

What Can We Learn from Taiwanese Teachers about Teaching Controversial Public Issues

Yu-Han Hung (hungyuha@msu.edu)

Michigan State University, Curriculum and Instruction, Teacher Education (CITE)

Abstract: This study explores how history teachers in Taiwan make curricular decisions while engaging controversial public issues. The main political controversies discussed in Taiwanese society center on the relationship between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. This study documents how four social studies teachers formulate their curricular decisions through the intersecting lenses of professional knowledge and personal beliefs. Findings illuminate the role of personal experience and belief in teacher's curricular-instructional gate keeping in socially divisive contexts. In sum, this study helps us understand the relationship between a teacher's own imaginative worldview, sense of personal and professional identity and their classroom teaching practices.

Key words: history curriculum, teacher knowledge, curricular-instructional gatekeeper, controversial public issues, Taiwan and the PRC

As someone who has grown up, been educated, and taught high school social studies in Taiwan, I have known the controversy that envelopes that island my whole life. Now, teaching and doing research in the United States, my view is different. I have noticed that people outside of Taiwan tend to have a limited understanding of Taiwan's relationship with the the People's Republic of China (PRC). In contrast, for my family, friends and colleagues still living in Taiwan, the relationship with the People's Republic of China is not only a major political issue, but a daily reality that affects almost every major aspect of their life.

In Taiwanese society, this relationship between Taiwan and the PRC has caused many controversies—including debates about national identity, state sovereignty, and ethnic integration—with the result that people argue and act upon these issues in a variety of spaces (Chen, 2008). Indeed, one could argue that Taiwanese society is virtually saturated with talks about the PRC, national sovereignty and the future status of the island. In such a situation, schools might play a particularly important role in shaping larger issues such as peace and war, happiness and anxiety.

Diana Hess (2009) has defined controversial public issues as questions of public policy that spark

Corresponding author email: hungyuha@msu.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

significant public disagreement and, in this way, constitute public problems. The relationship between Taiwan and the PRC, when viewed from this perspective, is therefore a controversial issue par excellence. Therefore, this paper uses the relationship between Taiwan and the PRC as a case example for the way in which social studies teachers can respond to the pressures societies all over the world face as they attempt to prepare their students for life in a fractured and conflict-ridden public sphere.

Given the intertwining nature of the historical relationship between the PRC-Taiwan, designing a history curriculum in Taiwan has inevitably been a contentious task. In this way, the challenges faced by Taiwanese history educators—to construct a history curriculum with a pluralistic and broad view of the past, present and future of the PRC and Taiwan, as well as to make educational substance outweigh the ideological and political dimensions of school history (Chen, 2008)—can provide an important case example for history educators around the globe. As Nel Noddings (1992) has noted, educational decisions need educational rationales—not only political ones.

Teachers are obviously important actors in school contexts; equally as obvious, teachers have their own reactions and responses to controversial issues in their classrooms (and this is particularly the case when they have lived through the difficult events they are trying to teach about, as is the case in this paper). Teachers are not merely deliverers of the curriculum; instead, they bring their own ideas and interpretations to their teaching (Thornton, 1991). As Hess mentioned (2009), teachers play a particularly pivotal role in the teaching of controversial issues, since they interact with students in ways that can never be fully scripted. This means that their own fears, hopes and desires are particularly on display in such forms of ambitious teaching.

Therefore, this paper focuses on how teachers in Taiwan use both their professional knowledge and their personal beliefs as they come to teaching about the controversial issue of the relationship between Taiwan and the PRC.

This paper explores the role of the teacher as “curricular-instructional gatekeeper” (Thornton, 1991, p. 237) a figure who must make important decisions about the implementation of the national history curriculum within a context dominated by public controversy. Last, this paper reflects on the pedagogical and social significance of the challenges faced by teachers in Taiwan and across the globe, as they carry out their work within the context of such social controversy.

A Conflicted Social Landscape

The relationship between the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan has been characterized as an intensive conflict, based on limited contacts and unstable interactions since 1949 (Grossman & Lo, 2008). Questions about the legal and political status of the island of Taiwan have focused on the prospects of formal reunification with the mainland, or on full Taiwanese independence. As negotiations began to restore “the three links” (Kuo, 1999, p. 66) (transportation, commerce and

Corresponding author email: hungyuha@msu.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

communications) between the two sides, Taiwan and the PRC launched semi-official negotiations through organizations representing the interests of their respective governments.

At the conclusion of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, the People's Republic of China asserted itself as the sole legal representation of China, and it has threatened the use of military force as a response to any formal declaration of Taiwanese independence. In fact, the relationship between the PRC and Taiwan, as well as issues of Taiwanese national identity, continue to haunt Taiwanese society and politics, and they are a cause of political divisions among all of the major political parties in Taiwan.

Since 1949, state sovereignty, Chinese inheritance and territorial disputation have been the main topics which have caused public debates, both in the national government and among the general public (Chen, 2008; Grossman & Lo, 2008). While these are primarily legal issues being worked in governmental circles, the questions surrounding such debates have led to a form of identity politics that has led to a larger polarization across Taiwanese society.

In terms of ethnic issues, there are no perceived racial differences among the people of Taiwan; instead, people are divided by perceived differences among their ancestry: ancestors who were from different provinces of China and who came to Taiwan at different time periods. For example, people from the south eastern part of China who came to Taiwan before 1949 are seen as Taiwanese ("people native to the island"), compared to people from other parts of China who came to Taiwan after 1949, and who are seen as Chinese ("people not native to the island") (Hsu & Chen, 2004). These are the two main ethnic groups in Taiwan. These two different ethnic groups continue to represent two different political choices, languages, speaking tones, living districts and food. They both have their own distinctive characteristics and practices in everyday life.

As should be clear, then, in terms of national identity, there is no agreement about who or what is Taiwanese. Therefore, national identity has long been seen as a controversial issue in Taiwan. Several factors have supported this sense of confusion or ambivalence. First, Taiwan's own sovereignty has not been recognized by the global community (Wu, 2010); people outside of Taiwan do not think of Taiwan as an independent country. This includes all global and international associations. Second, in Taiwan itself, the Taiwanese government has avoided clear statements about the definition of the nation. For example, starting in 1996, the Taiwanese government specifically rejected the development of a Chinese national identity as an educational aim. Instead, the government chose developing individual self-identity as an emphasis and gradually introduced a greater focus on Taiwanese geography, culture and society (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2006, 2009, 2013). Despite this conflicted state of affairs, legally speaking, Taiwan is nothing more than the geographic name of an island which is governed by an entity that calls itself the Republic of China—a name which is not recognized anywhere in the world.

The Role of the Person in Teaching

Given this social context, and given that the events which have shaped this context are in the not-very-distant past, it is not surprising that social studies teachers in Taiwan face not only professional challenges in their work, but personal ones as well.

Indeed, much research has sought to understand teaching through the lens of a teacher's own biography—teaching as a form of personal knowledge (Brookfield, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, 1996; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). This research demonstrates the personal way in which professional knowledge is constructed across a variety of situations. However, I would argue that the role of the *person* is particularly clear when we examine a case like the teaching of controversial public issues within the Taiwanese context.

In the literature on the personal foundations for teacher's public decision making, 95teachers' decision making emerges out of the relationship among people, places and objects in their temporal dimensions of past, present and future. Different relationships among people, places and objects—in terms of their pasts, presents and futures—make for different decisions among teachers. Indeed, Clandinin and Connelly (1987) attempted to clarify this when they examined the origins, uses and meanings of personal knowledge in their studies of teacher's beliefs.

In particular, teachers' personal knowledge is a factor that influences their decision making on controversial public issues. Past research shows most teachers agree about the importance of teaching controversial public issues—however, the perceived consequences may limit teachers. In particular, they fear student-related disruptions, conflict, as well as the implication for their careers (Byford, Lennon, & Russell, 2009). In addition, other research indicated that many teachers are under-prepared and feel constrained in their ability to handle controversial issues. Teachers, in general, demonstrate concern relating to “procedural neutrality,” the balance between teaching and learning, and a lack of readiness (Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004, p. 492).

Clearly, recent changes over the past decades in the Taiwanese public history curriculum were not just due to historiographical changes—they were motivated by larger societal concerns and debates. In these public debates, historians and educational policy makers have shown relatively little interest in pedagogical concerns; for the most part, only classroom teachers have cared about pedagogical issues, instructional goals, strategies, sequences, and the assignment of learning outcomes (Chen, 2008). Teachers have been left to sort these things out for themselves.

Many classroom teachers around the globe, including teachers in Taiwan, believe that curriculum decisions are made by outside authorities (Chen, 2004). That is, they believe that curriculum development is a formal task imposed from the outside (Cornett, 1987). However, on the other hand, Stephen Thornton (1991) has theorized that despite the many external limits on teachers, the teacher is still an agent, one who makes decisions about the curriculum. That is, no two teachers can

Corresponding author email: hungyuha@msu.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

or will ever teach the same curriculum in the same manner. Similarly, Walter Parker (1987) has contended that the idea of “teachers making a difference” is situated in teachers as curriculum agents. According to these scholars, teachers can do more with curriculum than they thought.

Thornton first presented this work in 1988 at an American Educational Research Association conference, and started to advocate the importance of teachers as curricular-instructional gatekeepers in the social studies. The components of gate keeping are considered to be 1) beliefs concerning the meaning of social studies, 2) decisions concerning planning, and 3) decisions concerning instructional strategies (Thornton, 1991, p. 237). A curricular-instructional gatekeeper has to make considerations of purposes—how teachers think about the social studies curriculum heavily influences teachers’ teaching and curriculum. As Thornton (2005) asserted, teachers, when viewed as curricular-instructional gatekeepers, have significant effects on the curriculum that is enacted in the classroom. Teachers’ beliefs concerning social studies do influence what they teach. In a sense, teachers are guided by their personal beliefs and theories that structure their teaching and guide them in their decision making.

Both curriculum and instruction can be strengthened by teachers having a significant stake in either creating or modifying a curriculum (Walker, 2003, pp. 294–295). However, in Taiwan and in other East Asian context, teachers have long been viewed in the research as “content deliverers,” delivering the official knowledge of the national curriculum standards and textbooks (Chou, 2001, p.95). An important goal of this paper is to challenge such a limited (and limiting) view of classroom teachers in both East Asian contexts (specifically) and globally (more generally).

Having indicated the role that teacher personal beliefs might play in the enactment of the classroom curriculum, I will now turn to the research itself.

Research Questions

This study seeks to produce results that will be globally relevant for curriculum reformers and for teacher education programs that seek to promote the value of the teacher as a curricular-instructional gatekeeper in contexts where teacher agency and autonomy have increasingly been reduced. In addition, this study aims to illuminate the challenges and strategies of social studies teachers as they attempt to teach controversial issues within a fractured and divided social context.

The following research questions therefore drive this study:

1. How do the beliefs and knowledge of high school history teachers in Taiwan about the Taiwan-PRC relationship influence their curricular decisions?
2. In what ways, if any, are high school history teachers in Taiwan curricular-instructional gatekeepers, particularly in their instruction about the Taiwan-PRC relationship?

Corresponding author email: hungyuha@msu.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

Case Study Methods

This study is about teachers and their working contexts: that is, history teachers in the social, cultural and political contexts of a globally interconnected world. My research seeks to understand the personal foundations of social studies teachers' professional decision making. The data from this paper comes from a larger case study (Yin, 2009) on controversial public issues pedagogy in Taiwan—an island. As I attempted to demonstrate above, that is a particularly rich example when it comes to thinking about issues of global connections, international conflict and social divisions.

There were four participants in the larger study and they were all Taiwanese teachers living and working in an urban context (see Table 1). These are all teachers at the top of their craft: they all have a master's degree in History. They have taught from 6 to 23 years. Two undertook their teacher preparation from Taiwan Normal University and the other two were prepared at alternative teacher education programs.

Table 1. *Summary of the Participants and Their Backgrounds*

	Mr. Wu	Mr. Chen	Mrs. Chang	Mrs. Fan
Teaching experience	20 years. First 2 years in a middle school, and 18 years in high school.	23 years, in a public high school.	6 years. 3 years in Taipei, and 3 years in Taichung.	17 years. 6 years in a middle school, and 11 years in a high school.
Education	Masters/ normal university.	Masters/ normal university.	Studying PhD in Taipei, having a master's degree from the U.S. and from an alternative program.	Master's degree/ Graduated from a private university. Majored in Western history.
Other experiences	Working for history subject summer camps in Taichung.	Worked for national curriculum design project.	Working for national history subject PD Team leader in Taichung.	Worked for a national university entry exam committee.

Family background	From a Chinese—not native to the island family, and married Taiwanese.	From a Chinese—not native to the island—family. All family members are teachers.	From a Taiwanese —native to the island—family. Single. He grew up in Taichung.	From a Chinese—not native to the island—family. She plans to move to Taipei in 2 years.
-------------------	--	--	--	---

Conducting a case study with multiple resources created a broad base and maintained a strong chain of evidence (Yin, 2009). This study utilized two different strategies of data collection: non-participant observation and interviews. The data collection was conducted over the summer of 2013.

For the larger study, interviews and observations were my primary research methods. The most important data collection method used in this study was interviews. As Yin (2009) mentioned, case study interviews are often of an open-ended nature, in which an investigator can ask key respondents for the facts of a matter as well as for the respondents' opinions about events. This study seeks to not only understand specific answers from teachers, but also to explore their personal practical knowledge and to try to understand how their personal practical knowledge influences their curricular gate keeping around the teaching of controversial public issues in the classroom. The use of interviews allowed me to obtain critical in-depth descriptions and interpretations from the participants in this case study (Stake, 1995). This method provided an in-depth analysis of participants' perspectives, their personal practical knowledge, their gate keeping, and their conception of controversial public issues' teaching.

Besides the interviews, I observed the four participants' classes over a period of 6 weeks; each participant was observed at least twice, each for 50 minutes. I observed Mr. Wu four times; Mr. Chen, four times; Mrs. Chang, three times; and Mrs. Fan two times. The observations in this study helped me build my relationship with the teachers. The time spent in their classrooms debriefing after each observation also helped me have a better understanding about their teaching practice and their social and cultural contexts.

I analyzed the interview and observational data in several ways. First, I began by organizing the data from interviews into two broad categories that I borrowed from the research: teacher knowledge and teacher belief. Within the teacher knowledge and teacher belief categories, I further divided the interview data into teacher professional knowledge, including content knowledge and pedagogy knowledge, and teacher personal knowledge, consisting of teacher backgrounds, teacher life experiences, and their political beliefs. This way of organizing the data highlighted teachers' gate keeping roles and the various factors that influenced how they viewed that role.

Corresponding author email: hungyuha@msu.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

I also collected observation data on the teacher as curricular-instructional gatekeepers. I connected their decisions to their professional knowledge and personal beliefs. I explored their decision making processes regarding the curriculum, for example, their ways of representing controversial historical events or their rationales for teaching or not teaching some specific issues.

Overall, as I reviewed categories and data, I made short conclusions for each category. After the process of reading the data, and organizing it into different themes and categories, I asked myself to rethink my own background and teaching experiences in Taiwan, and I went through the process again, as a Taiwanese history teacher, not as a researcher. Going through the process one more time, I got closer to the data, examining the structural issues and the cultural context carefully, and I made myself rethink the data, which is constructed in the specific context of Taiwan.

As should be clear from the dual way in which I attempted to analyze my data, my roles as both an insider and an outsider to the research context placed me in a unique position. On the one hand, I was perceived as an outsider because of my current status as a researcher and a doctoral student from the United States. Participants treated me as an outsider, not as a peer or colleague, and regarded me as a researcher, not as a fellow history teacher. But, the experiences have allowed me to distance myself from the immediacy of the demands of classroom teaching.

On the other hand, I was perceived as an insider because of my background. Before studying in the United States, as noted above, I was a Taiwanese public school history teacher for many years and I had heavily engaged in history curriculum reforms and several research projects, for example, the Social Studies in Asia research project.

In addition, growing up and attending public schools in Taipei, Taiwan, also positions me as an insider. My entire life experience and education in Taiwan has given me an embodied knowledge of the social and historical contexts of Taiwanese society. Such embodied knowledge was made critical though distance—giving me the knowledge necessary to understand the school and teacher culture found in the Taiwanese public school.

Teacher Narratives on the Personal Foundations of Their Professional Work

Teacher knowledge and teacher beliefs have largely been ignored by the Taiwanese research and educational community (Chou, 2001). However, for the teachers I interviewed, it is clear that teacher knowledge, teacher beliefs, teacher biography and curricular-instructional gate keeping are interrelated, especially with regards to the decision to teach the relationship between Taiwan and the PRC.

As noted above, in recent research in Taiwan, there has been little discussion of teacher knowledge, especially about its personal foundations. Instead, educational research and teacher preparation have invested more time and energy into equipping social studies teachers with the subject matter

knowledge needed to intelligently navigate the ideological pressures that are reflected in the oft-changing national history curriculum. For example, one participant, Mr. Chen (Interview2-2, 06182013,), said,

History teachers in Taiwan still rely on the subject matter knowledge learned from the teacher preparation and professional development programs. I have participated in the professional development program for high school history teachers for a couple years. Teachers across ages in PD significantly depend on their subject matter knowledge; they look for “historical facts” and “truths.”

To navigate the national history curriculum, teachers reach out for more subject matter knowledge, and teacher preparation programs and professional development programs have attempted to supply them with this content knowledge. That means that teachers depend on knowledge officially approved by an external authority. This means that their work is subject to the changing ideologies of the curriculum writers, on the one hand, and to professional historians, on the other.

From the participants I interviewed, it therefore appeared that their primary focus was on their professional subject matter knowledge rather than on their personal beliefs. In other words, participants usually reflected on their professional knowledge for teaching social studies, but they did not rethink how their personal beliefs influenced their curricular decisions.

However, the interview data revealed that teachers nevertheless interpret the content of the curriculum based on their personal beliefs. Interview data also reflected that teacher knowledge is highly dynamic, as new life experiences and new contexts may produce different insights and new decisions during their teaching. In addition, observation notes supported the claim that teacher personal practical knowledge helps to shape teachers’ decision making. In what follows, I shall explore several examples of how personal beliefs and experiences influence the professional work of Taiwanese social studies teachers.

Family Stories as a Spur to Multiple Perspectives

Even though participants were not aware of their personal beliefs influencing their curriculum gate keeping, they did make interpretations of the content of the curriculum that were based on their personal beliefs. For example, Mr. Wu shared,

My dad is Chinese, my mom is Taiwanese, but my dad came to Taiwan before 1949. During “228,” one would have expected him to be persecuted, but his Taiwanese friends prevented him from being arrested and killed. My family is part of this history. So, because this event is so close to us, I always ask students to re-tell these past historical episodes and events. I will share articles about this case, but with different perspectives, not from the political perspective but from a “humanities” perspective. That means I usually ask my students to

think about themselves from a human perspective, not from a person who has already been labeled as “Taiwanese” or “Chinese.” (Interview1-2, 06102013)

Based on the story from Mr. Wu about his pedagogical engagement with the historical event, 228—the February 28 Massacre, also known as the *228 Incident*, was an anti-government uprising in Taiwan. The massacre marked the beginning of the Kuomintang’s White Terror period and is a critical impetus for the Taiwanese independence movement. In his class, he opened students up to different perspectives on this historical event, brought in materials that supplemented the official documents, and stimulated students’ thinking by giving more space for student questions and free thinking. Through observation notes, I could see how Mr. Wu intentionally created the space for students to understand the conflict but not to emphasize the conflict between the Taiwanese and Chinese when he was talking about 228 in this class. Ultimately, it would appear, he made his curricular decision based on his personal story. Indeed, his own personal story truly influenced his interpretation of both the content and his teaching.

Based on the lesson Mr. Wu taught, he teaches historical events differently from the national curriculum standards, and the way he teaches is based on his personal beliefs. Mr. Wu’s interpretation exemplified how a teacher’s personal life can impact how he or she encounters a history curriculum. Indeed, teachers’ personal beliefs guided their curricular instruction as a kind of curricular gate keeping in class, especially in teaching controversial public issues.

The Teacher as a Curricular-Instructional Gatekeeper in Taiwan

From the interviews, it is clear that participants do make their own curricular decisions based on their professional knowledge and personal beliefs. Participants practice curricular-instructional gate keeping as they teach in their class, and as they make their own curricular decisions related to controversial issues. In other words, participants have been curricular gatekeepers who make decisions about teaching controversial issues in Taiwan.

The Teacher as a Curricular Gatekeeper Considers Students’ Development

A curricular gatekeeper not only makes decisions that shape the content of the curriculum and the nature of the classroom’s pedagogy, but also has to have an understanding of students’ development. Understanding students’ development, especially their moral and intellectual development, is a key point in being a curricular gatekeeper. Teachers best impact such development by offering students viable alternatives and allowing them to choose among them. As Mrs. Chang shared,

Being a teacher is subjective; teaching includes not only teaching knowledge (傳道), but developing values (授業) and solving problems (解惑). I think developing values is the most difficult one. As a teacher, I have my own values, but it is not expected that my students would either accept or be influenced by my own values. I usually give them multiple values and

multiple answers, rather than giving them specific answers and the “truth.” (Interview3-1, 06172013)

As seen in Mrs. Chang’s statement, a Taiwanese teacher can conceive of influencing students’ moral values and development. A curricular gatekeeper needs to have awareness of the ways in which students can be influenced by teachers, both inside and outside of class.

The Teacher as a Curricular Gatekeeper Has Awareness of Contextual Factors Influencing Decision Making

Teachers as curricular gatekeepers make decisions that are heavily influenced by contextual factors (Thornton, 2005). Mr. Wu shared,

Frequent history curriculum reforms impacted our teaching a lot, for example, the reforms in 1999 and 2006, which came along with the changes in the political parties. The goals and the content of curriculum were different, not only with more new content which teachers did not know, but also with some different ideology influences. For example, there is no mention of national identity in the new curriculum and there is a lesser proportion of Chinese History. I did make some differences based on these changes, but, overall, I see the changes as positive to my teaching, I have more space to adjust my own teaching and to learn different knowledge. (Interview1-3, 06172013)

From Mr. Wu’s perspective, he agreed that teacher’s gate keeping is influenced by contextual factors, for example, curriculum reforms, political changes and the interaction with the PRC. Yet, compared to other participants, Mr. Wu looked positively upon the factors and changes; indeed, he took the changes as opportunities to develop his teaching and knowledge—especially his subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. In addition, Mr. Wu also shared that he will try to teach an independent study “Taiwanese History After the 1980s,” which is a specific time period that includes many controversial historical events in Taiwan; he likes to use this opportunity to challenge himself for teaching the controversial issues. On the other hand, Mrs. Feng is an example of someone who is aware of the contextual factors but also made curricular decisions—she does not see the value of the curriculum guideline reforms; she instead chose to use traditional textbooks with her students. Through observation notes, I saw her comparing the new and old versions of the history curriculum textbooks and add content to the newer textbooks from the older one. Mr. Wu and Mrs. Feng were both aware of contextual factors and consider their influences, but they made different curricular decisions.

Discussion

Summary of the Findings

This study shows that even though there is no clear definition of teachers as curricular-instructional gatekeepers in Taiwan, teachers still make curricular decisions that are based on their subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, personal beliefs, family background and local contexts. The following are three different areas for discussion.

First, as Shulman (1987) pointed out, teachers must learn to use their knowledge base to provide the grounds for their choices and actions. In my study, teachers used their professional knowledge for teaching controversial issues, but their personal beliefs were also an important factor. In Taiwan, as everywhere else, teaching controversial issues is related to the structure and norms of the nation-state (King, 2012); in general, there are national curriculum standards and a national curriculum committee that makes the history curriculum. Teachers have little to no input at the national curricular decision making level. In addition, teachers often feel that they lack the required content knowledge and preparation for teaching controversial issues, especially those who graduated from traditional teacher preparation programs (Chen, 2008; Hung, 2007).

Therefore, when teachers face teaching controversial issues, teachers come to feel that it is necessary to develop professional knowledge that will guide them in this work. Through this study, we can see the manner in which teachers are anxious about the new content of the history curriculum, because they did not have such preparation from their teacher education programs. These teachers often reach out for additional professional knowledge, including subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, when facing the challenges raised by history curriculum reforms.

However, when teachers make curricular decisions in the classroom—when they exercise their gate keeping functions—they also make curricular decisions based on their personal beliefs, experiences and personal backgrounds. As Ross, Cornett, and McCutcheon (1992) pointed out, teachers are guided by personal and practical theories that structure their decision making. Along the same line, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) believe that teachers' personal knowledge and story-sharing make a difference in the lives of a teacher. Teachers' personal stories and experiences change the way teachers interpret the content of controversial issues and also how teachers represent these issues to students. However, the degree to which teachers are aware of such influences is, perhaps, questionable.

Second, the teacher as a curricular-instructional gatekeeper makes decisions for teaching controversial issues at the classroom level, not at the national level. There is always a gap between

Corresponding author email: hungyuha@msu.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

these levels. As Cornett (1987) argued, teachers too often believe curriculum development is a formal task imposed from the outside, not in conjunction with the teachers themselves. Along the same lines, in Taiwan, national curriculum decision making is a powerful dynamic and an ideological process that disempowers teachers (Chen, 2008); too many teachers believe they are only given a passive role for curriculum decision making. However, as we listen to the participants, it is clear that teachers do have an important sort of ownership over their classroom teaching.

When they represent historical events and controversial issues based on their own personal beliefs and professional knowledge, they significantly shape the curriculum at the classroom level. As Chen (2008) asserted, teachers play important roles, as curricular-instructional gatekeepers in the classroom, although they are often excluded at the national level. However, since teachers teach in the classroom, they can decide what needs to be included, what needs to be excluded, what skills need to be taught, how to interpret the historical accounts, and so forth. Teachers have more power in the implementation of a controversial issue at the classroom level than they often think.

Lastly, teachers can make differences when they make decisions based on their personal beliefs in ways that might influence students' development. As curricular-instructional gatekeepers, teachers impact the intellectual and moral development of students (Thornton, 2005). For example, Mr. Wu talked about the historical event 228 from a global perspective, and he teaches national identity in a manner that transcends national boundaries. Teachers influence not only students' ideas of national identity and self-identity, but also their opportunities for understanding the relationship between Taiwan and the PRC.

In addition, teachers make more differences than they expect and than they were expected to by the public in Taiwan. When teachers seriously consider the meanings and purposes of the curriculum, they also commit themselves to the responsibilities of making decisions at the same time. Indeed, teachers make differences as curriculum agents (Parker, 1987; Thornton, 1991). In Taiwan, in the past, most teachers have thought of themselves, and outsiders have thought about them, as curriculum deliverers, without the ability to make their own decisions. In a sense, they were not required and expected to shape the national curriculum and curriculum standards. However, from this study's findings, it is clear that teachers often recognize their own agency and, even when they do not, they still make decisions at the classroom level, and these curricular decisions, based on their personal beliefs, are a form of curricular agency. As Thornton (2005) argued, teachers as curricular gatekeepers have a more significant effect on the curriculum enacted in the classroom than is often believed.

Limitations of the Study

A concern for any interview study is the way in which factors in the environment that might influence teachers' willingness to honestly and openly discuss their experiences. In addition, it could

Corresponding author email: hungyuha@msu.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

be claimed that two and half months is a relatively short timeframe for a qualitative research. However, the evidences obtained from the observations and narrative interviews were used to corroborate and confirm the findings. In addition, my own insider knowledge of Taiwanese society and teaching cultures can be viewed as an important bulwark against faulty interpretation.

Implications for Policy and Practice

There has been a gap between classroom teaching and national curriculum-making. The results of this study suggest that national policymakers should take greater consideration of teachers, especially these teachers who have been empowered at the classroom level for teaching controversial issues.

On the other hand, teachers often feel anxious about new changes and teaching controversial public issues because of a lack of preparation from teacher education programs. Therefore, the result of this study suggests teacher educators should open the various courses and diverse field-placements for pre-service teachers in order to prepare their content knowledge and practical experiences for new content and issues. In addition, the results of this research also indicates that teachers are accustomed to reaching out for professional knowledge, including subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, for teaching controversial issues, without rethinking how their personal beliefs impact the curriculum that they teach. Therefore, teacher preparation and professional development programs should provide more chances for teachers, both preservice teachers and inservice, to reflect upon their personal beliefs and experience.

I began this paper by stating that it will always be a challenging (but imperative) task for Taiwanese history educators to construct a history curriculum with a pluralist and broad view of the past, present and future, and to make educational substance outweigh the ideological and political dimensions of school history. I believe that the results and recommendations of this study might be a helpful step in moving in that direction.

References

- Byford, J., Lennon, S., & Russell, W. B. (2009). Teaching controversial issues in the social studies: A research study of high school teachers. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 82(4), 165–170.
- Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Chen, N. P. (2004). The discussion of teachers' curricular decisions at the classroom level. *The Journal of National Education*, 52(2), 1–17.

- Chen, H. L. (2008). A critical reflection on the reform of the high school history curriculum in Taiwan. In D. Grossman & J. Lo (Eds.), *Social education in Asia: Critical issues and multiple perspectives* (pp. 87-110). Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Institution of Education.
- Chou, S. C. (2001). The myth of curricular decision. *The Journal of Education*, 7(47), 91–106.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1987). Teacher's personal knowledge: What accounts as personal in the study of personal. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 19, 487–500.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1996). Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes: Teacher stories of teachers. School stories, stories of schools. *Educational Researcher*, 25(3), 24–30.
- Cornett, J. W. (1987). *Teacher personal practical theories and their influence upon teacher curricular and instructional actions: A case study of secondary social studies teacher* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1990). Research on teaching and teacher research: The issues that divide. *Education Research*, 19(2), 2–11.
- Grossman, D. L., & Lo, J. (2008). Introduction. In D. Grossman & J. Lo (Eds.), *Social education in Asia: Critical issues and multiple perspectives* (pp. 1-12) Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Institution of Education.
- Hess, D. E. (2009). *Controversy in the classroom: The democratic power of discussion*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hsu, F. J., & Chen, M. S. (2004, 04). *The analysis of racial issues in Taiwan*. Paper presented in the Develop04ment of Taiwanese Population, Family, and National Healthy Policy Conference, Taipei, Taiwan.
- Hung, Y. H. (2007). *Explore the teachers' subjectivity in history curriculum guidelines reforms in Taiwan* (Unpublished master's dissertation). National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan.
- King, J. T. (2012). Teaching and learning about controversial issues: Lessons from northern Ireland. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 37(2), 215–246.
- Kuo, J. L. (1999). Political Logic of Three Links Policy Change. *Soochow Journal of Political Science*, 10, 65–95.
- Ministry of Education. (1996). *New curriculum standards for the junior high school education*. Taipei: Author.

- Ministry of Education (2006). *Temporal curriculum guidelines for senior high school education*. Taipei: Author.
- Ministry of Education (2009). *Temporal curriculum guidelines for senior high school education*. Taipei: Author.
- Ministry of Education (2013). *Temporal curriculum guidelines for senior high school education*. Taipei: Author.
- Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Oulton, C., Day, V., Dillon, J., & Grace, M. (2004). Controversial issues: Teachers' attitudes and practices in the context of citizenship education. *Oxford Review of Education*, 30(4), 489–507.
- Ross, E. W., Cornett, J. W., & McCutcheon, G. (1992). *Teacher personal theorizing: Connecting curriculum practice, theory, and research*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Stake (1995). *The art of case study research*. London, England: International Educational and Professional Publisher.
- Shulman, L. (1987). Knowledge and teaching foundation of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 51, 1–22.
- Parker, W. C. (1987). Teacher's mediation in social studies. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 15, 1–22.
- Thornton, S. J. (1991). Teacher as curricular-instructional gatekeeper in social studies. In J. P. Shaver (Ed.), *Handbook of research on social studies teaching and learning* (pp. 237–248). New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Thornton, S. J. (2005). *Teaching social studies that matters*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Walker, D. F. (2003). *Fundamentals of curriculum* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Wu, J. S. (2010). The relationship among the U.S., Taiwan, and the PRC after 911. *Soochow Journal of Political Science*, 28(1), 1–32.
- Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.