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Abstract: Academic debates over the theoretical base of China’s curriculum reform reflect a paradigmatic war between two traditions, curriculum studies and Padägogik. This article attempts to reconcile the two traditions by advancing a way of looking at the relationship between curriculum studies and Padägogik as well as the two concepts “curriculum” and “pedagogy.” The implications of curricular and pedagogical theorizing for China’s curriculum reform are discussed.

In the international arena, curriculum reform has always created heated debates over reform purposes, rationales, and implementation. Supporting and opposing voices are heard from various parties, standing for different traditions, paradigms, or schools of thought. Debates are rooted in the particulars of national histories and education systems. A fruitful attempt to reconcile the differences between competing traditions requires taking cognizance of the social and historical context of the country in which debates have
arisen. Further, it requires getting away from the habitual way of thinking about “curriculum” and “pedagogy” and looking at these two constructs from a fresh perspective.

In China, the most recent curriculum reform was initiated by the government at the turn of the twenty-first century, which was a response to rapid changes in the social, economic, and political context over the past twenty years—characterized by the establishment of a Chinese market economy; the emergence of a global economy; the demand for a creative, innovative, and self-motivated workforce; and so forth. To implement what is called “quality education” (centering on the all-around development of students as contrasted with the long-lasting and pervasive examination-oriented education that only prepares students to pass all kinds of examinations), three major transformations were introduced: (1) from a discipline-centered to a social construction-centered curriculum, (2) from transmission-oriented teaching to inquiry-oriented practice, and (3) from centralization to decentralization in curriculum decision making (see Zhong 2006).

The implementation has led to debates over the theoretical base of the curriculum reform, reflecting a war between two competing traditions in China’s education community, a battle between curriculum studies on the one hand and Padägogik\(^1\) (Jiao Yu Xue; referring to education as a science or discipline) on the other. One debate—held between Zhong Qi-Quan (East China Normal University) and Wang Ce-San (Beijing Normal University)—has attracted widespread attention among Chinese scholars. Wang (2008), a critic of the reform movement, calls for a revisit to I.A. Kairov’s Padägogik, maintaining it to be the indefensible theoretical base for quality education. Zhong, an advocate of the reform, condemns Kairov’s Padägogik as “moldy cheese” (Zhong and You 2004). He champions American curriculum studies and discourse as the theoretical framework for the reform (Zhong 2009; Zhong and You 2004).

Another debate—which has also captured the attention of Chinese educational scholars—centers on the relationship between curriculum theory (associated with curriculum studies) and pedagogical theory (associated with Padägogik), reflecting a war
between the two traditions as well. Some scholars advocate a grand curriculum theory (da ke cheng lun), which subsumes pedagogical theory on the ground that curriculum studies address both curricular and pedagogical issues. Others advocate grand pedagogical theory (da jiao xue lun), which encompasses curriculum theory, believing that curricular issues can be dealt with within the overarching framework of Padägogik (for the debate, see Huang 2004; Wang 2006).

This article attempts to reconcile these two competing traditions by advancing a way of looking at the relationship between curriculum studies and Padägogik as well as the two concepts “curriculum” and “pedagogy.”

A Brief Historical Perspective

A brief historical perspective can shed light on the tension between American curriculum studies and Kairov’s Padägogik in the Chinese educational discourse community. Over the past century, these two schools of thought have had varying effects on the development of Chinese educational discourse at different stages of history.

Before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, the input from America was rather significant, signified by historic events like the translation of Franklin Bobbit’s The Curriculum and How to Make a Curriculum into Chinese and the visit of John Dewey to give lectures at universities across the country (Zhang and Zhong 2002). Influenced by American scholars, Chinese educators started to produce books on curriculum theory and development. During this period, pedagogical theory was treated as a component within the American framework of curriculum studies (Xu 2009).

After the establishment of new China in 1949, the American tradition of curriculum studies came to a halt as China began to imitate the Soviet Union in the 1950s. This was signified by events such as the translation of Kairov’s Padägogik into Chinese and the visit of Soviet educational experts to lecture at universities across the country. Padägogik had since become the standard paradigm
of curricular and pedagogic discourse, in which curriculum theory was subsumed under pedagogical theory (Didaktik) within the framework of Padägogik (Xu 2009).

The end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 saw a resurgence of curriculum studies, symbolized by important events such as the publication of Chen Xia’s Curriculum Theory and Zhong Qi-Quan’s Modern Curriculum Theory in 1989 (the first two Chinese books on curriculum theory after the Cultural Revolution) and the establishment of China’s Curriculum Studies Association. Meanwhile, Padägogik tradition continued to flourish thanks to reform and opening up policies. Significant events included the publication of Wang Ce-San’s Pedagogical Theory in 1985 and the inaugural conference of the China Pedagogical Theory Committee. Curriculum studies and Padägogik coexisted and developed independently (Xu 2009).

Since 1989, curriculum reform in China has created a significant demand for curriculum theory and discourse, together with a rallying cry for the independence of curriculum theory from the Padägogik tradition. Zhong articulated a curriculum theory for quality education that views individual development as the core of curriculum and individualized curriculum as an important target of curriculum reform (Zhong 1995, 1997, 1999). In addition, he developed a theory of lived experience curriculum (Zhong 1997, 1999). His works, together with Wang’s (1999) endeavor to build a curriculum theory for the “creative transformation of selfhood,” were claimed to contribute to a “possible transition” of the Chinese curriculum field from traditional curriculum studies to contemporary curriculum theory centering on “understanding” the curriculum (Zhang and Zhong 2002). Reconceptualist and postmodernist curriculum discourse eventually became popular in China, as Pinar et al.’s (2002) Understanding Curriculum, Doll’s A Postmodern Perspective on Curriculum, and other related works were translated into Chinese.

This, however, does not mean that the Padägogik tradition has been weakened. Normal universities and teacher colleges across China have continued to teach pedagogical theory to teacher candidates. Padägogik has remained a compulsory subject in teacher
education programs. In addition, some Chinese theorists have attempted to “modernize” pedagogical theory (e.g., Fei 2005; Li 2005). However, their attempts, Yu (2009) observed, cannot escape the grip of Kairov’s Padägogik framework.

In short, curriculum studies and Padägogik constitute two traditions, or paradigms, in China’s education community today. Conflicts or tensions are inevitable, as the two paradigms were developed in different ideological and institutional contexts and had different missions to accomplish.

Curriculum Studies

The basic ideas of traditional curriculum studies are embodied in Ralph Tyler’s (1949) Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction, or the Tyler rationale. “All the essential elements of curriculum studies,” Westbury observed, “can still be readily described within the core text of the field” (2000: x). The rationale grew from the “Eight-Year Study” conducted between 1930 and 1942—a very important and comprehensive curriculum experiment in American curriculum history. At that time the United States was undergoing a transition from elite to mass terminal secondary education. In that experiment, thirty secondary schools (ranging across the continent from Boston to Los Angeles) participated in the endeavor of redesigning curricula in light of the special needs of students and communities (Tanner and Tanner 1990). The Tyler rationale was intended to be a working framework used by teachers in their deliberative thinking about the development of a curriculum for a particular school or school district (Westbury 2000).

The rationale revolves around four central questions:

• What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
• What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
• How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
• How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?
Formulating explicit educational objectives is viewed as a prelude to the planning and development of an effective and appropriate curriculum. The objectives are formulated through the following three sources: (1) studies of the learners themselves, (2) studies of contemporary life outside the school, and (3) suggestions from subject specialists. They are then supposed to be screened through the school’s philosophy of education, theories of learning, and suggestions from subject matter specialists (Madaus and Stufflebeam 1989). The end products of curriculum development are programs or courses of study that contain bodies of purposefully selected and organized knowledge, skills, and values for delivery in classrooms.

Three themes of traditional curriculum studies can be readily identified. First, traditional curriculum work is intended to provide a “managerial framework” for not only curriculum planning but also the control and evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum. Second, the primary concern of traditional curriculum work is with how a multiplicity of varied contents can be selected, processed, and packaged into programs geared toward the social and individual needs of students. Third, curriculum making is inextricably associated with the notion of “reform.” The focus of traditional curriculum studies has always been on reforming or restructuring schools as institutions in response to the needs and demands of students, society, and culture (Westbury 2000).

Traditional curriculum studies have been severely criticized for its preoccupation with the planning and implementation of an institutional curriculum, serving the administrative need to impose control over teachers and students. It has been declared no longer relevant to contemporary curriculum work (Hlebowitsh 1999). In the 1970s a reconceptualist movement was launched to reconstruct the curriculum field, with “understanding curriculum” as the primary focus of curriculum inquiry (see Pinar et al. 1995). Contemporary curriculum studies focus on analyzing “curricular” phenomena and issues, drawing on wide-ranging perspectives—from history, politics, race, gender, phenomenology, postmodernism, autobiography, esthetics, theology, and so forth.

Whether in traditional or contemporary curriculum studies, peda-
gogy is discussed under the broad umbrella term “curriculum.” In traditional curriculum studies, pedagogy is construed as tool and method for the delivery task of the predeveloped curriculum. In contemporary curriculum studies, pedagogy is viewed as something in the freedom of individual teachers—something that can be set apart completely from the institutional context of schooling (Reid 2006). No systematic and coherent thought on pedagogy is articulated to inform and guide pedagogical practice in classrooms. No serious attempts are made to integrate theoretical knowledge with pedagogical practice. This presents a stark contrast with the Padägogik tradition.

Padägogik

Kairor’s Padägogik was written for the Soviet educational system, in which the central government made most curriculum decisions. Curricular plans from kindergarten to college were formulated by the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences under the purview of the Ministry of Education (Medlin 1958). For many years, Kairov served concurrently as the head of the ministry and the president of the academy (Rogers 1959).

Kairov’s Padägogik was formulated based on Marxist-Leninist philosophy, Soviet school reform experiences during the 1920s and 1930s, and European progressive educational thought (Wang 2008). A particular branch of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, dialectical materialism, was used to establish ground rules that served to guide and inform the development of educational theories and principles. Influenced by the thinking of Comenius and Herbart, Kairov articulated a full-scale science of education—a comprehensive, coherent body of theory or discourse that provided an account for various aspects of education and schooling, including the aims of education, educational policies and constitution, pedagogical theory (Didaktik), school administration, upbringing, esthetics, and physical education. This body of theory was designed to inform and guide the pedagogical practice of classroom teachers and to be used as the theoretical basis for teacher preparation and training.

The articulation of pedagogical theory or Didaktik reflects a serious attempt to integrate theoretical knowledge with classroom practice.
The central task of classroom teaching was to systematically and rigorously help students acquire the scientific and disciplinary knowledge and skills codified in official curriculum syllabi and textbooks. Teachers were required to ground their practice in the faithful interpretation of the mandated curriculum contained in official textbooks and materials (Wang 2008). They were supposed to follow five basic pedagogical principles: (1) intuitiveness, (2) self-awareness and self-activeness, (3) consolidation, (4) systematism and continuity, and (5) popularity and acceptableness. Furthermore, they were required to use what was called the “five-step teaching method” consisting of (1) reviewing old material, (2) orienting new material, (3) explaining the new material, (4) consolidating the newly learned material, and (5) giving assignments. In other words, pedagogical theory, together with other general educational theories and principles, is intended to provide classroom teachers with a functional framework that can inform and guide their pedagogical practices within the context of a centrally developed curriculum and toward the common purpose of education, that is, toward the formation of the “new man”—an active and conscious builder of socialism (Rogers 1959).

It is important to point out that Kairov’s Padägogik was only one of the many branches of Padägogik in the Soviet Union—a country that has produced numerous great thinkers in the field of education, such as L.V. Zankov, A. Makarenko, and L.S. Vygotsky, to mention only a few. Due to historical reasons, China adopted a special version of Padägogik, which was developed during the 1940s and 1950s for political purposes under the Stalin regime (see Zhong 2008).

Comparison and Contrast

Obviously, there are important differences in the ideological and institutional contexts in which curriculum studies and Padägogik were formulated. The development of curriculum studies was driven by American ideologies of social efficiency (concerning preparing youth for specific work and citizenship roles), scientific management (emphasizing end-means rationality and empirical methods),
and social reconstruction (centering on the role of schools in reforming and reconstructing a society). Yet the writing of Kairov’s *Padägogik* was based on Marxist-Leninist philosophy and rooted in the European tradition. Furthermore, curriculum studies were developed in a localized school system in which individual schools or school districts exercised authority and control over curriculum decision making. Yet *Padägogik* was developed in a highly centralized educational system in which curriculum decision making was the province of the state Ministry of Education.

The ideological difference implies a fundamental difference in the character of the theory between curriculum studies and *Padägogik*. The managerial and reformist inclination of curriculum studies predisposes curriculum scholars to stay some necessary distance from actual classroom practices (Westbury 2000). Traditional curriculum scholars have been preoccupied by the search for a framework for developing a program or course of study that, on the one hand, is responsive to the needs of students and society and, on the other, serves to guide and control pedagogical practice in classrooms. Contemporary curriculum scholars have further distanced themselves from schools and classrooms, hence understanding curriculum as an “intellectual journey”—not as a field of “practical activities” (Hopmann and Gundem 1998). They have, Westbury (2007) observed, turned away from curriculum practice to . . . theoretical sources in the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

By contrast, Kairov’s *Padägogik*, a mixing of the European educational tradition with Marxist-Leninist philosophy, reflects a considerable orientation toward classroom practice. In dialectical materialism, “practice” is viewed as the starting point for theory development, and in the European tradition an essential frame of reference for the construction of education as a discipline or science. An important task of *Padägogik* is to link pedagogical practice to the formation of the new man.

Furthermore, the institutional contextual difference implies differing attitudes on an institutional curriculum. The absence of a centrally planned institutional curriculum in the United States means that curriculum studies do not necessarily deal with issues concerning how teachers work with an institutional curriculum developed by external
authorities. It also means that curriculum questions at the institutional level are open for debate and negotiation. By contrast, developed within the context of a centralized education system with an established institutional curriculum, Padägogik has to deal with issues of how teachers work with the existing institutional curriculum and use it as a starting point for instructional planning. However, the established institutional curriculum tends to be taken as given, and accordingly issues of curriculum and curriculum making at the institutional level tend not to be treated as open for discussion and debate.

Two observations can be made from the comparison and contrast. Curriculum studies focus on the development of a program or course of study for a school or local school system or on the needs of students and society that are above and around an individual school or local school system. However, the exclusive focus on issues of this kind or at this level has meant that issues on classroom pedagogical practice—particularly pedagogical practice within the context of an established institutional curriculum—tend to be ignored. On the other hand, Padägogik centers on issues about pedagogical practice in classrooms within the context of, or in the service of, an institutional curriculum. Yet it contributes very little to the understanding of how the institutional curriculum is planned and developed and of broader social, cultural, and political issues surrounding the institutional curriculum.

Reconciling the Two Traditions

As revealed from the above discussion, curriculum studies and Padägogik were developed in two very different ideological and institutional contexts representing two distinct ways of thinking about or “doing” education and schooling. One way to reconcile the two traditions is to locate them within the organizational context of schooling. At the outset, I need to point out that Padägogik here is not intended to mean the version developed by Kairov. It is used to mean a way of thinking about and doing education and schooling embedded in the European tradition. The discussion, as will be seen, leads to a broader notion of curriculum and of pedagogy.
Schooling can be viewed as embedded in the organizational context consisting of three layers, the *societal* (social expectations, policies, and discourses concerning what schooling should be); the *programmatic* (school types, programs, courses of study, assessment procedures, etc.); and the *instructional* (teacher-student interactions, classroom activities, discourses, etc.). Corresponding with these three layers are three levels of curriculum making:

- the societal or policy level, where politicians and policymakers produce curriculum policies and create images, metaphors, and narratives that “typify” what is desirable in social and cultural orders, what is to be valued and sought after by members of a society or nation;
- the programmatic level, where curriculum policies, images, or ideals are translated into curriculum structures, programs, or courses of study provided to a system of schools; and
- the instructional level, where the institutional curriculum is transformed into a cluster of events or activities by a teacher and a group of students in a particular classroom (Doyle 1992a, 1992b).

Curriculum studies and *Padägogik* find their foci at different levels of curriculum making. Curriculum work concerns primarily the ways of constructing a responsible institutional (societal and programmatic) curriculum for a system of schools (see Westbury 2000), or “understanding” the institutional curriculum in relation to broad social, political, and cultural issues and contexts (Pinar et al. 1995). *Padägogik*, on the other hand, concerns principally the making of the instructional curriculum—in terms of pedagogical practices—within the societal and programmatic context or within the web of societal expectations, policies, discourse, curriculum structures, programs, and so forth.

Furthermore, both the terms “curriculum” and “pedagogy” find broader meaning in view of the three organizational layers of schooling. The curriculum is more than textbooks or syllabi. It is embedded in government educational policies and discourses, represented by official syllabuses and textbooks, and manifested in classroom activities and discourses. Four kinds of curriculum
are identified: (1) the *abstract* or *societal* curriculum that defines the connection between schooling, society, and culture; (2) the *analytic* or *technical* curriculum that translates curriculum policy and ideals into structures and programs that serve to inform and guide the work of schools and classrooms; and (3) the *enacted* curriculum that is in motion in the classroom. At the classroom level is the fourth curriculum, the *achieved* curriculum (the curriculum students actually acquired) as well (Doyle 2007).

Likewise, pedagogy is more than method or technique. It can be seen as *implicit* in societal expectations, policies, and discourses on schooling; *regulated* by curriculum structures, programs, courses of study, and so forth; and *manifested* in the instructional activities, events, and discourse. Three types of discourse and decisions give meaning, shape, and significance to pedagogy.

- Policy discourses and decisions that center on symbolic representations of schooling in relation to culture and society. Through articulating the ideals and aims of schooling, policy discourses and decisions serve to clarify the social norms and responsibilities of schooling as an institution, suggesting the role that teachers are to play and the kind of pedagogy that needs to be employed in contributing to the achievement of those ideals and aims (Doyle 1992b).
- Curriculum structures, school subjects, or courses of study that serve to inform, regulate, and shape pedagogical practices. School subjects or courses of study constitute the “locus” of secondary school teaching; they regulate and frame classroom teachers’ pedagogical practice and perspectives on curriculum and pedagogy (Grossman and Stodolsky 1995).
- Classroom activities and discourses where pedagogy is manifested. A teacher transforms the institutional curriculum into instructional activities and discourses in a classroom in light of his or her understanding and beliefs about the purpose of education, content, students, and teaching and learning (Doyle 1992b).

In short, like curriculum, pedagogy is embedded in a web of three
distinct levels of curriculum discourses and decisions—societal, programmatic, and instructional. It involves more than classroom discourse and decisions. The discourses and decisions at the societal and programmatic levels bear on, and are manifested in, various aspects of classroom pedagogical practice.

Therefore, pedagogy cannot be reduced to merely a repertoire of skills or approaches. It is inextricably associated with a body of policies, discourses, regulations, and programs that gives meaning and shape to classroom practice. The analysis therefore lends support to the conception of pedagogy articulated by Robin Alexander (2001) based on a comparative study of primary education in five different countries. Pedagogy “encompasses the performance of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it” (540).

**Concluding Remarks**

This article has attempted to reconcile two competing traditions in China’s education community. It showed that curriculum studies focus on ways of constructing a curriculum for a individual school or school system in response to the needs and demands of a society and culture and “understanding” political, social, cultural, racial, and gender issues surrounding the curriculum. Kairov’s *Padägogik*, on the other hand, embodies a distinct way of thinking about or “doing” education and schooling that is rooted in the European tradition. It centers on developing a comprehensive, coherent system of theory and discourse that intimately relates to, and thus serves to inform and guide, pedagogical practice within an institutional context of schooling.

Therefore, it will not be necessary or beneficial to construct a grand curriculum theory to subsume pedagogical theory because curriculum studies and *Padägogik* represent two fundamentally different ways of thinking about or doing schooling and education. Nor will it be necessary or beneficial to develop a grand pedagogic theory to encompass curriculum theory. Likewise, it will not be defensible or wise to embrace curriculum studies with a condemnation of *Padägogik* or vice versa. *Padägogik* has something very impor-
tant to contribute to our understanding of pedagogy—something that cannot be acquired in curriculum studies (see Westbury 2000). On the other hand, curriculum studies can enhance our understanding about curriculum and curriculum making within the changing social, cultural, and institutional context in a way that Padägogik cannot. In view of the organizational context of schooling, curriculum studies and Padägogik are complementary in our understanding about schooling and education.

To stress the organizational context of schooling is to foreground the “realities” of schooling as the indispensible grounding for responsible curriculum and pedagogical theorizing. This is a challenge for scholars in China who indulge themselves in pure theoretical pursuits or embrace all sorts of contemporary curriculum discourse (reconceptualist, feminist, postmodernist, poststructuralist, postcolonialist, and so forth) without grounding their works in the actual work of schooling and without paying close attention to the organizational context of schooling. According to Schwab (1969), responsible curriculum theorizing does not start with theory. It starts with and focuses on the inner work of schooling within a social, institutional, and instructional context. Theory is used eclectically to illumine, improve, and enhance practice.

The new curriculum reform has created an urgent demand for curriculum and pedagogical theories. Useful theories are identified or formulated with close attention to the inner work of schooling and to the social, cultural, and institutional context in which schoolwork is carried out. This means that scholars need to identify and explore curriculum issues centered on school practices within the societal, programmatic, and instructional context of reform. This also means that scholars need to be engaged in curriculum-informed inquiry of pedagogical practice, that is, in using curriculum (including societal, programmatic, and instructional aspects) as an analytic concept in the study of pedagogical practice.

Note

1. I use the word Padägogik throughout the article to emphasize the German connotation of the concept.
References


