you? I looked at you as a freak subconsciously and I looked down upon you too. I didn't deserve to be your favourite teacher. I am just a guilty coward – too cowardly to reveal my cowardice, so guilty that sometimes I had to forget you,  $\beta$ ! I didn't deserve to be your favourite teacher!

But  $\beta$ , my girl, I have missed you so much.

## Reflections

While listening to the narratives of my subjects, reading my own journal, completing the three stories and translating them from Chinese to English, I experienced a kind of emotional struggle. Like a lunatic, I giggled, cried, sighed, and talked to myself; I was angry, disappointed, excited, resentful, and delighted. I experienced every emotional change with my characters while creating them. Each student character is special – Y is a trouble-maker, C is a “foreigner” and  $\beta$  is an unsophisticated creative writer. To teachers, our daily work is to educate special students, because everyone is special. Our intensively emotional experiences linked and interacted with these students. This might be an important reason why teachers endorsed the ideas of the NCR, which aims to liberate teaching and learning. The logic is simple, when students suffered, teachers suffered. Accordingly, curriculum reformers, teachers, students and their parents should have been in the same community of interest. However, the role that teachers are playing is more than a facilitator to the NCR.

Living in the hierarchical management system and test-oriented school culture, teachers are being-controlled controllers. As exam-oriented curriculum strangely integrates into the New Curriculum, exams and tests still hold a great cultural power to orient the new curriculum and to inspire the behaviour management. The SMEO is the specific department in every Chinese school to conduct this quantitative moral education that based on student behaviour regulation. More frequent than monthly test, this quantitative behaviour test conducts public ranking and its implied reward and punishment every week. More severe than monthly tests, this quasi-military behaviour regulation legalizes itself by rooting into the spirit of collectivism and patriotism, which are valued as a glorious revolutionary tradition by Chinese (Yan, 2007, pp. 101-105)<sup>57</sup>. Under the impact of the collectivism spirit, conformed textbooks, learning pace, homework in a grade and conformed schedule, physical activities in breaks, uniforms and even hair length in a school become lofty; mental and physical suppression contains holy education meanings. And teachers, especially main teachers are executives to control every single detail in this management. If they refuse to do so, they are incompetent to the job. As teachers miserably work at the lowest level in the managerial hierarchy, they are being-controlled controllers. And this controlling mindset passes on from schools to teachers and from teachers to students, which can not only be spotted in the stories in this chapter, but also in the timeline story of teacher Cheng.

More than that, teachers are trained to be hole-pickers. Test-based culture trained teachers to have a pair of exclusionary eyes. Holding a red pen, teachers hold their knowledge authority to

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<sup>57</sup> About moral education and behavior controlling, please also see works of Gao Desheng, such as 21 Details in Moral Education (2007) and Moral Education Comments 2012 (2013).

look for mistakes in students' compositions, journals and test papers, crossing wrong answers, deducting points, and turning the papers back to learners to correct. The sovereign power of knowledge is so stable that it can always rank learners, select the superiors from the general public and grant them a prosperous future. In the collectivism-oriented quantitative behaviour management, teachers use the same pair of eyes to spot odds who are against the spirit of collectivism, bring them into teachers' offices and implement "education", aiming to "correct" heterogeneity into homogeneity. The sovereign power of a collective is so strict that the strange and the abnormal usually cannot escape from the pair of teachers' eyes, unless *gaokao* advents. Yet new comes from difference; creation only survives in a tolerant attitude. Veteran hole-pickers can never build up mutual trust between educators and learners, nor can they be counted on to realize the Quality Education in our educational ideals. Rather than teachers or students, test-based culture and ubiquitous conformity are the original sore to make the hostile relationship between the two.

Teachers also have to be double-faced educators. Similar to double dealing classes, by using one face, teachers are praising liberal spirit, freedom and democracy in new texts to encourage the learning approach of independence, cooperation and inquiry. Turning to another face, they set rows and lines and limit their students' behaviours in accordance with school regulations. Although some of them know the hypocrisy and coercion in their education, and feel guilty and nervous in their management, they have extremely limited discretion to make a change. Or to some teachers, who stand between their conscience and school disciplines, neither can they conduct efficient management, nor can they teach righteously.

New Curriculum reformers claimed, “One of the keys in this curriculum reform is to make substantial changes to learning by promoting independent, exploratory and cooperative approach for facilitating learners’ development of innovation awareness and practical ability” (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001, p. 247). Years later this “key” was questioned by a Chinese sociologist:

The body that is competent for innovation awareness and practical ability should be independent, self-motivated, good-at-selecting and idiosyncratic.<sup>58</sup> But our management of behaviour in education can hardly meet the need of this ideal body image, since behaviour education requires a body that is standardized, homogeneous and docile. (Yan, 2007, p. 105)

For teachers, this cultural discordance means that being a facilitator in the NCR and being a “competent educator” who can control her student well are totally opposite<sup>59</sup>. Traditional Chinese philosophy held a holistic view of human, without differentiating mind and body. “Knowing and acting are two words but one thing” has been a famous educational saying from Ming Dynasty (about 1500’s). However in 21<sup>st</sup> century, the latest Chinese educational reform splits knowing and acting apart, trying to cultivate docile and creative learners and workers. It is the most idealistic part in the NCR, I believe.

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<sup>58</sup> In Chinese language, body is “身”, and “身” means an individual. So when Chinese scholars talked about bodies, they talked about individuals, including body, mind and characteristics, that is, a whole person.

<sup>59</sup> The OBECR (Outline of Basic Education Curriculum Reform) did encourage educators to cultivate students’ spirit of innovation and creativity. But it also reiterated the educational goal that China has always been committed to, “developing patriotic and collectivism spirit of students”. Please see page 30 in this thesis for more details of the OBECR.



Besides, the existing behaviour education and class management are proved to be a very effective way to secure high scores in exam-oriented curriculum, and this exam-oriented curriculum is prosperously alive with the New Curriculum. Thus in order to maintain this class managerial method, elective courses must not be selected by individual students but by school districts to guarantee the order of a school. For main teachers, other than teaching their own subjects and assessing students for the subject learning, they have to take responsibilities of class management, comprehensive quality assessment of their classes and school-based elective courses development and more. Not only did they suffer physical pain to do too much work every day, but also they suffered mental and emotional pressure and struggle to fight for a position in the cultural contradiction.

Rather than asking teachers whether they are ready with ideas, knowledge and preparation for the NCR, I would like to ask reformers and schools whether the existing school disciplines and managerial culture is ready to realize the NCR. If this disciplined school life opposes what students learn in literature, then what is the meaning of curriculum change? What does it mean to have teachers ready for change? From this perspective, solving the cultural discordance might be a tough long-term task before the bottleneck of the NCR could be released. After all, a curriculum reform is not a class reform; it has to be realized systematically through creating a new school culture while conducting a new class management, instead of just flashing its ideas in a demonstration class or even incoherently showed in daily classes.

## Chapter 6. Ideals And Reality: Teachers' Introspection On Reforming Practice

“Aren't teachers the representative of the whole school system in the eyes of students and parents?” (Huang, 2010, p. 60)

A reform that adds more impositions than making positive changes and replacements can hardly be called a “reform.” Not only China, “the pursuit of surface changes” is actually a popular problem of educational reforms in Asian countries (Hallinger, 2010). The case in Beijing is not an exception. As a reform to correct exam-oriented curriculum, the power of exams and tests has been restrengthened from class learning to behaviour education. The NCR only motivated several innocuous alters in the high school exam mechanism<sup>60</sup> and the High School Program was isolated from being coordinated by the other school educational system.

Nevertheless, being hastened by ideals and restrained by the reality, teachers' reforming practice is like a small tree growing in a rock crevice. Where there is a will, there is a way. During the whole data collection process, I was not surprised when I heard the physical pains and emotional torments from my interviewees. I was one of them.

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<sup>60</sup> “The reform of the *gaokao* (National Matriculation Test) has been a difficult labor since many years ago”. Important adjustments to the nationwide test in Beijing include starting an autonomous test-design matriculation test in 2002 and carrying out 3+x test plan (3 main subjects, Mathematics, Language Arts and English plus a comprehensive subject: Physics, Chemistry and Biology to science-stream candidates, Geography, Politics and History to arts-stream candidates) at the same time. Then there were several alters; for instance, taking the scores in the Comprehensive Quality Assessment into reference of admission. The most recent change was issued on October 2013, which planned to reduce English values from 150 to 100 and correspondingly increase Chinese Language Arts value from 150 to 200 in *gaokao* from 2016. Although this change only involves 50 scores, it triggered more than 55 million items in Baidu.com, the biggest search engine in China. A leader in the National Center of Basic Education Experiment commented, “It's the whole education that goes wrong, not only the subject of English”. A professor in Renmin University commented, “If we only reduces scores in a subject rather than changes the test content and admission system, we are killing this reform.” A teacher commented, every time the start point of a reform is good, but “it generated more new problems by solving the old ones.” (Qian & Shao, 2013)

What really surprised me, however, was the burning hope to find a way to change and the understanding of the reform plight that some teachers expressed when they reflected on this reform, especially when I heard the hopes just after they finished a sad story. When they suffered the pains in their body, they felt there was no hope, yet when they thought back on their six-year journey under the reform, they felt the hope for change had never disappeared. Interestingly, all of my interviewees identified this reform as “Westernized,” but only two of them have been to the West (the USA and the UK). Some of them called this reform “too idealistic” or “far from our daily teaching,” but all of them told me the ideals were good and necessary. Perhaps it is the complexity of an ongoing reform. What exists between our ideals and reality is what connects our mind and body.

After inquiring into the bodily and emotional experiences of Chinese high school teachers, I shall focus on their introspections in this chapter through two stories. I wonder what teachers think of this “idealistic” and “Westernized” curriculum reform and their reforming efforts. Would they view this reform as a fundamental failure like a university scholar or a valuable uprooting endeavour as an official, or something else?

From a different perspective, the first story in this chapter responds to the problems that were raised in Chapter 4, providing the complexity of teachers’ hardship. The second story responds the problems in Chapter 5, from the perspective of a Chinese-West comparison. The two characters are senior teachers with 16 and 30 years’ teaching experiences<sup>61</sup> respectively. The stories are taken from five interviewees in my research with similar teaching years and positions. All the interviewees were in the stage of

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<sup>61</sup> A survey with more than a thousand teacher respondents showed that there was minimum reforming resistance came from middle-aged teachers or teachers with 11-20 years teaching experiences. Meanwhile, the impact of school types and geographical locations was small to the resistance of teachers. There is no significant variation of teacher resistance among key schools, regular schools, urban or rural schools. (Zhang, 2011, p. 229)

“focusing on self-renewal”<sup>62</sup> (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001, p. 424) and have experienced at least two educational reforms in their teaching career.

I believe that this intrapersonal resource will open a window for us to further understand the change of Chinese educational ideology in the period of the NCR and at the same time ponder on the gaps and relationship between ideals and reality, mind and body, and the West and the East.

### **“Being A Teacher, Change Is My Norm”**

Teacher L, 38, a high school CLA teacher for 16 years, is the Teaching Director in M school. She is also the CLA teacher in one of the three experimental classes of Grade 3 (Grade 12). Before and after the High School Program launched in Beijing, she visited many domestic schools in the NCR pilot areas to learn their experiences. She is probably one of the few teachers who have the broadest horizon and deepest understanding of the NCR in the school.

“Workaholic,” the other teachers described her. She works more than 12 hours a day, arriving at the campus at 6:30 a.m. and usually leaves her office after 7 p.m. or sometimes 10 or 11 p.m. She never takes weekend breaks in the last month of a semester or when school-wide teaching activities are under preparation. “It’s quite normal when you’re a Grade 3 teacher and in charge of the whole school teaching.” She seemed quite

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<sup>62</sup> During this period, teachers pay more attention to class activities and their teaching effectiveness. They are also concerned whether students are really learning in their classes. Teachers in this period are able to face educational problems holistically, confidently and deliberately. Acknowledging that students are the masters of learning is an important transformation in the concept of students to the teachers in “focusing on self-renewal”. Teachers encourage students to discover and build up their own “meanings,” other than helping them to understand teaching content. More than engaging students in knowledge learning, teaching means to facilitate students to develop comprehensively through a teacher-learner interactive process. The key to teacher professional development transfers from subject knowledge to pedagogical application. (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001, p. 425)

accustomed to this working schedule, but her bitter smile gave her away. “Sometimes I ask myself the meaning of my hardship—it’s just to get things done.” Teachers in M school respected her. “Only a workaholic can lead the reform. You have to pour yourself into the reform to make change. It isn’t easy!” some teachers said.

On a sunny afternoon, I sat in teacher L’s office, preparing to listen to her story. However, she told me that she was not a good storyteller, but would like to chat freely over a cup of tea.

“In fact, my teaching changes all the time.” When I asked her to reflect on the changes she has made in the NCR, she said, “the momentum of the change isn’t the NCR or any educational reforms, the point is that, being a teacher, change is my norm. Do the changes come from the constant educational adjustments or reforms? Maybe, but a more likely reason is based on the changes of my students and our fast-developing society. Teaching is a dynamic interaction. Your educational objects are changing and so are you. The essence of our education is to engage learners in learning, to let them know and be interested to know more. If you grasp this essence, you are good in any changes or reforms. But not every teacher has a clear awareness of this essence and the directions of the changes.”

In the afternoon sunlight, her words sparkled. Some scholars’ claimed that teachers’ resistance forms barriers to the NCR, and one of the basic reasons for teachers’ resistance is “conservative property in the depth of teachers’ culture” (Zhang, 2011, pp. 58, 60). Apparently teacher L provided a different view of teachers’ culture.

“That’s the reason we need a top-down reform.” She continued, “Educational reforms in China have to be top-down, not only because of our centralized educational

system, but also because we need new ideas to inspire us, to guide us. I may not understand a new idea this year, but two years later I might feel it is necessary in my class. We also need a systematic reform to help us to change smoothly by policy, by cohering with all the powers and stakeholders to realize the new ideas. A top-down reform is an explorative process to realize our educational ideals; every ideal has a gap to reality, so we need time for class experiments. A top-down reform is also an idea sharing and exchanging process between the top and the down, though the top is the guider. It's like our teaching process. Teachers are guiders, but wise guiders know how and when to share or follow," she said calmly.

"Being a teacher, change is my norm" to some extent overturned my original supposition of top-down curriculum reform. Only by following the leader can the down change. The top, in my understanding, is a superior authority anyway. However, teacher L said that the down is changing to realize the essence of education; it is necessary for the top to communicate with the down to make appropriate policies. The superiority of the top is that it can move all the relevant powers, yet the relationship between the top and the down should be equal and cooperative. However, is it too idealistic to expect a superior power to bend down, to listen and respect to the down in a centralized education system? I doubt it.

As she mentioned "teaching process," we then turned to talk about the changes in teaching and learning approaches.

"Lecturing is a fast way in teaching." She took the hot potato. "It is necessary for us to move fast especially when we have a very intensive teaching syllabus today. The problems come from when it becomes the dominant way to teach and thus it makes

teachers believe that the fast way is THE effective way, or THE MOST effective way.”

She looked at me with concern.

“I change my teaching methods because a teacher always teaches on the basis of her students’ start points and future development, and accordingly chooses different pedagogical approaches to engage her young learners. However, lecturing is my fact, and our fact as well. In a class with the normal size of 45 students, it’s just hard to cover every student and question. The more students discuss, the more thoughts are evoked and the harder it is for a teacher to deal with the questions and to do follow-ups. It is difficult for us to facilitate the rich, independent and cooperative inquiries of students. I only have two eyes and two ears. So I have to go back to lecturing to offer my students a correct demonstration. This probably makes outsiders and even the teachers think the reform has made changes in teaching approaches. After all, the form of our classes do not change; teachers are still standing in front of the class and students are still sitting and listening in lines and rows.

Besides, there are tests. Students must know how to pass and get good scores in tests. And a test means that there always are right or wrong, better or worse. Lecturing can unify different opinions into the right and better answers. Although the new type of test question emerged after the High School Program that encourages different answers from students’ individual experiences, we still need lecturing, since we still need to give high or low scores to the experience-laden answers. It is as though we are ranking students’ life by scores. We soon developed a frame to answer this type of question according to our paper-marking experiences. It wasn’t because we did not want our students to express their true feelings or life, it was because their raw feelings or life

experiences cannot win them a better score. So lecturing is still here. Where there is a policy, there is a countermeasure.” She shrugged her shoulders.

“But the changes in teaching do take place in our daily classes through a connotative way.” I then asked her for an example of this “connotative way.” “We always teach the same text in the same period. This is a big advantage for teachers’ teamwork to prepare the same teaching subject together, then observe each other and reflect on the same class subjects with different people present. We do our teaching research by this process. Our current focuses are: what kind of questions that teachers ask can better evoke learners’ higher-order thinking, what kind of class activities or combinations of activities we are able to do to cultivate learner’s inquiring awareness or artistic abilities. Although our choices are very limited by the class form, class size, classroom space, school rules and other more objective elements, there are always ways. We turn to the connotative development of our teaching and I believe it can best meet our needs in this transition period. After all, it’s useless to make changes only in demonstration classes. Changes should be doable in our daily teaching.”

“Then you must have noticed the phenomenon of double-dealing classes during the reform?” Another hot potato!

“Yes. Although we prepared specifically for demonstration classes, they are more like our daily ones now. It’s stupid to prepare a totally different class to demonstrate but it’s also stupid not to show the best aspect in our class-reforming experiment.

Demonstration classes are our guide and mirror. Behind those classes are a group of researchers in our school district, so one class represents the thoughts of the top and the



directions of our future efforts. Using the classes as a mirror to reflect on our daily teaching, we can discover more practical methods and the value of new ideas.

I believe that a teacher will gradually make professional progress in her daily teaching. But when I was FORCED to teach demonstration classes in front of a group of teachers and leaders, and was forced to explore new teaching approaches or ideas, I had to wake up all of my wisdom as well as my team's intelligence. Unlike normal classes, demonstration ones helped us to move along faster with the reform. And faster development means strong competitiveness, better scores, better ranks and a better source of students. To schools, reform is a reshuffle in a situation of strong competition.”

From her words, I started to understand why there are different impressions and interpretations of the same NCR, because the changes that are taking place in classes are not easy to discover. I also started to understand why the power of tests and lecturing do not reduce, because though the competitive contents have changed, the competitive mode remains. So I asked her whether she thought this reform fails in some aspects. She shook her head.

“Last year we visited a province to learn reform experiences,” She recalled, “There were display boards in every school to show photos of their reform practice. But we were disappointed as soon as we observed their classes. In a high school CLA class, five minutes after the teacher started, the observers still asked each other what subject of the class was. It is shamefully sad for a teacher to teach such a class! However, could we put all the blame on the teacher? No. The school administration, the direction of the reform guide at the level of the school or the district and even the city or the province, and the appropriate nature of the follow-ups should all be considered. We must allow

flaws and mistakes in this change. All the reform experiments need our further and deeper research. They cannot be measured as right or wrong, only good or better, because we are in the flow of change, and to some extent everyone is a frog in well.”<sup>63</sup>

Stepping out of L’s office, I sat down under a tree and became lost in thought. Being a school-level leader in this reform, teacher L belongs to both the down and the top. It is her very identity that made her live in between. She had a more positive attitude than normal teachers to confront the NCR, because she was able to make some real and tangible changes in school. She was more patient than some university-level scholars, because she was a teacher and understood the real difficulties in the class-level reform.

She clearly knew the distance between ideals and the reality, and was working hard to find a way to bridge this gap. For her, demonstration classes and connotative development are not hypocritical and self-deceiving but her bridges.

However, the reasonable choices for her implied many difficulties in my eyes: big class size, limited reform space, short of hands and supports, the ingrained power of tests and lecturing, fierce competition between schools and more. Demonstration classes and connotative development are rather compelling choices due to these difficulties. They are generated by the natural momentum of continuous change among the students, society and teachers.

As I left the school, a spring wind rose and the weather changed. The powers of winter and summer are tussling in this season. However, it is in this season in which tender shoots spring up and more changes are going to come up from the earth.

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<sup>63</sup> “A frog in well” is a famous Chinese idiom, to describe a person with a very limited view metaphorically.

## **The West**

Summer in California is delightfully sunny. When this afternoon the principal told me to go to London with her for an international education exchange in this winter holiday, I immediately recalled the last summer in San Diego, my first educational visit overseas.

“Broadness” was the most direct impression when I stepped out of the LA International Airport—broad sea, broad sky, broad highways and even the campus and the classrooms of S secondary in San Diego. In fact, Beijing is a bigger city than Los Angeles. But with more than 20 million permanent residents and many more immigrants living in 16,000 square kilometres, Beijing feels crowded and narrow. The classrooms in S secondary were about 1.5 times bigger than ours, accommodating only about 20 students in each.

Teaching and learning in S secondary are different too. Chinese students stay in a fixed classroom with their fixed main teacher. Subject teachers walk to their classes. But in S secondary, teachers stayed in their classrooms, waiting for students to come to them. There is no main teacher to monitor and rule the behaviour of her students. One of the original intentions in the NCR was to make a change to move students to their selected classes, and some high schools in Beijing tried for a while but they soon changed back. No classes, how could we rank after tests? No ranks, how could we compete? No competition, how could we improve? This is our latent logic and who can say our tests do not serve to improve our students? Yet moving students or moving teachers relates to the freedom to choose and the trust of learners’ independence, which makes a big difference in educational ideology and effects.

During the three-day visit we observed eight classes including a Language Arts class. I do not know English so I only got the rough idea by guessing. Teachers in S school didn't prepare classes specifically for us but taught normally. All teachers were relaxed and patient; all classes were light and easy, there is no push, no rush, but the students were more attentive than ours. When students introduced a writer, the teacher put some comments on the board and gave a dictation, and a 50-minute class was completed! In our classes, these might be done in 25 minutes or less. If I teach at this speed and class capacity like my San Diego peer, I could lose my job in a month. Efficiency is everything for us!

Honestly, I envy the relaxed work pace and the delightful class atmosphere in S school, because we seldom have this now but in the 1990s, we did. By teaching with smaller and thinner textbooks, I was able to design courses that my students enjoyed. When I added content that was not in the textbooks or if we went off the topic to discuss problems that we were all interested in, I would not feel guilty. In the 2000s, I lost some of this peaceful mind, but I still had spare time and could watch TV after work. In the 2010s, I feel increasingly tired and unable to cope with my job. Teaching is like fighting in a battle. We teach against the clock and have much heavier pressure in test score competition. But the fact is that the competition in the National Matriculation Tests has become less intensive, with the decrease of our student population and the expansion of university enrolment.<sup>64</sup> Today when almost every student in this model school can get admission to a university, we fight for the admissions to key universities in this country.

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<sup>64</sup> Spokeswoman in the MOE reported on June 2013 that there were about 9.15 million candidates took part into *gaokao* this year. The recent five year witnessed a consecutive decrease of *gaokao* candidates from 10.5 million in 2008. Meanwhile the acceptance rate has significantly increased since five years ago, from 57% in 2008 to 75% in 2012. The rate of Beijing in 2013 reached a new peak – 80%. (Wu, 2013)

Sometimes I think we might be choosing the wrong object to blame. It is not the “Westernized,” “post-modern” education ideas that we cannot import and apply, but the test mindset and its corresponding mechanism that we cannot get rid of. To realize our educational ideals, the biggest obstacle is ourselves; the biggest hope also exists in us, not in the USA or in London.

Coming back from San Diego, I was occupied by my crazy busy work again, finding I had lost control in my teaching. The new ideas that I got in the sunny summer faded away. The school district and the textbooks to a large extent controlled the speed and content of my teaching with an invisible hand. I gradually forgot the visit until today I was told to make another trip to London. I would not say the trip of SD was absolutely useless, but I could not realize what I got on the trip.

Actually I am lucky because being an academic leader in a model school in Beijing allows me the opportunity to see the West through my own eyes. Most of our normal teachers have no chance to experience Western education at any level. They have never thought of what Western education looks like and what we can learn from it. They simply heard what they should hear, for example, “integral constructivism” in Western education (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001, p. 23, see footnote 14), stress on “statistics,” “standards,” and “assessments” in schools in London ( (Project Group of the China-UK School Development Plans in Haidian School District, 2012, p. 18). For them, as well as for me, the West is a mystery with sporadic concepts and impressions. Really, we criticized the NCR as “Westernized,” not because we knew about Western education, but because the reform increases our workload and brings us new concepts that cannot be realized in the current situation.

So we localized this “Westernized” reform to make it fit into our needs, keeping our competitiveness and innovating to reinforce this competitiveness.<sup>65</sup> In the name of “localization,” the practice of the reform in a school or a class might be totally different from the original reform intentions.

Either the West or the local system, they are just part of us.

### **Reflection**

It is well known that “teacher development and implementation (of innovations) go hand by hand” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992). Yet not only teachers’ development goes with curriculum changes, but the possibility of intensifying differences and consolidating gaps drag the hands of both, especially in a centralized and pro-unified educational system. The focus of the stories in this chapter is gaps. There are five gaps I identified in my research and reflected in my stories

In a fast-developing society, teachers and students are changing, whereas the centralized education policies and the whole school system may not change so frequently and flexibly to meet the changes. This forms the first gap between educational policies and practice. Like running in M school’s playground in the timeline story, to keep all the students at a similar pace is impossible. This gap partly explains why some teachers like L feel that they are changing all the time and some teachers like C’s teacher feel that they do not get to make any changes. It also partly explains why teachers tend to look for the essence of education when they have experienced several reforms and many educational adjustments.

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<sup>65</sup> It is the slogan of the High School Program in Beijing (“守正创新” , see the title of Wang & Lei, 2010).

Further examining this phenomenon, another part of the explanation contains two more gaps. The gap between Chinese educational researchers and teachers makes it difficult to remedy the defects caused by the gap between policies and practice. As I pointed out in the first chapter, the new generation of Chinese education scholars rarely teach at the basic education level, so they are not familiar with the daily teaching practice of the mass of teachers, however well they have studied theories nationally or internationally. When problems took place in the Chinese education system, the solutions that this group of scholars tended to provide were not based on the context of Chinese basic education, but rather were the introduction of “developed” educational theories from Western developed countries. This plausible solution therefore forms the third gap between the Western educational theories and Chinese basic educational context.<sup>66</sup>

From this perspective, it is easier to understand a typical criticism of class teachers: “The main reason for the implementation problems in the NCR is the deviation in the understanding of the new reform ideas among teachers. Besides, the lack of experience and ability of the implementers is another important reason” (Yu, 2005). Certainly, as the majority of teachers in Chinese elementary and secondary schools do not have any experience of foreign countries, it is more than reasonable for the superior scholars to think in this way. Living in the three gaps with the task to realize quality education on one hand and to win score competitions on the other, there are simply too many things that need to be done and too limited reform options left to teachers.

Moreover, there is the fourth gap between “the new” and “the old.” The New Curriculum reformers have gone too far since they tried to put the new curriculum and

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<sup>66</sup> This is why the NCR was criticized by the old generation of scholars such as Zha Youliang, who have been elementary and secondary school teacher in his career.

the old one in opposite corners. They cared less about the reality of “the old path” but more about defining the existing teaching path as “the old.” They simplified and demonized the old path for the sake of beautifying the new (Guo, 2010). Artificially broadening the gap between “the new” and “the old” forces implementers to choose sides. Yet the reformers ignored two facts that only when teachers know why they teach, can they understand why they need change. Only when they know how to change from the old to the new step by step are they supported to make changes. Unfortunately since they have not bridged this gap, the task to find the connections falls on the shoulders of school-level leaders.

Last but not least, the fifth gap exists between mind and body. Teaching and learning are embodied in the person. “How a society defines and allocates the value of physical ‘body’ of individuals and populations inside schools reflects the nature of the principles of social control and reifies the educational ideology embedded in that society” (Evans, Davies, & Rich, 2009, p. 391). To control mind and ideology means controlling body and physical space correspondingly; to liberate the mind and encourage innovation means liberating the body first. However, the status quo in the NCR expects you to liberate the mind while still keeping control of students’ and teachers’ bodies. Apart from what is mentioned in Chapter 5, the story the West shows is different from another angle. Sending teachers to learn and observe overseas to liberate their minds when they have to control their teaching when they come back occurs in the name of localizing Western education theories and approaches. It is more interesting that the principals who observed what they wanted to see, brought it back to implement. They unified their mind and body so that what they brought back was not “the Western,” but “the self.”



All the teachers working for the NCR today are more or less living between the five gaps, consuming themselves to bridge or close the gaps. The pain in their bodies is the pain in the curriculum reform, because every teacher is a representative of the whole school system.

## **Chapter 7. Stories Tell More: The Pedagogical Significance Of Teachers' Ethnographic Stories In Curriculum Change**

What we might call a hermeneutic returning to the lived ground of human experience within the story—a place wherein inhabits a tensionality of both distance and nearing. It understands such a place as a resonant place where emerging from the silence may be heard the movement of melody and rhythm—polyphonic voices of teaching. Where might such a place be? Paradoxically, the place is where we already are—a place so near yet so far that we have forgotten its whereabouts.

(Aoki, as cited in Pinar, 2005, p. 4)

Throughout the research process, I experienced the richness of ethnographic stories. And stories, like life, are alive and able to grow up. An individual grows up in learning whereas a story puts forth its blossoms in reading. In this chapter, I shall present the blossoms of the eight stories that flourish in my heart to summarize my thoughts towards the main question of the thesis: Why Chinese high school teachers accept the ideas of the NCR yet fail to implement these ideas in their daily teaching? Following with the summary, I shall present the pedagogical significance that these ethnographic stories imply.

### **The Coexistence of the Two Curriculum Systems**

In China, not every teacher works as I described. My focus is on a group of CLA teachers in a Beijing model school. Yet everyone's story is an epitome of a society or an era, reflecting the dynamic of a nation, a country or a world more or less, here or there.

At first glance, especially to Chinese people, what the teachers did in my stories is extremely common. Teachers should design courses, teach classes, mark papers and

assignments, and help candidates with various tests. Teachers should use reformed curriculum ideas in their classes, educate the young generation and help them get a better future. The only surprise might be the trivial details of their work, such as going to school so early and getting back home so late, caring about every detail of every student in their classes including learning, living, emotional changes and even the length of their hair. But if these responsibilities are teachers' obligation, then teachers have to work that hard to be competent in their job.

Even though I have been a high school CLA teacher in a Beijing's model school for six years, I used to take the hardship for granted until I started my learning in Canada, reviewing relevant literature and returning to Beijing to do my research. Standing out of this education system while still working with teachers, recalling my bodily and emotional experiences with the narratives of my peers, I gradually understood what is happening to the group of teachers and what has happened to me. Our exhaustion is merely a phenomenon, caused by the coexistence of the two curriculum systems.

It is common logic to conclude a curriculum reform as successful, failed or mixed; therefore, the recent declaration of the "fundamental failure" of the NCR caused a stir in the academic circle of Chinese educational reform research. However, few consider that the current difficulties of the NCR generates from the coexistence of the two curriculum systems. In short, the New Curriculum coexists with its opponent; neither one is able to replace the other.

As my stories illustrate, the coexistence of the two curriculums can be reflected in three aspects: (a) applying new textbooks yet keeping a lecture-dominated teaching approach, (b) setting new curriculum goals and comprehensive quality assessment yet

retaining *gaokao* and the corresponding drills in daily teaching, and (c) promoting new pedagogical ideas and learning methods yet consolidating rigorous behaviour education and class management. The coexistence of dual curriculums thus requires the high school teachers to initiate teaching methods to facilitate independent, cooperative and innovative learning on one hand, and guarantee high scores in *gaokao* on the other. It requires the model schools to complete more difficult teaching content in the New Curriculum schedule on one hand, and arrange monthly tests, unified exams in school districts and the following paper explaining classes that are out of the New Curriculum syllabus on the other. It additionally requires the existing school culture to cultivate learners on one hand, but train test candidates on the other. Confronted by the effect of cancelling each other out by the coexistence of the dual curriculum systems, teachers are not only overburdened but also have to become hypocritical or cynical.

Moreover, teachers usually cannot get enough support or help from the top, especially teachers at the lowest level of the whole school hierarchy. The five gaps that were analysed in Chapter 6 revealed that neither the New Curriculum reformers or curriculum scholars or policy makers or imported “Western” educational theories can offer direct help to class teachers. Only the peers of teachers and their grade groups can share the most inspiring moments of teaching and research.

Although every individual high school teacher in different areas and schools is experiencing the NCR differently, they are facing the same problem of implementation of the NCR. If the comprehensive quality assessment cannot gradually replace *gaokao* to address the exam-oriented curriculum, and the implementation of the New Curriculum cannot change the existing class management and behaviour education, then the New

Curriculum cannot replace the old one, however hard teachers try to make changes in a single CLASS to fulfil the new CURRICULUM goals. Gaokao and the engrained behaviour education and class managerial approach are narrowing the reform space. The coexistence of two curriculum systems is trapping the most important reform implementers in double busyness and pressure.

### **The Restriction by *Gaokao* and Class Managerial Culture**

An invisible yet important character in my stories is the scores of *gaokao*. The NCR aims to reform the exam-oriented curriculum; the “exam” refers mainly to *gaokao*. The core problem at the meeting of the two curriculums is *gaokao* and its corresponding class managerial culture.

However, to fundamentally reform *gaokao* in order to make it meet the needs of the New Curriculum does not seem possible at the moment. Even a slight move of this high-stakes test so far has caused massive public concern and heated discussion. Why cannot *gaokao* be reformed to fit into the New Curriculum? Because the New Curriculum is mainly an educational issue, yet *gaokao* is a social issue involving relations, interests, powers and stakeholders. “Apart from selecting appropriate talents for higher education and promoting learning through assessing, *gaokao* is functioning to maintain social justice, keep social stability and facilitate social mobility” (Liu, 2005). Even a slight move of *gaokao* is large enough to cause a butterfly effect. “Some reform ideals seem very reasonable from the perspective of education and pedagogy, yet might threaten the mechanism of fair competition and influence the stability of the society” (Liu, 2005). This means that reforming *gaokao* is more difficult than reforming a curriculum.

The “exam fever” (Yang D. , 2013, p. 3) that I mentioned in the literature review reflected the vital importance of this high-stakes test in China. When a single test determines about 10 million teenagers’ future careers and social class every year, the test has to be the goal of learning and teaching. While *gaokao* is not yet urgent in elementary or junior high learning stages, schools, teachers, parents, and students can prioritize quality education. Once *gaokao* gets closer and closer in senior high learning stage, students’ test scores, teachers’ bonuses and promotion opportunities, schools’ reputations and future resources of students, and the competitiveness of school districts are all based on this single note, how dare teachers and schools take this test as just a learning method? How can they take a monthly test result that aims to meet *gaokao* with ease? The crucial part is that the results of *gaokao* decide who is an appropriate talent in society and who is not. The ranks in *gaokao* determine whether teachers and schools cultivate talents for the nation. And this is the reason for “the higher the grade, the more the problems” (Zhang, 2011, p. 7) in the implementation of the NCR.

The flaws of this assessment are obvious; however, *gaokao* plays a vital role in maintaining social justice, stability and mobility in China. With the broader development gaps between areas and between the rich and the poor in China, a fair mechanism of talent selection is critical to ensure that children of the rich and the poor, the higher officials and the common people have the same opportunity to compete for a better education and life. As a test that only considers scores *gaokao* meets this need for social justice to a large extent. As several severe corruption cases related to admission took

place in famous universities recently, scores in *gaokao* without power games around money was confirmed as playing a role in maintaining social justice and stability.<sup>67</sup>

I believe that *gaokao* will last for a relatively long time, as the social gaps in China are broadening and the supervisory mechanism of university admission is imperfect. I also believe that the possibility of a fundamental change to *gaokao* in order to fit in the New Curriculum is slim, since the benefits of the New Curriculum are more virtual and indirect than that of *gaokao*. The comprehensive quality assessment that was raised in the NCR has many benefits compared with this high-stakes test. It permits recording and assessing learning processes, and evaluating learning by multi-stakeholders including teachers, students, peers and parents. Nevertheless, it cannot replace *gaokao* in terms of maintaining social justice, because its subjective evaluation may create wider admission corruption. Besides, due to the huge population of yearly candidates in China, three-year-long, complicated electronic portfolios in comprehensive quality assessment hardly compete with simple statistics of scores as an efficient means of selection.

*Gaokao* is a topic that goes far beyond what I have described in this thesis. The dilemma that *gaokao* has to be reformed but cannot be changed for the New Curriculum restricts the further implementation of the NCR. Hence the New Curriculum cannot avoid stepping on the old path of the exam-oriented curriculum with a pair of new shoes. From this perspective, the pilots of new reform ideas in demonstration classes are worth

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<sup>67</sup> Cai Rongsheng, the chief of the Admission Office in Renmin University was investigated by police for corruption in November 2013. Whistleblowers revealed that he received huge bribes through the power of independent admission by exceptive and supplementary admissions. Renmin University then announced that the independent enrolment will stop in the year of 2014. The topic of the justice of university admission then heated in various media in China. “Although the original intention of education is not ‘judging a hero by scores’, admitting by scores from high to low is still a generally accepted game rule. In the context that the admission rules are relatively simple, it is a severe test for social justice to allow universities in China to exercise their admission power independently such as exceptive admission of candidates with low *gaokao* scores in the name of art specialty.” (Li & Wang, 2013; Ye, 2013)

cherishing, because the new ideas of the New Curriculum might not be implemented or coordinated with other functioning systems in schools. High school teachers, especially main teachers, grade three teachers and major subject teachers would have to be prepared to work under double the pressure for a long time.

Furthermore, the class managerial system, behaviour education and the corresponding school culture that emphasizes collectivism, unity and homogeneity might remain in the long term together with *gaokao* and the New Curriculum. The reason is not only because the class management and behaviour education match well with the test training for *gaokao*, but also because the New Curriculum has to align with the current governance of the Chinese government. The first goal in the OBEER is “developing patriotic and collectivism spirit of students” (Guan & Meng, 2007). However, through inquiring into the bodily and emotional experiences of teachers as well as students, my research reconfirmed that it is contradictory for teachers to carry out rigorous behaviour education in class management with a spirit of collectivism and to cultivate students’ spirit of innovation, creativity and practical ability. The former requires uniformity, restriction of body and the exclusionary of heterogeneity, whereas the latter requires diversity, liberation of body and the lenience of differences. From this point of view, although the NCR expressed the pursuit of democracy and freedom by Chinese curriculum reformers and education scholars, as a reproduction process of a state ideology, the implementation of a curriculum and its education culture cannot be opposed to the governance of the country. The difficulties of the NCR to some extent reflect a cultural and ideological tussle between democracy and despotism in China. It still might



be a long-lasting competition. And “wearing new shoes to walk on the old path” with dual curriculum systems is likely to last for the long term.

### **A Call to Return Bodily Experience**

As recently as 20 years ago, Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) noticed the phenomenon that individual teachers were ignored in the research of teacher development:

Either treat all teachers as if they are the same (or should be the same), or stereotype teachers as innovators, resisters, and the like.... Most strategies fail to take these differences (of different teachers) into account, and consequently fail to be effective for many teachers. (p. 5)

Now, this problem is still very common in Chinese educational research, and it prevents solving the current problems of the NCR.

As shown in the literature, our knowledge of the New Curriculum is informed by quantitative data and rational analysis. Although both are necessary, the physical, emotional and identity distance between researchers and teachers strengthens the imagination or stereotypes of teachers in academic analyses. At the same time the real-person's struggles in real-time are left in the darkness. When teachers' problems escalate to a must-settle issue, and when the imagination or stereotypes of teacher groups cannot work out a solution locally, the importation of a “Western” solution becomes the easiest way to put out the fire. Such a solution treats the symptom, not the specific issue; a teacher as an individual and a problem as a case are still out of the sight and out of the mind of quantitative research views.

To return to the specific and solve problems for individual teachers, Chinese scholars have noticed, “[T]he primary difference between individuals is the difference between their bodies. The experience of a body is the experience of a person or a life; our bodies are with us” (Yan, 2007, p. 42). Our bodies form ourselves, therefore to break the stereotypes or imaginations of a collective of teachers has to shift to a concern with individual cases, inquiry into details of the everyday experiences of teachers and focus on bodily and emotional experiences. This means going back to the original world before our imaginations and narratives, and a reality before quantitative data and the “science.”

When the body is controlled, whether it is forcedly or voluntarily, the mind is restricted and trained purposely; it works for either students or teachers or researchers. Hence in order to engage students to learn independently, innovatively and cooperatively, we have to free their bodies from fixed spots, lines and classrooms. A similar opinion was raised by Montessori as early as the 1890s.<sup>68</sup> To allow teachers to work in a democratic, equal, dialogic and consultative culture, to use textbooks instead of being scheduled by the textbooks, we have to liberate our bodies from heavy burdens in the first place. In order to encourage researchers to solve problems and re-discover the “self” of Chinese education, scholars have to leave their university offices to work regularly with teachers on basic education. Learning, teaching and researching are intertwined. The places, postures and movements of our bodies are the attitudes, ideas and thoughts in our minds. If I may be allowed the expression, Chinese education has never been sick with

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<sup>68</sup> In *A Critical Consideration of the New Pedagogy in its Relation to Modern Science* (1892), Maria Montessori commented on “educating children”: “We know only too well the sorry spectacle of the teacher who, in the ordinary school-room, must pour certain cut and dried facts into the heads of the scholars. In order to succeed in this barren task, she finds it necessary to discipline her pupils into immobility and to force their attention. Prizes and punishments are ever-ready and efficient aids to the master who must force into a given attitude of mind and body those who are condemned to be his listeners... Such prizes and punishments are, if I may be allowed the expression, the bench of the soul, the instrument of slavery for the spirit.” (2009, p. 30-31)

aphasia<sup>69</sup>; the language of Chinese education has always been stored in the living experiences of individual teachers. It is unfair to impose such a sickness on Chinese education because we have not found its language. To the current world, especially to the Western world, Chinese education and its New Curriculum no doubt have a distinct existence rather than following any system.

Moreover, returning to bodily experience of individual teachers means to face reality bravely. Holding tight to our ideals is no doubt important, yet when the ideals and the original goals cannot be fulfilled in a short period (the NCR has taken over a decade and still coexist with the exam-oriented curriculum, and might be impeded by the slow reform of *gaokao* for a long time in the future), how can we bridge the ideals and the reality of the NCR to protect teachers from a double burden? However reluctant we are to face this question, we need to seriously consider some compromise to reduce the harm of the hard landing of the NCR goals.<sup>70</sup> Imported theories and methods are helpful but there is no ready-made solution to a local Chinese problem. Curriculum reformers have to work with teachers and schools to initiate solutions that work in the Chinese school contexts and enrich Chinese educational vocabulary.

The NCR is advancing to its thirteenth year, and the High School Program in Beijing is undergoing its third three-year experiment. Since Chinese curriculum scholars have oriented this reform from the beginning, they cannot just move from one school to

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<sup>69</sup> See footnote 15. “Chinese education aphasia” was diagnosed by Chinese educational scholars for “the imitation of western thoughts,” “the learning of Western vocabulary and speaking patterns” (Lu, 2009, p. 21).

<sup>70</sup> Different from professor Zha, who suggested the “soft landing” of the NCR and pointed out 8 aspects of misleading by professor Zhong, by using “avoid hard landing”, I mean to work out specific strategies for specific schools or areas to solve specific problems that caused by the dual curriculum, for instance, if we have to work in the dual curriculum for a relatively long time, what should we do to reduce teachers’ real struggles to ensure the NCR can be implemented sustainably and step by step.

another to analyse percentages and become de facto onlookers to the daily classes and the real curriculum implementation that is being changed by them. Returning to the body, to individual teachers, to the bodily experiences and embodied research methods does not mean that rational analysis, statistics, and quantitative research methods are weak. But it is easy to create an illusion that teachers are a collective and scientific methods must be built up by numbers. Today we all know: “The properties of mind are not purely mental: They are shaped in crucial ways by the body and brain and how the body can function in everyday” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 565), returning to the body and facing reality are critical ways to understand our mind, our ideals and our knowledge.

Closing my laptop, I walked out of my room, sitting on the large carpet of grass near my house, focusing on my breath, my body and existence in this world. In Chinese philosophy, this is a moment that I integrate into the nature. Becoming a learner in the University of Victoria and living my life on this island cure my pain, bring the self back to me and make me rethink education. When I went back to Beijing, breathing in the smog and working together with my peers to collect data, I had a very clear sense that I was living in between – between a teacher and a learner, my past and present, Chinese and Canadian educational ideas and ideologies and between my mind and body.

What I can present in this thesis is only a small part of my collected data. But I believe that stories can tell more than the writers suppose, because stories connect the real world, the fictional world, the world of writers, readers and characters. I expect that the eight stories in this thesis will evoke richer, deeper and broader thinking in my readers. I expect that an increasing number of researchers will return to work with

teachers and do their qualitative research on teachers' real problems. I also expect practical solutions can be worked out, based on my and more stories of teachers, by Chinese and international scholars.

There has to be an end to my narrative, but when the stories are over, my new teaching life is just starting.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1. Interview Questions

#### Part 1 After-class interview

1. Generally, how is your feel about this class?
2. Could you remember the feels when you stepped into that classroom? Please describe them.

(The following questions would vary depending on what teachers did in their classes, but generally as below)

3. What do you think was the best and worst parts in this class? Could you please describe your feels then? Could you remember what you did and what students reacted to you? Describe your experiences.
4. Where do you generally stand in a class? Did you change your places within this class? When you changed your places, did you do them on purpose? And what differences can you feel?
5. How was your feel when the class is over?
6. By reflecting all the process of teaching in this class, what comments are you going to leave for yourself and your students?

#### Part 2 General experiences about the New Curriculum Reform

1. What new ideas have you heard or learned since the NCR started in 2007?
2. Compared to your teaching before the NCR, what have you changed in your teaching approaches?
3. Who have instructed or helped you with the implementation of the NCR at class teaching level?
4. Please use some words or sentences to describe the ideal teaching in the NCR in your understanding.
5. Could you describe your general feel, physically and emotionally since the NCR started? What are they?
6. When do you feel best and worst during a typical workday? Please describe them.

### Part 3 The Original Chinese Questions

#### 第一部分：课后访谈问题

1. 你对这节课的总体感觉如何？
2. 你还能记得当你步入教室时的感受吗？请形容一下。  
(以下问题将随老师在课上的不同表现而有所变动，不过总体上将围绕以下思路)
3. 请形容一下这节课上得最好和最糟的部分。你还记得你都在这些部分中做了什么，学生是什么反应吗？请形容一下。
4. 你在课堂上通常站在哪？你会改变你的位置吗？你是有意变换自己的位置吗？在改变位置时你的感觉有什么不一样吗？
5. 当讲完这节课时，你的感受如何？
6. 通过回顾这节课的全过程，你如何评价你自己和你的学生？

#### 第二部分：对新课改的总体体验

7. “新课程”实施以来，你都学习或听说了哪些“新”理念？
8. 比照“新课程”实施之前（2007年以前）的教学，你在“新课程”实施以来都有哪些教学方面的改变？
9. 哪类人对你在课堂层面的教学改革做出过具体的有益的指导？请列出。
10. 请用一些词或短句形容你心目中的“新课程”教学模式。
11. 请形容你自“新课程”实施以来身体上/情感上的感受。
12. 你一天工作中什么时候身体感觉最痛苦以及最舒适？