

# A Landmark in China's Basic Education Curriculum Reform

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*“Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.”*

*—Albert Einstein*

CURRICULUM reforms in basic education have been an essential component of educational reform, playing a crucial role in promoting student holistic development. To secure their national competitiveness, developed countries have made persevering efforts to improve their basic education. In the early 1990s, the United States started to implement the reform in curriculum standards as a major strategy to address those long-standing issues in basic education such as low academic levels of students and inequality in education, which could be impediments to the achievement of the nation's political, economic, and social development goals. The revised curriculum standards strived to eliminate the prevalent acceptance of “mediocrity” in the education system. Student learning was transformed into a succession of interrelated activities centered on core objectives and students were encouraged to construct new knowledge based on prior experience. As a result, the previous curriculum system that was loaded with repetitive and superficial exercises was abandoned (Chen, 2004). Realizing that the curriculum reform was key to educational advancement, the United Kingdom promulgated the Education Reform Act 1988, which was modified in 1995 in areas like curriculum objectives, content, structure, evaluation, and management. The Act aimed to promote the common development of students and at the

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same time allow schools the autonomy to develop curricula with their unique characteristics according to their specific circumstances (Zhang, 2014). Evidence from pioneering countries' curriculum reforms indicates that the primary function of education in the new era is to boost students' comprehensive competencies and prepare them for the challenges in their future life rather than simply transmit established knowledge to students.

Since its reform and opening up, China has undertaken several curriculum reforms based on the global experience and the nation's special circumstances. In the last two decades, the change in basic education curricula has been accelerated. What has been emphasized in these reforms was that basic education in China is aimed at developing fundamental skills, qualities, and values of students to lay the foundation for their lifelong growth and meet the needs of social development. The cultivation of students' key competencies was established as the main training objective of curricula. The General Framework for the Development of Key Competencies of Chinese Students was formulated in 2016. In terms of curriculum structure, integration of courses has been emphasized and transdisciplinary instruction and practical activities have been advocated to foster students' ability to cope with complicated, real-world issues. In curriculum administration, a three-level curriculum management model has been established, which offer ample autonomy to local educational authorities and schools at all levels. Regarding curriculum experiment, China has been cautious in implementing new curriculum programs. They must be experimented as pilot projects first before being universalized. Additionally, the nation has placed premiums on the deployment of information and internet technologies in basic education. Incorporation of IT-related content into curricula and educational technology-supported teaching methods have been encouraged (Meng, 2019). Overall, curriculum reforms point to the holistic development of students, prompting a transition from focus on knowledge delivery to emphasis on competence development. The notion that education should be student-centered is now well accepted. The "self-regulation + cooperation + inquiry" learning modality, which is meant to cultivate students' innovative and problem-solving capabilities, has become increasingly popular.

In the intense atmosphere of educational transformation, the newly released *Compulsory Education Curriculum Program and Standards 2022 (including the Compulsory Education Curriculum Program and the Compulsory Education Course Standards)* has aroused extensive debate in educational community. The Compulsory Education Curriculum Program 2022 has optimized the goal of compulsory education, improved the plan of courses, and established detailed requirements for curricular implementation. The Compulsory Education Course standards 2022 has upgraded the organization and structure of the 16 courses taught at the compulsory education level (covering primary and junior secondary schooling in China), set academic quality standards, and strengthened the connections between different learning phases (Yu, 2022).

*An Interpretation of the Revised Compulsory Education Curriculum Program and Standards: A Revolution in China's Compulsory Education* in this issue focuses its discussion on the training objectives of the new curriculum program, intensified reforms it brings to curriculum design and instruction, and strategies for its successful implementation (Wei, 2022). In addition, “major concepts” and “learning task clusters” underpinning holistic module learning are also highlighted in the revised curriculum program and course standards. *A Case Study of 271 Education Group's Learning Protocols: Reconstruction of Course Contents Based on Holistic Module Learning* illustrates how 271 Education Group use their innovative teaching paradigm, holistic module learning protocols, to execute the new curriculum program. It is hoped that the two articles will ignite more debate on curriculum reform (Liu, 2022).

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