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16. CONCEPTIONS OF TEXTBOOKS BY CHINESE TEACHERS IN MAINLAND CHINA

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past two decades, the beliefs and conceptions of teachers have been debated by scholars, educational officials, and even parents in the teacher research field. Unless stereotype conceptions of teachers are transformed, any ideal blueprint of curriculum reform will unlikely be achieved. After examining the conceptions of teaching of 13 academic teachers using semi-structured interviews, Samuelowicz and Bain (1992) have identified five qualitatively different conceptions of teaching, listed in descending order as follows: to support student learning; as an activity aimed at changing students' conception of the world; to facilitate understanding; to transmit knowledge and the attitudes towards this knowledge within the subject discipline; and to impart information. Many similar studies exist (Kember, 1997; Kember and Kwan, 2000; Murray and Macdonald 1997; Kember, Kwan, and Ledesma, 2001; Åkerlind, 2003, 2007; Chan, Tan, and Khoo, 2007). Most studies depict teaching as transmission of knowledge towards student development. In fact, a consensus focusing on teachers and their strategies towards student learning has been reached (González, 2011).

Additionally, in the investigation by Kember and Kwan (2000) of conception of teaching among 17 university teachers, the teachers were expected to reflect on their concept of "good teaching," the kinds of motivational strategies they used, their expectations for student learning, and their understanding of effective teaching. Elley (2006) recruited 23 university teachers ranging from lecturer to associate professor rank, who were asked to describe how they prepared certain recent class presentations. Tuul, Ugaste, and Mikser (2011) adopted a semi-structure interview to investigate 31 experienced pre-school teachers' perceptions of the curriculum before and after the Soviet era. Teachers generally comprehended the meaning and conceptions of the curriculum designed by the curriculum makers and theorists; however, they lacked assistance in implementing the autonomy and self-responsibility imposed on them by the curriculum. A research conducted by Jackson (2010) reconstructs the university's conception of life-wide curriculum using a work-integrated learning (WIL) scheme. Such studies facilitate changes in curriculum, teaching, and learning to some extent.

In response to worldwide wave of curriculum reform, the Ministry of Education in China launched a new round of school curriculum reform in 2001, spurring teachers to change their traditional ideas and conceptions of teaching, learning, and curriculum

CHEN

materials in favor of the dynamic and long-lasting reform slogan “for every student’s development and for student’s every aspect’s development.” Many scholars have published numerous articles on changing existing teacher conceptions, especially on curriculum and textbook, which were previously focused on pure transmission of knowledge based on responsibilities prescribed by traditional teaching. Liu and Luo (2004) assert the conceptions of ecological curriculum, whereas Wang (2010) advocates hermeneutical curriculum. Chen (2007) proposes constructive curriculum, whereas Yang (2002) puts forwards the conception of a curriculum of transcending knowledge, and so on. Undoubtedly, these studies facilitate the theoretical development of the curriculum and subject matter. These studies may also stimulate teachers to abandon their traditional conceptions of teaching and textbooks. Unfortunately, purely theoretical exploration of curriculum, as mentioned above, cannot provide a compelling account of, much less, solve, the practical perplexities faced by teachers in the classroom. Many political and reform slogans that isolate teachers’ daily teaching routines, such as the one mentioned previously, are bound to suffer resistance from teachers. Although no strong opposition is evident from the teachers, the effectiveness of out-of-practice research remains questionable. Schwab (1970) asserts that the idealized conceptions of curriculum, mostly originating from theory, could be mistaken for “real things real acts, real teachers, real children...” He adds that a curriculum “will deal badly with real things if it treats them merely as replicas of their theoretic representations” (p. 27).

Although the discussion of conceptions of curriculum and teaching has exploded, few concerns pertain to the conception of subject matter or textbook. In addition, many realities remain concealed due to the lack of exploration on teacher conceptions of textbooks, which directly affect teaching behavior and effectiveness. In order to enhance the implementation of curriculum reform, provide constructive advice on compiling and developing instructional materials, and address concerns in teacher conceptions of textbooks, researchers should adopt a shift in paradigm from theoretical epistemology to grounding accounts. Exploring teachers’ conceptions of textbooks (TCT) in specific schooling contexts is vital.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

Research Question

What is the conception of textbook (CT)? To answer this question, let us first review the definition of a textbook. Different people hold different opinions. Rather than cling to any of these, this researcher will initially present various conceptions of textbooks. Since Crech educationist Comenius published the first children’s reader “Orbis Sensualium Pictus” (World Graphic) in 1657, the evolution of textbooks has changed dramatically. At that time, the textbook was regarded as an encyclopedia that learners must learn and master. Therefore, learning the prescriptive knowledge is prioritized in textbooks. As Grand (1987) claims, the traditional textbook attempts

encourage students to learn the language as a system. Once learned, the students are expected to apply this system in any situation they encounter. However, Purves (1993) contends that a textbook is a subset of teaching media. The textbook itself should complement other media such as hands-on materials, anthologies, offprint, databases, and others. In this sense, textbooks embrace content that surpasses the one-dimensional official or academic texts. Textbook coverage is further developed as the world moves rapidly into a high-tech virtual reality and the information era. Instructional packaging is gradually becoming a cardinal element of textbooks. Calfee & Chambliss (1999) claims that textbooks not only provide integrated instructional packages bolstered with diverse supplements, but also cover ample content for learners to study or experience. She highlights the function of textbook to be both instrumental and mind-nurturing. Current research is inclined towards using the term “curriculum,” rather than “textbook,” because the former is wider than the latter in terms of both content and categories. For instance, Marsh (2011) lists six prevalent definitions of curriculum, ranging from secular knowledge to contemporary living, learning experiences, learning site, and human situations. Because curriculum and textbook have similar, sometimes interchangeable, meanings, and some definitions of curriculum are also suitable for textbooks from a broad perspective. Walker (2003) contends that the curriculum includes at least three elements: content, purpose, and organization. Tyler (1949) has constructed four steps for creating a curriculum: educational purpose, selection, organization, and evaluation of learning experience. These steps include the objective, origination, construction, and evaluation of learning content. As mentioned above, the terms curriculum and textbook can be interchangeable in a broad sense. Therefore, the CT can be viewed as the comprehension by teachers of a textbook, including both its features and function. This conception contains knowledge content, nature, function of learning experience, and expresses the views of the values, roles, assessment criteria, and adaptation of textbooks (Ren, 2003) in terms of the goal, content, structure, and teaching performance. Therefore, the TCT can be assumed as their perceptions of objectives, contents, structure, and adaptation of textbooks.

This study endeavors to address the following questions:

1. What types of CTs do the teachers hold?
2. What are the characteristics of TCT in four dimensions: objective, content, structure, and teaching of textbook?
3. What is the overview of TCT?
4. What are the relations among different TCT?

Methodology

John Dewey, a renowned thinker in education, suggests that our experiences are central to our work. He further claims that experience is a crucial factor in interpreting matters behind surface phenomena, and helps us analyze and understand

the type of learning, as well as the manner by which it takes place in the classroom. Experience also facilitates our understanding of human thinking. Unlike quantitative research, which deals with numbers and employs statistical model to illustrate data, qualitative research strives to avoid numbers, and deals with “interpreting” social reality through the language, gesture, voice, image, and so on. Because conception is implicit, invisible, and even blurred, a statistical survey hardly explores the deep implication of the conceptions of human being. Therefore, qualitative research approach is used in this study. Six Chinese teachers, aged 29–34 years old were selected from a pool of volunteers at a primary school in Pearl Delta of South China. Two methods were chosen to aid teachers in the explication of TCT: (a) semi-structured, in-depth interviews; and (b) stimulated recall interviews covering the use of videotapes of lessons taught by the teachers to prompt them to recall aspects of their TCTs. Considering the integrated school year, a one-year longitudinal research with four formal interviews and some informal ones was conducted. The interviews included the following questions:

- (a) What is your opinion of current textbooks?
- (b) How do you understand the objectives of textbooks?
- (c) What is your idea of the content of textbooks?
- (d) What do you think of the ideal organization of a textbook and what elements are involved in the organization? In your opinion, what content should be embraced in the textbooks?

Each question above was divided into many subtopics in the interviews. The data were recorded by recorders and video cameras, transcribed verbatim, and coded then and recoded according to the relationship among their conversations, the teaching observations of the researcher, and between these two aspects.

FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

As mentioned previously, the framework for this study consists of four dimensions: CT objectives, content, structure, and teaching. These dimensions are based on Ralph W. Tyler’s (1949) basic principles for curriculum and instruction: (a) seek school educational purposes, (b) select educational experiences, (c) effectively organize educational experiences, and (d) assess the purposes attained. Shi L.F (1996) has put forward procedures for curriculum development (including setting curriculum objectives, selecting and organizing curriculum content, implementing curriculum, and evaluating curriculum). A comparison of the two kinds of curriculum development shows that Shi’s framework is similar to Tyler’s rationale. From the perspective of curriculum development and implementation, what should be taught should be first decided, followed by development and selection of learning opportunities, design and organization of classroom activities, and finally, evaluation of learning outcomes (Meneil, 1996; Doll, 1995; Pratt, 1994).

CT objectives. Objectives refer to the learning outcomes that students are expected to achieve after a period of learning within and outside the classroom. Many synonyms, such as “outcomes,” “goals,” “aims,” “purpose,” and “intention,” are used (Marsh, 2009); however, the major terms are undoubtedly “objectives,” “standards,” or “outcomes.” Pratt (1994) contends that objectives can consist of knowledge, skills, attitudes, processes, and experiences according to what learners should learn, how they perform their responsibilities, and how they feel about themselves and others. In light of learning continuity, these objectives need to be aligned with an integrated streamline. According to the perspective of sociologists, textbook objectives should adopt a coherent curriculum, comprehensibility standards, and student-centered instruction as their evaluation criteria (Calfee & Chambliss, 1998). These objectives embody textbook coherence, comprehensibility of knowledge, and learnability of instructional content. From the view of pragmatics, the textbook objectives refer to a standard that provides learners with basic facts, concepts, and generative inference in further learning. These objectives can be divided into “behavioral objectives, enacted purpose, and performance objectives”. With regard to the studies above, we assert that CT objectives comprise the teacher’s understanding of the function of the textbook itself, behavioral objectives, and formative objectives conducted in the classroom.

CT content. Based on the objectives of textbooks, what should be taught in the classroom is developed: the textbook content, which deals with the range of topics contained in the textbook. Wang (2003) believes that textbook content reflects what is taught, for example, the teaching and learning materials within the textbook. Borrowing the three origins of educational objectives from Tyler’s rationale (Tyler, 1949), this study views textbook content as encompassing both external content (graphic system, arrangement, and material sources) and essential content (thinking system, knowledge system, etc.). This research mainly focuses on essential content.

After the selection of textbook content, the textbook is ready to be organized logically, psychologically, socially, and contextually, in line with the principles of textbook compilation and curriculum organization. Thus, textbook structure, which pertains to the compilation system, is the third stage and an important part of textbook creation. It integrates subject structure with instructional structure, both surface and in-depth (Ding, 2001). Subject structure involves the knowledge, skills, and methods in textbooks, while teaching structure pertains to the placement or arrangement of knowledge, skill, method, affect, attitudes, and values embodied by the textbook. The in-depth structure consists of the elements of knowledge and affect, whereas the surface structure includes the system of characters and graphs. Because knowledge structure of textbook will be explored in textbook content, the current study only explores the teaching structure and in-depth structure of textbooks in this research.

Teaching is the implementation of curriculum and instructional materials, especially the implementation of the textbook distributed by the government and commercial publications. How to understand the use of textbooks, or teaching, relates to the events that transpire in the authentic classroom that bring a lasting impact on the quality of student learning. Consequently, CT teaching is closely

CHEN

associated with, and follows, the textbook content. TCT portray how the teacher handles his/her teaching in the classroom. They describe what kind of teaching a teacher expects (Gao, 2004). Likewise, they reflect the relationship between the individual learner and his own experience. Based on the definition of conception of teaching, CT teaching shows how the teacher selects the instructional content, and his methods and strategies for redesigning instructional materials.

FINDINGS

Conservatism-oriented Conceptions of Textbooks (CCT): I Yield to What the Educational Authorities Require Me to Do.

Teachers who uphold CCT strongly asserted that the local government's semester test is a priority among all teaching objectives because the teacher's appraisal system is based on this test; the appeal of educational scholars for the wholistic development of children is neglected. As Teacher A confessed, "Although test is not the exclusive target of textbook, it is still the fundamental goal for teachers and students. If your students fail in their exams, or the textbook doesn't contain all the testing contents, we deem the textbook [as] useless." Undoubtedly, the textbook should cover the basic knowledge, skills, and methodology that students need to master; at the same time, textbook objectives are expected to be based on the subject matter syllabus/standard which presents the basic testing standards for all students. Teachers expressed belief that testing by local educational authorities is the dominant objective of textbooks; hence, textbooks must be strictly followed regardless of the possible defects of the test itself (e.g., stereotyped, outdated questions), which may hinder student development.

Because the requirements of national curriculum standards are unclear, when the test paper does not totally follow the textbook, the teacher is assumed as "all at sea, completely at a loss," to quote a Chinese proverb because they do not know how to select other instructional materials outside the textbook. Curriculum expert Oliver (1977) contends that curriculum reform is always confronted with resistance from the teachers because of stereotypes, and the feeling of insecurity, incompetence, insufficient time and funds required in its implementation. American scholar Harvey (1990) lists 12 factors impeding the implementation of curriculum reform, one of which is "insecurity" among teachers. From the point of view of teachers, the goal of the textbook not only facilitates students' development as human beings, but also helps in their acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. According to Teacher B,

"In addition, the textbook must help students purify their souls...they can be affected through text learning. For example, I remember the topic of one lesson I taught was blood transfusion. It describes one child was dying because he lost too much blood. The other boy, although being scared of seeing the blood losing, was willing to transfuse his blood to the dying child. The story not only inculcates that we need to help others when they are in trouble or in emergency situation, but also let students be affected through learning. As a result,

their minds can be nurtured, affected, and awakened and the significance of education will be deeply ingrained in their minds.”

Rather than highlighting the nurture of children, Teacher C affirmed that the most important function of a textbook is in serving as a doctrine for the teacher to teach and the learners to learn, in order to cater to local government mandate on tests (proper reference is needed.) As Teacher C asserted,

“Frankly speaking, the textbook has two fundamental functions: the bible for teaching and the scale for test. We don’t know what and how to teach without official textbooks because for one thing we can’t find other curriculum resources, and for the other thing the teachers are reluctant to collect and search off-textbook materials because it costs a lot of time that the teacher cannot afford. The spurring motivation for us to attend textbook analysis training hosted by educational authority is to learn about what the testing contents of this semester will be. Who cares [about] the other issues such as facilitating students’ development, creatively adapting textbook in classroom? ”

Textbook content mainly covers illustration, text, teacher book, and, form of workbook, including words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and texts that comprise knowledge content. As Teacher A remarked, “As a basic vehicle for other subjects’ learning, Chinese course plays a critical role in helping learners learn new words, understand its implication within the text, and comprehend the logic[al] relationship among paragraphs or sentences. Only with this can it serve for other subjects’ learning.” In terms of the knowledge content, textbooks should contain words, phrases, sentences, paraphrases, and text. When asked, “How do you choose textbook content?” that the teachers replied that they neither had an idea nor the freedom to select textbooks, but merely complied by adopting the institutional textbook mandated by the educational authorities. When asked, “How do you understand the origin of textbook content?” Teacher C, after some deliberation, smilingly replied, “Does it not come from experts’ hands like yours? What matters to us is how to teach the textbook, not where it came from. But one thing is certain: the content must connect with students’ daily life and authentic social context. Currently, most of the textbook content is acceptable but some of it is obscure, obsolete, and tedious. For example, some ancient prose can be very abstruse, or topics such as snow are far from the southern children’s daily life, because they have never seen the snow in their homeland of south China.” Teacher A seemed to hold the same opinion, “I hope more content will be relevant to real life, especially children’s lives. Part of textbook content deviates from current social life; it is hard for students to learn, and their learning motivation cannot be spurred.”

When textbook structure was discussed, most teachers expressed support for theme-based textbook organization because this allows students to learn systematical knowledge from each unit. This technique is also very flexible for students to learn due to the flexibility of content embraced in the textbook. In their eyes, the textbook

CHEN

structure covers passage/text and exercise. All must be associated with one topic within a unit and a book. As Teacher A revealed,

“In order for teachers to better understand the textbook designer’s intention, and at the same time, develop students’ logical thinking and cultivate their systematic knowledge, an axis must be threaded through both each teaching unit and the whole book. We know that English textbook has a clear clue unlike the Chinese textbook, for example, if you open the English textbook (published by both Oxford press and People’s Education press), you will see the topic “tiger” distinctly running through the book. It leads you to the park and to conducting a dialogue with him, and it also shows you some games. However, Chinese textbook contents are compiled in isolation and we cannot find the continuity or coherence in the textbook.”

As Chambliss (1998) suggests, “coherent structure is a critical feature for effective text design. Structure provides the linkages that hold the design together.” Influenced by traditionally pedagogical conception, these teachers seemed more concerned with the academic knowledge in textbooks rather than affective education and perseverance quality which may have a profound impact on students’ present growth and future achievement. In addition, influenced by the innate conception of schooling, these teachers stressed academic knowledge over affective, methodological knowledge when the researcher asked regarding the kind of knowledge that they believed the textbook needed to cover in terms of structure. However, the latter may have a profound impact on students’ present mental growth and future success in their vocation.

How do the teachers illustrate CT teaching? Without hesitation, they answered “teaching paper by paper, syllabus by syllabus.” They expressed that teaching resources are exclusively documentary textbooks and teachers’ books, and thus dominate what and how they should teach. Teachers prefer being told directly what the teaching method is from the textbook instead of exploring the method by themselves. In short, they seemed most concerned about whether a textbook is suitable for teachers to imitate mechanically and use it in their own class. As they frankly revealed, “no textbook, no teaching.” We often expect the teacher to transcend the textbook while teaching; however, some teachers still hold a traditional view of textbooks. As one teacher explicitly stated, “Only under the instruction of textbooks can we not lose our way in completing the preset teaching objectives in the textbook.” In their eyes, “textbook” and teaching were equivalent terms.

Eclectic CT: Two Steps Back and One Step Forward

Teacher D revealed that the objectives of a textbook not only cultivate positive values and philosophy of life in juveniles, but also simultaneously improve their competence in literacy and writing. Similar to teachers with a conservative CT, teachers with an eclectic CT agreed that textbooks are ample measures for testing because the teachers’ appraisal system is associated with the learners’ testing scores. Only when “the

livelihood” (test) is met can the teacher handle other objectives, such as students mental, affective and continuing development. Consequently, the teacher prioritizes improving student grades over cultivating their competence. In this sense, when confronted with conflicts in enforcing tests from local educational authorities, in realizing the teaching objectives of the textbook, and in promoting individual development, the teacher has to weigh the significance of each alternative against two issues: how to cater to the external test standard and at the same time facilitate students’ wholistic development. Undoubtedly, the teacher often prioritizes the former over the latter.

The teachers expressed agreement of textbook content as having a broad spectrum of knowledge resources across interdisciplinary subjects and areas involving knowledge on both urban and rural, contemporary life, and future life preparation of learners. For instance, in the text entitled “The first snow” (an excerpt from a Chinese language textbook for Grade 3 students, People’s Education Press of China), although the Pearl Delta of Guangdong Province (South China) has never experienced snow, the text is acceptable and necessary for the learners in gaining knowledge outside their daily lives for their future. Such a scenario is different from the conservative conception of textbooks in which the teachers only care about the current and visible life that they can experience by themselves. A teacher with an eclectic conception of textbooks views such content as containing mass culture, in addition to the elite culture. However, the ideological culture must be reduced to a great extent. For example, a text entitled “The Bridge” (Book 9, Grade 5, Chinese language) portrays a communist as saving other people’s lives at the expense of his own life. However, the topic is quite discrete from the daily lives of students because adolescents aged 12–13 years are unlikely to understand the obscure political ideal and spirit of self-sacrifice. Although they may be willing to sacrifice themselves in order to save another person, the act of sacrifice should not be imbued with such blind, self-sacrificed morality, which is far beyond their capability and thinking. Many innocent lives could have been saved had we cultivated teenagers properly.

How should textbook structure be understood? Teacher D expressed support for theme-based compilation and combining spiral principles into textbook writing, given the learning differences among individual students. The CT held by Teacher D can be regarded as pedagogical organization.

In CT teaching, Teacher D expressed strong belief in the authority of the textbook. “I’ll teach what the textbook shows me” is ingrained in her mind, although she occasionally extends beyond textbook materials when frustrated by students’ questions in the classroom. In addition, she adds and deletes content when adapting a textbook in order to suit the learning demands of various students.

Data from interviews, classroom observation, lesson planning, and teaching reflection shows that Teacher D proposed that the textbook should guide and meet teachers’ demands in both teaching methods and content. The teacher should find materials to supplement textbook content. Although Teacher D adheres to the authority of the textbook in teaching, she considers the development of competence in students in preparation for their future lives and career. Teachers with such conception do not

CHEN

thoroughly abide by the textbook, neither do they delete or add to the context of the textbook; they simply employ a trivial adaptation of the textbook while teaching.

Generative CT (GCT): Beyond the Ordinary Teachers' horizon

Teachers with GCT asserted that the fundamental goal of a textbook is to enhance the wholistic development of learners, including knowledge acquisition and skill development, positive affective experience, and the spurring and maintenance of learning motivation. Teacher E expressed belief that the textbook plays an important role in preparing the life-long development of students, in addition to providing basic knowledge and developing basic skills. Learners do not live by books but through application of knowledge into their lives. Whole-person education pursues the overall development of the human being, and considers the “integrated person,” upholding the integrity of the human body, mind, vitality, and spirit as a unit; the stimulation of affection, mind, inspiration, and intuition; the development of imagination, innovation, and multi-intelligences; and the harmonious development between human being and nature, person and person, people and society. In conclusion, the teachers with GCT not only seemed to possess a comprehensive and profound understanding of the three dimensions of curriculum objectives of the Chinese Basic Education Curriculum Standards, as launched by the Ministry of Education in 2001 (e.g., knowledge and skills; learning process and method; affect, attitudes, and values), but also seemed to place a high regard on the instrumental and humanity functions of textbooks.

The teachers expressed belief that the textbook needs to be connected with the students' lives and that such connection should be a priority in selecting textbook content. As clarified by Teacher E, student survival skills, peace, justice, and knowledge extension should be incorporated into textbook content. Second, content should cover interdisciplinary knowledge such as history, literature, poem, geography, and others since human beings are social creatures that construct social significance through living experiences and social interaction. Both classical text and the values of different social classes are considered. According to Teacher F, teaching content is a firm foundation for students' life-long development, extending beyond the limitations of a “documentary” textbook, constituting morality, behavior habits, history, high technology and so on. Third, both commonplace and elite cultures are reflected in a textbook. Teacher F claimed that a textbook should include, not only great figures and elite living, but also the ordinary person and civilian life. Occasionally, some form of masterpiece can be directly infused into the learning content. Going “beyond the ordinary,” Teacher F explained, is going beyond what is in the textbook. In Western countries such as the US, the UK, and Canada, anthologies are widely used as textbooks in elementary and middle schools. However, the schools in China seldom adopt anthologies due to long-term dominance of textbooks prescribed by the governments and the highly unaffordable book fees. The teachers expressed awareness of the significance of extending textbook content

and of learning from masterpieces or classics such as “Journey to the West” (written by Wu Cheng’en) and “Romance of the Three Kingdoms” (written by Shi Nai’an). British curriculum expert Lawton (1983) views curriculum “as a selection from the culture.” As the main carrier of the curriculum, the textbook should present the preferences or values of the different social classes. According to John Dewey (1916), subject matter (textbook) “consists of the facts observed, recalled, read, and talked about, and the ideas suggested, in [the] course of develop[ing] a situation having a purpose.” The life-oriented textbook typically reflects Dewey’s experienced CT. Thus, textbook content not only covers knowledge pertaining to social and cultural experience, but also accommodates student differences, background, or experience.

In terms of textbook structure, Teachers E and F expressed support for the integration of cyclical and spiral compilations. Their claims were somewhat similar with the opinion of other teachers. Teacher F suggested that a textbook can be compiled by integrating a theme-based unit with spiral organization. Such compilation caters to student demands for acquisition of systematical knowledge, psychological development, and cultivation of learning interest.

With regard to the conception of teaching, the generative conception of a textbook regards the textbook as an example or guide for teaching, which means the teacher can add, delete, or integrate instructional materials in accordance with the students’ learning process and pace. As Teacher E claimed, “[A] textbook only shows us the basic guideline for teaching and learning, thus the teacher can and should supply some materials for the students within their comprehensibility and learnability.” She also asserted, “Students may ‘steal’ some model essay while they are learning writing. ‘Steal’ doesn’t [imply] copy[ing] but learn[ing] the writing techniques and strategies which can be adopted in their own compositions.” Teacher F gave a similar comment, emphasizing the whole perception of text when students learn, and not being limited to trivialities. In short, teacher should not split the text into trivial fragments such as words, phrases, and paragraphs. The teaching should begin with, and be based on, the learning demand and prior knowledge of learners. German scholar Martin Wagenschein (1951) was the first to put forward the concept of exemplary pedagogy, with “essential, basic, and exemplary” as its main feature, highlighting prior knowledge, experience, and intellect of students in learning. An “example” is a bridge connecting a learner’s subjective world with the external objective world. The textbook conceptions expressed by Teachers E and F demonstrate exemplary and scaffolding traits: the textbook, a guide for teaching and learning, does not include all the teaching content; the teacher instructs and students learn because teaching is always a process of creating meaning and rebuilding knowledge of the text based on the existing knowledge of learners. Intellectual growth and nurture of the mind follows such conception.

Features and Relations Among Different TCT

We have illustrated six types of TCT. Their features and relationships are summarized in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Traits and relationships among TCT

<i>Dimension Teacher</i>	<i>Conception of Textbook Objectives (CTO)</i>	<i>Conception of Textbook Content (CTC)</i>	<i>Conception of Textbook Structure (CTS)</i>	<i>Conception of Textbook Teaching (CTT)</i>
A	Prioritizes the examination by local educational authority over student development	Official textbooks including the student's book, teacher's book, and workbook	Theme-based compilation	Textbook and teacher-centered, inculcation method
B	Knowledge acquisition, skills training, mind nutrition, formation of learning habits	Official textbooks that mainly include life-oriented content (focusing on current rather than future life)	Classification organization	Textbook- and teacher-centered
C	Mastering testing coverage, developing skills, fostering good learning habits	Textbook is the core content in teaching and concerns students' current and future lives	Spiral organization with a theme running through the whole textbook	Textbook-centered, telling 'me' what to teach in class
D	Cultivating positive values and beliefs for life; facilitating students' literacy, reading, and writing skills	Integration of elite and civilian cultures, rural and urban lives; reduction of ideological text	Integration of the Grading system with topics; focuses on students with poor and average learning	Expository method is used often, while the heuristic method is sometimes used.
E	Achieving two language functions: language as a vehicle for communication vehicle and for fostering the human mind; Caters to learners' current and future lives; promotes knowledge acquisition and skill development	Textbook knowledge is important, but should be integrated with the lives and skills of learners	Theme-based grading: from easy to difficult, simple to complex	The textbook is a guideline and model for teaching, not a doctrine with which to abide; textbook analysis should be connected with students' prior knowledge and experience; the demands of individual learners' demand should be considered
F	Combines the tool function and humanities function; addresses the current life of learners in and preparation for their future.	Reflects both the learner's life and the subject matter	Theme—exercise—extension logical arrangement	Reduces teaching time; highlights learners' self-understanding; advocates flexible teaching methods.

Table 1 shows that different teachers hold different opinions but share common ideas with regard to their conceptions of the textbook. For example, most teachers agreed with theme-based textbook compilation as their conception of the textbook structure. However, some obvious divergence exists among them in the three other dimensions, especially in the conception of textbook teaching. Teachers A and B claimed that they absolutely rely on the textbook; however, Teachers E and F stated that they regard it only as a guide or example while teaching. From the table above, we can infer that the conception of the former can be regarded as textbook-dependent orientation whereas the latter is textbook-enacted orientation. In conclusion, we describe Teachers A, B and C's conception of the textbook as "conservative," Teacher D's as "eclectic," Teachers E and F's as "generative." A summary of their typical features and relationships follows.

Among the three teachers with conservative conceptions, Teacher A highlighted the testing function of the textbook as "I will teach what you test." Teacher B expressed a desire to change the traditional approach to teaching, but is concerned that the cooperative teaching approach may inhibit the regular teaching schedule thus affecting classroom management. For the sake of "safety," or controlling the teaching pace, she teaches what is contained in the textbook rather than address what students want, and the difficulties they encounter. Teacher C revealed using the "tips" provided by the textbook and only "paints dipper according to gourd" In terms of textbook content, Teachers A, B, and C expressed belief in what an official textbook contains because it is authoritative. However, Teacher D claimed that, although the textbook is an imperative curriculum resource, she intends to add, delete, and replace certain content in adapting the textbook. In her eyes, the textbook is crucial, whereas other curriculum materials are only supplementary in teaching. Teaching content can never deviate from the textbook, otherwise the teaching schedule would be out of control.

Teachers E and F asserted that the textbook is an example or model of the teaching content, and that the teacher needs to extend from the textbook, and provide knowledge and methods more suitable and connected with student life. For example, fiction, anthologies, a collection of poems, and even new papers can be used in class in order to enhance student knowledge and writing competence. Compared with the first two conceptions of the textbook, the generative conception of the textbook espouses the exemplary role of the textbook and reconstruction of teaching.

In terms of textbook structure, most teachers abide by the theme-based organization, except for Teacher C, who expressed support for the spiral structure, omits the theme-based organization for each unit. The views expressed by the other five teachers were also different to some degree. Teachers A and B only expressed support for theme-based writing, whereas D and E revealed that they consider the mental development of students. Teacher F expressed belief that the textbook should allow knowledge extension, following the theme—exercise—extension logical organization.

With regard to the conception of textbook teaching, Teachers A, B, and C firmly asserted their belief in “teaching with, through, and by textbook” because they deem the authority of textbook in teaching and testing as one that cannot be swung, hence should not be replaced by other teaching materials. The textbook-centered teaching method is deeply ingrained in their minds and is adopted in their entire teaching process. Teacher D often uses transmission method in teaching and sometimes employs other methods. However, unlike Teachers A, B and C, she expressed concern regarding absolute obedience to the textbook because not all the methods recommended are appropriate for teachers and students. Compared with other teachers, Teachers E and F expressed completely different claims. They advocate the whole language method, reducing teaching time, encouraging and motivating student thinking, and integrating multiple methods in favor of the different learning styles of students. Their basic creed for teaching extends beyond the fixed teaching method within the textbook.

In general, according to Teachers E and F, the development of an ideal and exclusive panacea in teaching seems to be impossible because the context and students often differ according to period. Consequently, method-based teaching is inadequate to meet the challenges of everyday teaching. Teachers attempt to develop a “method” of their own in the classroom, mainly based on their intuitive ability and experiential knowledge. Indian-American linguist Kumaravadivelu (2005) points out that, due to the woeful deficiencies existing in method-based teaching, we need to seek a better solution. He proposes the post-method, which is “sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals, within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu.” He continuously cites Elliott’s (1993) claim that the idea of pedagogic particularity is consistent with the hermeneutic perspective of situational understanding, which suggests that a meaningful pedagogy cannot be constructed without a holistic interpretation of particular situations, and that it cannot be improved without a general improvement of those particular situations.

Neville Grant (1987) exemplifies three opinions about textbooks among teachers. Teacher 1 is the teacher who does not use a textbook. He prepares all of his teaching materials because he believes he knows his students better than any course book writer does. According to Teacher 2, “I could not teach without a textbook. I use it just like a recipe. Follow it page by page, and you cannot go wrong,” whereas, according to Teacher 3, “I find my course book very useful. I use it most of the time, but not all the time.” The first CT can be regarded as a flexible conception because the teacher proposes various instructional materials to be integrated into teaching content based on students’ learning demands. The second can be regarded as a bible-oriented CT, which is adopted as an exclusive teaching resource. The last conception is eclectic as it regards the textbook as the main basis in teaching but extends or employs supplemental instructional materials occasionally. The views of Teachers A, B, and C can be associated with Teacher 1’s conception, that of Teacher D can be associated with Teacher 3, and that of Teachers E and F is the flexible conception of the textbook.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The previous discussion has explored six CTs among teachers using a four-dimensional framework. The typical characteristics, divergences, similarities, and relations of conceptions of the textbook among teachers are clearly seen. This researcher will next attempt to depict the following (a) the extent to which these teachers' conceptions of textbooks have changed; (b) the relations among the three conceptions of textbooks; (c) this researcher's own perception of the features in view of the research analysis, and compared with the assertions and criticisms of scholars.

First, with the ongoing school curriculum reform in China, most TCT have changed in various degrees. Excellent teachers who hold generative CT, including Teachers E and F, have not been significantly affected by the curriculum reform. Their CTs have not changed prominently because their open, creative, and enacted conception of the textbook is in accord with new curriculum reform ideas presented by the Ministry of Education. However, Teachers as A, B, C, who are considered to be at the low teaching level, have been affected more heavily than the so-called excellent teachers (E and F). Medium level teachers or those with an eclectic CT have been less affected than this group. Teachers considered to be at the intermediate teaching level are more willing to change and accept the new ideas than teachers at the low teaching level.

Second, although many differences in CTs exist among teachers, some similarities exist in terms of the four dimensions. In their divergent views of textbook objectives, textbook content, and textbook teaching, the biggest difference lies in textbook teaching. As expected, teachers share some common views on textbook structure. For instance, most teachers agree with a theme-based textbook structure and all teachers support textbook content that is life-oriented.

Third, TCT are implicit, complicated, and inextricably pendulous. Their conceptions contain features that are intricately interwoven with the other conceptions of textbooks. As mentioned, the three TCT share similarities and differences in terms of the four dimensions explored. Compared with the CTs claimed or criticized by educational scholars (e.g., bible-oriented, constructivism-oriented, and materials-oriented) TCT are relevant, practical, and not radical. Neither are they wholly bible-oriented nor Constructivism-oriented, but lie in the middle.

Although the basic education curriculum has undergone reform for over a decade in China, the change in TCT remains austere in achieving success in the reform blueprint. Zhong (2007), who leads the national school curriculum reform, emphasizes that the critical stage of education reform is curriculum reform, whereas the critical stage of curriculum reform is the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom. In addition, the critical stage of classroom teaching is teachers' professional development. Without a change in teachers' conceptions, any ideal curriculum reform is virtually utopia. TCT are not only influenced by the quality of teachers (personal and educational background, prior knowledge, educational philosophy), but also by their intrinsic bias, which is embedded in their traditional

way of thinking and conflicts between university scholars and school teachers when faced with similar research problem having incompatible solutions.

To effectively promote curriculum reform, some long-term studies, such as those on dynamic teacher professional development system, the potential factors of which impact correct formation of TCT, are increasingly gaining importance and necessity. Meanwhile, encouraging and empowering teachers to directly engage in curriculum development and textbook writing, especially at national and provincial levels, also facilitates the implementation of curriculum reform and the development of instructional materials. Only with these cogent measures can blind obedience to institutional and programmed curricula be eliminated, and the perceived conflicts among administrators, scholars, teachers, and learners dissolved, while spurring teachers' participation in, and reflection on, curriculum reform and textbook adaptation. When such measures are advocated by both researchers and teachers, and confirmed by the educational authority, then the goal of students' wholistic, positive, harmonious, and individualized development is ultimately realized.

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CONCEPTIONS OF TEXTBOOKS BY CHINESE TEACHERS IN MAINLAND CHINA

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