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Unexpected Realities: Lessons from China's New English Textbook Implementation

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Although studies have been done in China's large cities on education policy issues, research is lacking on China's smaller towns, which are more indicative of the situations throughout China. This article presents lessons learned from studying Chinese English teachers at four different schools that were adopting new English textbooks, in accordance with revised national education policy. Using conflict theory and social action theory as an analytical lens, and combining ethnographic and naturalistic inquiry as research methods, the article reports on the conflicts that the Chinese English teachers confronted as they were adopting the new English textbooks at the classroom level. Analysis of the implementation conflict resulted in lessons learned related to the influence of the traditional cultural and education structures, the impact of policy implementation contexts, and the availability of support systems for teachers. The lessons indicate that future education policymakers in both China and the United States need to be mindful of obstacles that teachers struggle to overcome when implementing new policies.

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How new education policy is implemented at the school and classroom levels has been absorbing educators' attention for years (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). Researchers argue that, in the United States, education governance has been following "a loosely-coupled system of federal, state, and district input" (Mohammed, Pisapia, & Walker, 2009, p. 2). Conversely, China's education governance has been highly centralized over the past 50 years, with the National Academy of Education Administration in China (NAEA) in Beijing having the extreme authority. With the influence of China's Open-Door Policy in 1979, which emphasized the importance of economic development (Galbraith & Lu, 2000), in the late 1980s, changes occurred to push China's education governance toward decentralization.

China's new textbook adoption is one of the initiatives that aimed to assist local education bureaus in gaining authority over their own textbooks. At the time, China's textbooks were tightly controlled by the NAEA. This academy held major influence over the construction of textbooks, including what content, resource materials, and pacing guides should be used, as well as which publisher should publish the textbooks. These textbooks were then distributed and used nationwide (Hooper, 1991). With this initiative, officials started to encourage new textbooks in an attempt to bridge the gap between textbook content and the local needs throughout the country.

With that effort in mind, some big cities, like Beijing and Shanghai, began to develop their own new textbooks. By the end of the 1990s, various

English textbooks were increasingly created to address new teaching requirements. To standardize the local new English textbook efforts, in 2001 the NAEA issued a document called *The National Standards for Teaching English Subject (NSTES)*.

The NSTES required that the new English textbooks meet local needs to help students gain better practical knowledge for English language application in a local context. Not all cities in China reflect the same characteristics as Beijing and Shanghai, however, and these were the two leading producers of textbooks. In fact, most cities in China are smaller, and so the challenges and lessons learned in these communities are worth considering. Thus the research question, "Based on the requirements of NSTES, how were the new textbooks implemented at the classroom level by teachers working in less economically developed, small cities?"

This paper contributes to the field of education through its purpose of exploring the answers to the research question in two small towns. More specifically, the study used qualitative methods for the research, leaning primarily toward an ethnographic approach that relied heavily on observation to explore answers, bearing in mind the new standards requirements, to the following subquestions: (1) How did the Chinese English teachers implement the new textbooks? (2) What were the reasons behind China's English teachers' implementing actions? (3) What issues or concerns about implementation emerged through the study results? and (4) What lessons might Chinese, as well as other nationalities', policymakers take from this study?

Literature Review

The reviewed literature covers two major areas related to the research question. One area is a review of the history of China's new English textbook initiative and of its relationship to the new NSTES requirements; and the other concerns research regarding policy implementation and how that relates to understanding the English textbook adoption efforts of the teachers in China's classrooms.

China's New English Textbook Initiatives

With the fast spread of globalization and the enormous achievements of China's economic reforms in the past 30 years (Chan & Zhang, 1999; Chen,

1998; Galbraith & Lu, 2000; Hooper, 1991), scholars claimed that the previous, highly centralized, government-controlled education system was unable to meet the diverse needs of new societal developments, specifically those related to parents and students (Benewick & Donald, 1999). As early as the 1980s, influenced by economic development, officials in charge of the curriculum and textbooks at the NAEA decided to encourage locally constructed new textbooks to bridge the gap between the textbook content and local needs.

With the intention of reforming textbooks and decentralizing education management, at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, some big cities, like Beijing and Shanghai, started to develop their own new textbooks. Among the reformed textbooks, the new English textbooks leaned toward a more liberal pedagogy, which emphasized the communicative ways of teaching¹ (CWT) (Hadley, 2001; Ouyang, 2003; Hu, 2005). The CWT advocates student-centered learning in a specific cultural context. This approach rejects the traditional teaching methods (Hadley, 2001) and, therefore, the new textbooks required teachers to switch from teaching grammar and translation rigidly to creating learning contexts for students, and from teaching English language from a linguistic perspective only to teaching from both linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives (how language is used in specific social contexts) (Ruddell & Ruddell, 1994; Pearson & Stephens, 1994). By the end of the 1990s, English textbooks were increasingly revised and redesigned toward addressing the new CWT approaches. English textbooks attempted to turn teachers from teaching the textbook *mechanically* to assisting students in learning the textbook *flexibly* and *actively*.

China's New English Textbook Policy

In 2001, to standardize the new English textbook efforts, reinforce the desired new way of teaching, and meanwhile align various localized textbooks, China's NAEA issued the NSTES. The NSTES (2001) explicitly indicated that

The core of the textbook reform is to change the tendency that old English textbooks paid too much attention to the teaching of grammar and vocabulary and ignored the cultivation of students utilizing and applying English language. The new English textbooks need to take stu-

dents' study interests, life experience, and their cognition knowledge level into consideration. (pp. 1–2)

The new standards document clearly indicated the desired new way of teaching, which emphasized students' interests, prior experiences, and English language competency development in context. In addition, later in the document, the *NSTES* also asked teachers to assist students in developing positive attitudes toward English language learning, thinking through English, and practicing in English (*NSTES*, 2001). Based on these requirements, English teachers are expected to (1) cultivate students' linguistic competence, which includes aiding students' mastery of English from the sense of linguistics, such as semantics, syntax, or phonology (Nicholson, 2006), and (2) foster students' sociolinguistic competence, which refers to the application of language based on the specific social context in which the language occurs (Bloome & Green, 1984; Stubbs, 1976/2002). In the early 2000s, with the World Bank financial aid starting to support the development of the western part of China, reforms inside China sought to speed up textbook decentralization throughout the country.

Literature on Policy Implementation

Disconnection Between Policy Intention and Implementation Action

Researchers argue that the results of a policy's implementation are influenced by various factors, such as how the implementers understand the policy, whether the environment fosters the implementation actions, and whether the implementers play an active or passive role. For instance, policymakers may require subordinate agents (institution or person) to adopt a particular policy, but this position does not ensure that practitioners at the practical level will follow the intention of the policymakers (Wilson & Berne, 1999). O'Meara (2005) studied how the Health and Physical Education Curriculum and Standards Framework II (HPE CSF II) was implemented by a group of physical educators from Newviews Secondary College, a large metropolitan secondary school in Australia. O'Meara found that although the use of the HPE CSF II increased among the group, there were still educators who showed noncompliant behavior with the reform three years after the curriculum's adaptation at Newviews.

Researchers also argue that there can be an obvious disconnection between the policy's intentions and the implementers' actions. For instance, Cohen and Hill (2000) analyzed data from a 1994 survey of California elementary school teachers and 1994 student California Learning Assessment System scores to study education reformers' assumptions that modifying policies will change teachers' practice, which will then improve student performance. One teacher, Mrs. Oublier, involved in the implementation effort to replace memorization with understanding and featured in the article, was typical of the others who participated in the reform. She was eager to try the new reform and saw herself as a successful example of the new policy. However, when she was observed, the observer found that her new instructional practices were filtered by her old teaching approaches. It's apparent that there was a disconnect between policymakers' intentions, that new policy would change teachers' teaching practice, and Mrs. Oublier's real teaching action that remained consistent with her previous practice (Cohen, 1990). The researchers argued that only under certain circumstances, with professional development programs or other administrative support, can policy affect practice and then affect student performance. Clearly, the policymakers' intentions alone could not lead to improved teaching and higher achievement (Cohen, 1990; Cohen & Hill, 2000; & Wilson, 2003).

Factors Affecting Policy Implementation

Some other studies focused on examining the factors that affect the policy implementation process and results, including the practitioners' ability to implement, the contextual environment, the strategies available, and the degree of the implementer's compliance. Along this line, Mohammed et al. (2009) identified and applied 16 factors to study the implementation of Reading First programs in the U.S. in the 50 state departments of education based on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) Act. The NCLB Act requires that all teachers in U.S. public schools need to be highly qualified for the grade level and content area in which they teach. It also mandated that every child in America be at grade level for reading and math by 2014. Across the factors they used were three categories: the capacity of the teachers, the contextual environment, and the implementation strategies utilized. They found that 10 factors had great impact on the degree of policy

implementation, including partnership and coordination, negotiation and reformulation, personnel, and internal and external agency assistance, which are factors highlighted in this paper and which played out their roles and influenced China's policy implementation results.

Horsley (2009), in addressing accountability issues that affect education policy and implementation in the Ontario, Canada, neoliberal education system, argues that educational resources, such as textbooks, classroom supplies, technology, physical space, and teachers, need to support education policy and implementation. Horsley's argument emphasizes the importance of educational context, including the physical space of learning, in successful policy implementation. His findings very closely mirror the situation in the Chinese implementation process, where concerns about physical space and support for teachers were critical issues.

Policy Implementation Influenced by Values and Culture

Mohammed et al. (2009) studied what factors impact states' implementations of the NCLB Act in the U.S. Contextual environment was one of the three factors on which they focused. In the study Mohammed and colleagues argued that contextual environments uniquely influence policy implementation actions. They examined how the contextual environments, based on an institutions' interorganizational support for a policy, affect the rate and extent of implementation (Mohammed et al., 2009). Mohammed and colleagues further broke down interorganizational support into two different categories: (1) the political context—they argued that at the implementation level, the groups involved could either work cooperatively or against one another, which obstructed a policy's implementation extent—and (2) the interorganizational support—which was defined as the support from external agencies and viewed as positive factors associated with successful implementations (also see Goggin, Bowman, Lester, & O'Toole, 1990; Odden, 1991).

Most of the studies about policy implementation explored, to a large extent, the implementation issues without considering the cultural components embedded in institutions (Saetren, 2005). Even with the growth of the literature, research on the influence of institutional culture on the results of policy implementation has not been growing steadily and

continuously (Harris, 2007). Harris (2007) studied a tuition decentralization policy implemented in North Carolina and found that institutional values and culture influence how policy implementation is enacted. This is significant to understanding what was at stake in the China textbook adoption.

In addition to these findings, there are also three variations with which policy implementation is impacted: top-down (e.g., Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1981), bottom-up (e.g., Hjern & Hull, 1982), and through sociocultural perspectives. The top-down model refers to a policy decision that is made by a formal authority at a higher level of power and minimizes the power at the level of implementation (Harris, 2007). The bottom-up model refers to the fact that participants at the implementation level were directly and actively involved with creating and carrying out the policy (Harris, 2007). The sociocultural perspective refers to the significant roles that culture plays in an organization and the importance of taking culture into consideration in thinking about policy implementation (e.g., Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Harris, 2007). China's new English textbook adoption demonstrated a hybridization of all three. This article takes this sociocultural view of policy implementation, embedded in the Chinese culture and values, to examine what factors played out in that setting and how they affected China's new English textbook implementation at the classroom level.

Analytical Framework

Tightly related to the sociocultural influence on policy implementation, two specific theories are involved as the analytical framework—conflict theory that is borrowed from Hopkins, Monaghan, and Hansman (2009) and social action theory.

The Conflict Theory

This phenomenon can be explained by Cohen, Timmons, and Fesko (2005). This group of researchers studied policy "conflict and ambiguity" (p. 221) by examining general implementation of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in the U.S. and its effects on workers' services. They claimed that policymakers intentionally created vague policy implementation language to provide local implementers with flexibility for incorporating it into their own practice. However, they further argued that because

of these ambiguities, conflicts between the policy-makers' intentions and the implementers' actions manifested at the practice level. Cervero and Wilson (2006) argue that policy implementing actors negotiate their actions within a complex social arena full of competing interests and power relationships.

In studying the elements of policy implementation conflict and the need for collaboration, Hopkins et al. (2009) studied the specific conflicts appearing in the WIA implementation process. Their study covered a broader scope than that of the research done by Cohen et al. (2005). By using conflict theory as an analytical lens, Hopkins et al. (2009) found that throughout the implementation process, there were four conflicts that deserved the attention of those who cared about implementation results. The four conflicts were:

- (1) The change of agent, which refers to the conflict regarding "what the roles should be" and who should play the role of policy implementer. In the field of education, who really plays the change agent role; the teacher, the policy makers, the parents, or the students?
- (2) The power broker conflict, which refers to "who had the real power" in the implementation process. In the field of education, classroom teachers have to rethink their practices to fit into the big picture of school, community, state, and the nation;
- (3) The policy interpretation conflict, which "revolved around the participants' interpretations of the intention of the legislation." This refers to how the implementer/s understand and interpreted the policy intention, and
- (4) The ambiguity of means, which "addresses the clarity (or lack thereof) of the process for carrying out the programs." (pp. 217–221)

In many cases, when a policy is implemented, an implementer cannot find very clear and specific guidance on how the policy can be implemented successfully (Hopkins, et al., 2009). In education, this ambiguity occurs more often than not and certainly fits the circumstances in the China textbook adoption. When policy implementation is considered within social contexts, various factors need to be considered regarding the implementation results. Conflict theory provides a tool to code and categorize the conflicts that appeared during the new textbook implementation process.

Social Action Theory

I used social action theory to better understand the reason behind the conflicts found in the study, with examples from the literature in the United States. This theory emphasizes actors' (teacher) self-understanding as agents rather than reactive beings, and actors' attributing meaning to situations and sharing the meaning with others (Catron & Harmon, 1981). Kilgore (2001) argues that knowledge is socially constructed. During the social construction process, the participants' understanding and interpretation of the policy might be different from the policymakers' due to the different social environments in which they work.

Within the social context, this theory provides a lens to examine the interactions between situations and actors. There are, however, several key points associated with this theory. First, an actor's behaviors are seen as the end of an interaction (Willhelm, 1967). Second, the behaviors are occurring between the actor as an *agent* and a *situation* the actor, or agent, is in. Third, the actor collectively constructs meaning with those who are directly or indirectly taken into account by their social context, so together all people are sharing beliefs, using common means, and establishing norms (Catron & Harmon, 1981; Willhelm, 1967). And fourth, socially constructing the meaning determines the alteration of behaviors.

The parameters for social action theory as stated above provide significance in understanding the new textbook implementation experiences and in exploring the lessons China's textbook implementation offers to future policymakers. In the context of policy implementation in China, teachers are the actors, or agents. They socialize with their students through the process of adopting the textbooks into their curriculum and classroom-teaching methodologies, which are situated in the particular social context of China's English teaching. In the socialization process, teachers decide what instructional strategies to use based on the learning purposes and the broad and specific contexts the teachers and the students are in. The process of this socialization also requires students to collaborate with the teachers to achieve the socialization. The elements of this theory help demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses in teachers' fulfilling policymakers' intentions. Within this social context, various factors affect the implementa-

tion, such as Chinese culture, tradition, values, and how the English teachers make decisions on the alternatives for teaching the textbooks. This theory explains what patterns the participants demonstrated through their teaching, providing reasons for the findings based on conflict theory.

The combination of the theories leads to a cross analysis of the new English textbook implementation in China, also providing evidence useful to education policymakers in both China and the United States.

Research Method

This study used several qualitative approaches, such as ethnographic research methods including naturalistic inquiry to explore how the Chinese English teachers implemented the new textbook policy and what lessons their experience might offer policymakers in both China and the United States. In one approach, I interviewed the teachers and the educational personnel who worked closely with the new textbook implementation. During the interviews, I asked open-ended questions along with follow-up questions and took field notes of my observations to ensure accuracy. With permission from the participants, I audiotaped all the interview sessions. The purpose of the interviews was to collect data on what and how each participant personally understood and thought about the policy and how this affected his or her view of teaching. This set of data paralleled my ethnographic observations and field notes.

Ethnographic research methods have the potential to provide readers a vivid description of what happens at a certain moment through the researcher's eyes. Brodtkin (2000) argues that using ethnographic methods allows researchers to move beyond the visible phenomena, and, therefore, be able to make connections between practice and the condition of the practice. Brodtkin (2000) further argues that because of the in-depth examination of the contexts, the researchers are better able to understand various causal factors that determine a practice. Stritikus and Wiese (2006) also argue that in the studies they did with the implementation of Proposition 227, a bilingual educational policy, in California, the use of ethnographic methods yielded a rich account of various factors that played a critical role in determining how education policy was im-

plemented. Further, other scholars, e.g., Jennings and Maxwell, also argue that because ethnographic inquiry is focused on the exploration of participants' perspective and interpretations, it fits to the examination of how policy is implemented through individual's practice (Jennings, 1996; Maxwell, 2004).

Given that the purpose of this study is to explore how the new English textbook policy was implemented at the practical level, ethnographic methods of inquiry were a logical approach. They helped build understanding for how the teachers handled the implementation process in their own classrooms. Meanwhile, using ethnographic methods enabled me to dig into the conditions underneath the surface-level practice. Maxwell (2004) argued that the fine methods used by ethnographers provide an opportunity to expose the causal nature of the visible contexts that shape the policy implementation process. That was the intention of this study.

This leads to my use of naturalistic inquiry (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005). Harry and colleagues (2005) argue that a naturalistic inquiry provides an understanding of the motives and pressures behind decision making and certain practices, which is effective in studying social processes. Glaser and Strauss (1967) named this process "sensitizing," meaning that it allows the observer to quickly make sense of the actions within certain social contexts. How well the researcher can expose the "sensitized moment" to readers depends on the ways in which the researcher documented the occasion (Peshkin, 2000). I chose this method because in the classrooms where the new policy was undertaken, teachers' implementation practices could not be understood without a fully developed understanding of the teachers' actions in context. This understanding helped me identify the dominant conflicts embedded in the conceptual categories between policymakers' intentions and teachers' actions. Based on the conflicts, I was able to scrutinize the reasons behind the teachers' actions and, therefore, develop answers to my research questions.

Research Sites

This study involved four schools in two small towns, Eastown and Westown². Eastown is the small, impoverished city of Oldbridge in Newcenter Province, in the middle eastern region of China, with a population of about 200,000. In Eastown, the Oldbridge

Educational Committee (OEC) is the highest education organization in the local area, under the control of the Newcenter Provincial Educational Committee, which is under the NAEA. In 1998, Oldbridge started adopting textbooks by the Educational Committee of Newcenter Province, which aimed at using the CWT in English language instruction. Westown, a township under the administration of New River City, the capital of Greentree Province in southwest China, is a relatively remote area with a population of 326,700. Due to its remote location, Westown experienced slower economic growth, and its education development has lagged behind the more prosperous cities, like Beijing and Shanghai, and the coastal areas along the eastern and south-eastern land boundaries of China. Westown, which was unable to produce its own textbooks, adopted the English textbooks that were compiled and used in Beijing. This set of English books was composed based on the English language proficiency and competencies of students in Beijing.

The two cities were chosen for the following reasons: First, their populations, economies, and educational resources are representative among the circumstances of most small to average-size Chinese cities. Second, the two cities are geographically far from each other, minimizing intercity influences and providing across-site understanding of the implementation process. Third, the two cities represent different policy implementation situations. Eastown implemented its own books, which were designed to fit the needs of the local students. However, Westown adopted textbooks that were not compiled in accordance with Westown's local English teaching and learning contexts, but instead are reflective of Beijing's characteristics. Thus, the common issues and problems found in the two cities provide lessons and experiences relevant at both a local level and a broader level.

Within each city, two schools were chosen, one inner-city and one suburban school. All were public schools, two elementary and two middle schools, and were piloting the new textbooks. These schools were chosen as pilot institutions because they are rich in education resources (teachers with higher education levels, students with higher academic achievements, and more books) compared with the rest of the schools in the same locality. With higher-quality teachers and higher-achieving students, the challenges these teachers and students faced should

have been more manageable than when confronted by schools that did not have such resources.

In each school, the principal recommended one teacher who they viewed would be best in implementing the new English textbooks in the school. In this way, these teachers might more easily solve the issues and problems and help prepare other teachers for the challenges they would face during the process. As a result, two inner-city teachers were teaching 8th graders and two suburban teachers were teaching 3rd graders. All the recommended teachers had been using the new textbooks for more than one year. This should have reduced any complications in understanding the implementation (Conversations with Principals, Eastown, 05-03-2004). Further, the data collected provided the possibility of observing policy implementation at different grade levels in the same city or across cities.

Participants

In Westown, Mrs. Dee, an English teacher with 18 years of teaching experience and 3 years of new textbook experience, was recommended. At the elementary level, Mrs. Bee, young and energetic, joined the study. She has 4 years of teaching experience and more than 1 year of new book adoption experience. In Eastown, the middle school teacher was Mrs. Tee, who has taught English for 8 years with 3 years of adoption experience. Mrs. Mee, who was the elementary teacher chosen from this town, has taught English at the elementary level for 8 and has 3 years of book adoption experience as well. As general English teachers in China, all of these teachers taught English as their only subject. The elementary teachers taught English for six 40-minute periods each week, while the middle school teachers taught English for ten 40-minute periods a week.

Besides the teachers, I also interviewed Mr. Cee, the staff member who is in charge of the new textbook teaching quality in Westown, and Mrs. X, who holds the same role in Eastown. Meanwhile, I had some casual conversations with the school principals, which provided me more data for consideration.

Data Collection and Analysis

Guided by ethnographic and naturalistic methods of inquiry, from May 2004 to October 2004, I observed

the four English teachers by shadowing them for three weeks in their classroom. A total of 64 class periods were observed, with 14 visits being made to each room. Because of the distance, I spent most of May and part of June and September in Westown and most of June and part of September and October in Eastown. This was done to keep all observations of an individual teacher to a three-week window in an effort to maintain continuity. The observations were chronicled through detailed field notes. After each observation, follow-up questions or conversations were carried out with the classroom teacher to clarify or confirm my notes. Coding, categorizing, and primary data analysis occurred concurrently with the observations. Based on the analysis results, I generated questions, posited assumptions, or noted any data that needed further exploration during my next field trip. Then when I went back to the field again, I tried to test these queries, asking for clarification or answers for reliability. This circle repeatedly occurred during the data collection and analysis process until common themes emerged, leading to the answers for my research questions.

I was the sole data collector and analyst. To avoid any potential bias arising from my personal perspective, before the end of the study, I also interviewed the participating teachers about their thoughts on the new textbooks and the new textbook adoption and their understanding of how they implemented the textbooks. I viewed this set of data as complementary to my ethnographic data and essential for counterbalancing any potential for bias. Additionally, I interviewed the staff members who were in charge of the new textbook teaching qualities at the local department of education about their views on the new textbook policy and their understanding of teachers' implementation actions in general.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred at the same time as the data collection. Borko, Whitcomb, and Byrnes (2008) stated, "Data analysis is a recursive process that begins during data collection" (p. 1026). They also opined that "themes and patterns are developed both inductively from the data and deductively from the conceptual framework" (p. 1026). Throughout the data analysis process, an open coding system (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used, where I gave

titles to the events and actions that I recorded in my field notes and constantly compared them with one another to make "clusters of occurrence." Based on these clusters, I categorized or conceptualized the data and looked for commonalities among the codes, as well as for those that might raise questions for further exploration. This is referred to by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as "axial coding," which reflects the clustering of the open codes around specific "big ideas," or points of intersection. At this stage, I also examined all the categories and the subcategories to make sure that they were referring to the same phenomenon. Finally, following Strauss and Corbin (1998), I moved to "coding selection." I reviewed all the categories and made decisions about how the clusters were related to one another and what stories they told about the implementation, in addition to what and how they answered the research questions.

Findings

A common pattern was found across the research sites throughout the observed class periods. All the teachers used (1) detailed explanations of language points, such as the usage of words or phrases and grammar rules involved in the texts; (2) reading, retelling, and reciting as common instructional techniques; and (3) audio-lingual methods that habitually appeared in each class for enhancing students' listening comprehension. Based on the requirement for encouraging students to apply English language, it was observed that teachers frequently offered students opportunities to make sentences with newly learned words or phrases or to translate sentences either from Chinese to English or from English to Chinese. When students' experiences and interests were being considered, teachers usually arranged the students in pairs or groups for the practice.

Based on the cross-category comparisons between conflict theory and social action theory, various conflicts were found during implementation. In this paper, I illustrate one major conflict in each crossed-comparison: (1) the change agent conflict, (2) conflict about power, (3) conflicts from participants' interpretation of the policy, and (4) ambiguity of means for carrying out the program (See Chart 1).

The Change Agent Conflict

This change agent conflict relates to what the players' roles should be and who should play the role of

policy implementer. In policy implementation efforts, there are several possible change agents. For example, the authority behind policy change might come from the federal policymakers, departments of education, local school boards, school administration, or classroom teachers. I found that teachers across research sites viewed themselves, and were viewed by others in China, as the worker bees in adopting these books, making them the change agents.

Mrs. X, who is in charge of teaching quality, made some interesting comments in the interview related to the roles that the teachers needed to play, stating that they were simply expected to carry out the implementation as part of their normal duties. She said, regarding teachers' responsibilities:

The teachers were required to organize teaching and learning activities, facilitate students' reactions, organize teacher-student interactions, and ensure the planned lessons to be accomplished. Teachers also had to control such factors as

"teaching techniques," "degree of student noise allowable," and "degree of student movement." (Interview Notes, Eastown, Mrs. X, 08-25-2004)

Mrs. X never mentioned any other players whose role was to support the teachers in implementing the new English textbooks. Interestingly, even though her position was that of teacher quality control, she saw no role for herself as a change agent in policy implementation. From her responses, it seemed that the teachers were expected to play the role of implementers without any support from outside the classroom.

Mrs. X's understanding of who should play what roles in the new textbook adoption seemed to be aligned with the understandings of the teachers. Unfortunately, as demonstrated in other studies, this type of arrangement does not guarantee policy implementation (Cohen, 1990; Cohen & Hill, 2000). From the data, the teachers willingly assumed the responsibilities for implementation and did not look for assistance in adopting the books. The following

Chart 1: Cross-Comparison Conflicts between Conflict Theory and Social Action Theory

		Social Action Theory			
		Action as an End	Actor as an Agent and in a Situation	Constructing Meaning with People Around	Altered Behaviors
Conflict Theory	The change agent conflict • what the role is • who should play the role	Teacher alone played the role of teaching the new books			
	Who had the real power		Surface level: the teacher Hidden level: traditional Chinese culture and physical classroom condition		
	Participants' interpretation of the policy				Covering the required skills
	Ambiguity of means for carrying out the program			No guidance on how to teach the new books to address the policy-makers' intentions	

excerpt illustrates how Mrs. Tee viewed herself alone responsible for the implementation.

Me: Have you ever asked yourself why you are teaching this version of English book?

Mrs. Tee: Hmm, honestly, no.

Me: Why?

Mrs. Tee: I am a teacher. I think it's my responsibility to teach any required textbook.

Me: Do you feel that you are forced to teach the book? Especially, when there are difficulties?

Mrs. Tee: No. I am specialized in English language teaching...I am comfortable to teach any textbooks. It's a matter of format change. The basic language contents do not change.

Me: Do you have any supporting people to help you with the books? For instance, do you have any professional development program to attend?

Mrs. Tee: So far, no. But I think I can handle it. (Interview Notes, Eastown, Mrs. Tee, 05-18-04)

Mrs. Tee demonstrated her understanding of what role she should play in the process. She was very willing to incorporate the new textbook in her teaching and did not raise any concerns suggesting that she needed help. The excerpt also demonstrated Mrs. Tee's confidence in herself to successfully accomplish the task. However, based on the general pattern of teaching with the new textbook, Mrs. Tee's willingness and confidence did not help her achieve the policymakers' intentions.

Conflict About Power

Conflict about power refers to the idea of who had real power in the implementation. This study suggests that at the surface level, the classroom teachers who took full responsibility for adopting the new books demonstrated their power over the students and showed "power for implementation." They executed their authority through decision making for the class, determining what the students needed to learn and how they learned it. They seemed to do their best based on their own understanding and interpretation of the policymakers' intent.

Mrs. Tee showed her authority through calling students by name, ordering students to finish a task, and maintaining order in the class, thereby controlling the potential for policy implementation. However, if Mrs. Tee's commanding ways of teaching aroused students' interests or connected to the prior experiences of students (as required by the *NSTES*),

especially to those who were seldom or never called on, there was no data to suggest this influence. In fact, there was nothing in the data to demonstrate that Mrs. Tee had any intention of teaching toward any policy implementation standards. Her attitude indicated that she believed she had the power to implement the new textbooks in any manner she chose. This might be the reason that in the final interview, Mrs. Tee did not question whether her teaching matched with the requirements of the new standards:

Me: How do you see the connections between your teaching and the new standards requirements?

Mrs. Tee: That's a good question. Hmm...I have not got time to think about it. (Final Interview, Eastown, Mrs. Tee, 10-01-2004).

Conflicting with any power for implementation the teachers might have held, Mr. Cee, teaching quality controller in Westown, explained that the power of the traditional Chinese culture holds tremendous influence over the teachers' practice. Mr. Cee stated:

Chinese culture influences the practices of teachers in the classrooms. Teachers traditionally transfer knowledge to their students, while students play the role of receiving knowledge from their teachers. This tradition cannot be expected to change in a short time. (Interview, Westown, Mr. Cee, 07-26-2004)

The teachers are entrenched in their instructional practice, and this has a bearing on their power for implementation. The following example illustrates this phenomenon:

Mrs. Tee: Today we will do our revision first. Let's review the forms of the past continuous tense. Nancy, would you please give us an example by using past continuous tense?

Nancy [stood up, seriously]: She was drawing.

Mrs. Tee: "She was drawing" is only part of a whole sentence. Sit down. Chris, could you give us another example?

Chris: He was talking when you came in.

Mrs. Tee: Good [with a straight face]. Be quiet, class. Bob, could you tell us another sentence?

Bob: We were reading the books when the class began. (Observation Notes, Eastown, Mrs. Tee, 09-28-2004)

This was a very traditional approach to the instruction. There seemed to be no infusion of the new

standards in this interaction with students. The training the teachers received for maintaining order in the classroom, instructing directly to the curriculum, and limiting student interaction were all factors that worked against the teachers' power for implementation, despite the assumption that they are the agents of change.

Whole-Class Teaching: A Favored Approach for the Crowded Classrooms

Along with the influence of the traditional Chinese culture, the functional barriers from the physical characteristics of the classrooms disempowered the participating teachers' implementation capacity as well. Classrooms are crowded with students, necessitating an extensive amount of student desks and chairs, leaving very little room for movement or collaborative work. Given the large class sizes, averaging about 60 students in each teacher's room, the teachers favored a one-size-fits-all model of instruction. This model consisted primarily of direct instruction through whole-class activities, such as lectures, questions/response, or skill/drill practices (Field Notes, 09-23-2004). Information was transmitted through writing key words, phrases, or sentences on the board.

Two examples of this direct instruction were:

[On the blackboard]:

Beside the big picture of a brown bear, the teacher wrote "Big Bear" in English. Then she wrote "in the woods..." (Observation Notes, Westown, Mrs. Bee, 06-09-2004)

Mrs. Bee continued writing more major language points, such as "searching" and "walking," for the whole class. Similarly, Mrs. Mee's case showed the same tendency:

Mrs. Mee: Then we need to look at "take it/them off." This is a phrase. You can use it when the object is singular and use "them" when the object is plural: take it (cloth) off, take them (trousers) off. [Teacher wrote the phrases on the blackboard.]

Mrs. Mee: We need to know "be angry with somebody," "be angry at somebody," and "be angry to do something." [Teacher wrote the three phrases related to "angry" on the board]. Now read after me: Be angry with somebody.

Students: Be angry with somebody. (Observation Notes, Eastown, Mrs. Mee, 06-28-2004)

Although this method offered collective learning

opportunities, it limited opportunities to address individual students' interests, backgrounds, learning level, and questions; all key components of the NSTES.

Conflicts from Participants' Interpretation of the Policy

This conflict revolved around the participants' interpretation of the intention of the legislation. From the study, a general pattern was found across the sites that the teachers viewed themselves as classroom leaders and change agents who were responsible for teaching the new textbooks successfully. The new textbooks emphasized that teachers help students master the skills in speaking, listening, reading, writing, and language comprehension. From the observation data, it seemed that the teachers carefully organized activities around each of these skills to make sure their teaching met the requirement. However, there was not much evidence to suggest consideration was given to students' life experiences, interests, or cognitive level as required in the NSTES (Field Notes, 06-10-04). It was found that the students were pushed from one exercise to another. Sometimes, the teachers used both Chinese and English languages in giving directions, but they still fell short of expectations. The following example demonstrates how Mrs. Bee tried to meet the requirements:

This is a 35-minute major teaching excerpt. This excerpt occurred after Mrs. Bee's class reviewed the content they learned on the previous day. During this section, Mrs. Bee arranged the first 8 minutes for students to *listen* to and repeat after the audiotapes, which contained seven language phrases, such as "no food" and "don't litter." Mrs. Bee explained the directions both in English and in Chinese. The students followed the instruction and listened to the tape the first time and then repeated after the tape the second time. Eight minutes exactly covered the listening and repeating activities. Then during the next 10 minutes, students practiced *speaking*. Mrs. Bee called the students' names while she was pointing to a picture, which indicated the phrases they listened before. The student whose name was called would stand up and give the answer, such as "no parking" or "don't touch." After several practices, Mrs. Bee asked the class to do the same thing in pairs, with the directions being given both in English and in Chinese. While students were practicing in pairs, Mrs. Bee circu-

lated in the room to correct any mistakes she heard. When the 10-minute period was over, the class moved to a 5-minute *comprehension* practice. During this time, Mrs. Bee asked the students to do actions together while she was speaking the phrases loudly, such as “don’t touch” and “touch.” The students reacted correspondingly. Afterwards, the class started their practice for *writing* for 10 minutes. Mrs. Bee asked her students to take out a piece of paper and draw pictures based on what she said. The students started to draw pictures, such as “no food,” “no camera,” etc. Before the end of the class, Mrs. Bee spent 2 minutes asking the students to put their paper on the desk and the last student in each row collected them for her. Within the 2 minutes, Mrs. Bee also gave the assignment to the students: listen to the tape and learn the song on the tape.

Class is over. (Field Notes, Westtown, Mrs. Bee, 06-10-2004)

The condensed activities in this description were not unusual among the observed classes. The fast pace of the activities guaranteed that all the required skills—listening, speaking, comprehension, and writing—were covered in the teaching but not in the manner required. With such a fast pace, it seemed difficult for students to digest and reflect on what they learned. With Mrs. Bee’s teacher-centered instructional model, how could her students apply what they learned to appropriate language contexts? Indeed, how could the slow students in the class catch up with what was taught and what should have been learned? Moving at such a pace, how could Mrs. Bee reach the ideals for student participation and collaboration as desired by the new standards?

Conflict for Ambiguity of Means for Carrying Out the Policy

This conflict addresses the clarity of the process for carrying out the programs. The study revealed a common theme that the teachers were not given clear guidance on the process of adopting the new textbooks. This was most likely a contributing factor to the variance in policy interpretation. Surprisingly, however, none of the participants questioned or complained about the ambiguity of the policy. As mentioned before, Mrs. Tee was very confident that she was doing what she was supposed to do in her

teaching. Mrs. Bee used fast-paced instruction to cover all the strategies required by the policy without considering the learning results. Mrs. Dee, from Westtown, had the similar feeling about the implementation.

Me: I noticed that you wrote on the board to teach students the language points. Was that something required by the new textbook implementation?

Mrs. Dee: No. There was no specific guidance on how to teach the books, except the teacher’s handbook, which illustrates the major language points.

Me: Then was it something you learned about how to teach the new textbook?

Mrs. Dee: No. I have been using this method for a long time, and I found it worked well with my students, especially when they tried to learn new language points.

Me: Where did you learn about the method?

Mrs. Dee: That’s a good question. ... I guess from my teaching experience.

Me: Have you had any professional development programs that helped you learn how to teach the new textbook or that support you in implementing the new textbook?

Mrs. Dee: So far, I have not heard about any. But you know, I am, I am pretty busy every day. Probably, I missed something. (After-Class Conversation, Westtown, Mrs. Dee, 06-11-04)

From the above conversation, it was clear that how to implement the new books at the classroom level was ambiguous. Mrs. Dee did not get any support from others about how the books should be taught and what possible teaching strategies she could have used. The question of how teacher professional development might influence the teachers’ interpretation of the policy and possibly reduce ambiguity arose, so I queried the two teaching quality controllers. This was their response to the function of professional development:

Mr. Cee: I observe teachers’ teaching, write notes, and afterwards debrief with the teacher how the teaching goes.

Me: Sounds like a lot of work. When you debrief with the teacher, do you show the teachers how to teach the textbook?

Mr. Cee: Yes. I let the observed teacher know which part of the teaching went well and which part did not.

Me: You use a form for this?

Mr. Cee: Yes.

Me: Oh, are there any items about “addressing students’ interests, backgrounds,” etc., as required by the new standards?

Mr. Cee: Oh, no, no.

Me: In your part, do you do any training to help the teachers’ new textbook implementation?

Mr. Cee: No. I am evaluation personnel. I only do evaluations.

Me: Are there any other personnel who provide trainings to the teachers for implementation?

Mr. Cee: I do not think so. (Interview, Westtown, Mr. Cee, 07-26-2004)

Mr. Cee further indicated that the new policy did not provide clear guidance, not even on the evaluation form. If there were not any specific details about how the new textbooks should be taught and how the teaching should be assessed, what expectations should policymakers have for the teachers?

Discussion

In reviewing the findings, the social action theory provided a solid foundation and analytical lens. Based on the theory, the following themes were considered: (1) constructing meaning with people around, (2) action as an end, (3) actor as an agent in a situation, and (4) altered behaviors.

The biggest lesson learned from this research is that a long-existing hidden culture plays a critical role in policy implementation. In this case, Chinese culture virtually guarantees the observed practices, which makes co-construction of meaning with students in the process impossible. The long-held tradition of teachers as the authority can be traced back to the War Period (475–221 B.C.) when Mengzi (372–289 B.C.) pointed out to his king, “Knowledgeable people are the teachers of the Kings and Dukes so that those people should be respected, even by Kings and Dukes” (Miao, 1992). These cultural rules, as illustrated by Angus (1998) as “informal rules,” are obtained through daily behaviors and activities and regulate people’s behaviors in their daily work and everyday life. In China, this philosophy has been observed for thousands of years.

As a result, the teachers were viewed and viewed themselves as solely responsible for textbook implementation. They took full responsibility for teaching the new textbooks to reach the requirements,

without seeking help or input from others. It was observed that the teachers did not co-construct meaning for the implementation with other educators. Teachers maintained a rigid demeanor; students only spoke when called on and only in response to a direct question, which eliminated the possibility for a free-flow exchange of ideas. In such a teaching environment, the teachers were not able to integrate their students’ learning desires, interests, and life experiences into the lessons they were teaching. This instructional style has been ingrained in Chinese education and created a barrier to the implementation of the policymakers’ intent.

The second lesson learned from the study is that policymakers need to take the policy implementation contexts into consideration. China has a large population in both middle schools and primary schools. Overcrowding is most prevalent in the high-achievement schools, such as Westtown and Easttown. In the classes observed, there were about 60 students in each class. The classrooms were so crowded that the first row of the student desks were against the teacher’s desk, which was on the front platform for teacher’s to stand on (about four meters long across the front wall and one meter wide from the front wall), while the last row was against the classroom’s back wall.

Although the data suggested that a large burden for implementation fell to the teachers and thus the failure to implement was a reflection on them, these findings were not meant to suggest that the teachers were unwilling to implement or incapable of change. For example, besides whole-class instruction, pair work or small-group activities became other favored strategies in the teachers’ efforts for implementation. Mrs. Bee was particularly fond of these new methods and commented:

The practice of teaching English based on the textbook in pair work or group work is one of the best ways to enhance students’ cognitive levels, as well as matching students’ interests and experiences....When they practice in pairs or groups, they use sentences that they know. This addresses their experience. (After-Class Conversation, Westtown, Mrs. Bee, 05-11-2004).

Mrs. Tee also involved pair work in her instructional practice. For example:

Mrs. Tee: Now, let’s do our exercise 2 on page 121. “Looking at the pictures, think about the questions you would like to ask your partner/s.

Then tell your partner/s what and why you think about the question in the way it is." I would like you to give your answers to your partner/s and explain to them your reasons.

[Students working in pairs, asking and answering questions automatically. Mrs. Tee was circulating in the classroom.] (Observation Notes, Eastown, Mrs. Tee, 10-19-2004)

Mrs. Tee used pair or small-group work to address the requirements from the *NSTES*. In the paired activities, students shared with each other their stories and experiences (Observation Notes of Mrs. Tee, Eastown, 10-19-2004). However, based on my observation, she never used groups larger than four students. Other teachers demonstrated a similar tendency toward smaller groups in their teaching as well. Mrs. Bee made a very illuminating comment when she said, "Pair work addressed the requirement for 'cultivating the ability of collaboration,' while the class is kept in order" (Interview Notes, Westown, Mrs. Bee, 09-28-2004).

The problem with these attempts at teaching to the new standards was that the forming of pairs as observed was limited in the sense that students' partners were fixed to those who sat around them and the pair work time was limited. This seat-restricted pair collaboration did not match the policymakers' intentions of authentic "active learning" and goals for "addressing students' interests."

Chinese policymakers should have been familiar with these inherent restrictions to implementation and how they would affect the teachers' ability to adapt to the *NSTES*'s concepts for teaching. The failure to address the problem prior to pushing for reform resulted in an infeasible and unrealistic policy action.

The third lesson learned from the study was that policymakers need to make sure that professional development programs are aligned to support teachers in carrying out new policy implementation. The new document required teachers to teach the five skills—listening, speaking, reading, writing, and language comprehension—and the teachers altered their actions to involve activities that addressed these abilities. However, without any knowledge, skill, or technique training, the teachers were not able to teach in a more flexible, comprehensive, student-centric manner.

The uniform results from this study across the grades and locations demonstrated that the policy-

makers' intentions alone could not lead to improved teaching and higher student achievement (Cohen, 1990; Cohen & Hill, 2000; & Wilson, 2003). This case is similar to David Cohen's (1990) chronicle of Mrs. Oublier, a 2nd grade mathematics teacher, in her attempts to implement California's new state-mandated policy for math instruction in her classroom. She paid a lot of attention to the manipulative she wanted her students to use but showed little concern for how well her students understood the concepts. Identically, the hope that, by adopting the new English textbooks for matching the standards document, teachers would teach in a new way and students would have new experiences with English learning seems not to have come to fruition. This, again, proves the argument of Wilson and Berne (1999) that the change of only curriculum would not change teaching practice directly.

As Spillane and Jennings (1997) argued, aligned policies and reforms can encourage teachers' instructional changes, but other factors, such as the surrounding cultures of the policy and the realities of the physical classroom, affect the results of the implementation as well. Thus, to achieve the policy intention of shifting to a more balanced approach in teaching English subject matter, teachers might need to be (1) provided with the opportunities to clarify and reinforce the intentions of the new policy, (2) aided to overcome the influences of the Chinese culture, and (3) assisted to understand how to better use available physical classroom space.

This study, while providing insight for policymakers in China, might also offer a warning for U.S. policymakers, educators, and teachers. Currently, education reforms in the United States are increasingly coming from the state or national level, with a more centralized control over education. U.S. education policymakers might want to take the Chinese teachers' experiences into consideration. Because this study revealed the critical influence of China's traditional culture and the impact of teaching context, it might be worthwhile for U.S. educators to think about the hidden rules in the United States, which might hinder any reform initiatives. In general, policymakers in both countries should not oversimplify the implementation process.

Notes:

1. There are different titles for this targeted teaching approach. Based on the Hadley's theory (2001), this

article uses “communicative ways of teaching.” Ouyang (2003) called the teaching approach “communicative language teaching (CLT), which advocates student-centeredness, communicative learning, a humanistic approach, and practical learning” (p. 121). Also Hu (2005) illustrates the teaching strategy as “communicative competence in English”, consisting of “linguistic competence,” “socio-linguistic competence,” “discourse competence,” and “strategic competence” (p. 658).

2. All the names used in the article are pseudonyms.

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