

# Chapter Five

## Discussion

The case analysis developed in chapter 4 gives a framework for understanding two junior high school EFL teachers' attitudes toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum and their teaching behaviors in classrooms. In this chapter, some themes and problems derived in the previous chapter are discussed in depth. The chapter has three parts. Section 5.1 briefly addresses the four research questions. Section 5.2 discusses critical themes and concerns. Section 5.3 provides a conclusion to this discussion chapter.

### 5.1 Answers to Research Questions

This section aims to answer the four research questions raised in Chapter 1, trying to understand how the two participants deal with different situations in the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum.

#### **Question #1: In a public junior high school, how do the two junior high school EFL teachers view Grade 1-9 (English) Curriculum?**

Both of the teachers appreciated the revised English curriculum, but Teacher B had many criticisms of the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum. Teacher A, a new teacher in English, didn't express her opinion on Grade 1-9 Curriculum, but she seemed to hold affirmative attitudes toward the English part of the curriculum. She considered that the new English curriculum offered her students opportunities to develop their speaking abilities and also contributed to her professional growth and development.

In contrast to Teacher A, Teacher B, an experienced teacher, was pessimistic about the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum because she worried about the political influence on this educational policy. She didn't know if this curriculum reform could be implemented successfully and reach its goal. However, she did appreciate the content of the revised English curriculum because this new English curriculum had its goals to develop students' communicative language skills and cultivate students' learning interests. Being able to benefit low-proficiency students was another advantage she appreciated.

**Question #2: How do the two junior high school EFL teachers put Grade 1-9 English Curriculum into practice in the classroom?**

The two teachers had very different teaching styles in dealing with the current English curriculum. Teacher A preferred to adopt bottom-up instruction and to put more emphases on accuracy than fluency. She was used to spending more time in teaching language forms and meanings than having students work on language functions. Although she emphasized the importance of listening and speaking competence of students, she couldn't avoid putting more emphases on language accuracy because of two reasons. One was the external factor of examinations, and the other was her prior experience as a student. Her learning experience has more influence on her teaching model than her positive attitudes toward communicative language teaching. In addition, her inexperience also led to the unfamiliarity with necessary teaching skills and the troublesome question of classroom management.

As opposed to Teacher A, Teacher B was an experienced teacher who owned necessary skills and abilities to deal with the situations that she encountered in the

classroom. Regarding her teaching, she also adopted bottom-up instruction to build her students' competence of the four skills. She dealt with grammar forms and sentence patterns prior to oral communication because of students' needs. The low-proficiency level of her students had Teacher B adjust her personal theory and philosophy of teaching to fit students' learning. During most of her teaching time, the researcher observed that she applied many mechanical drills instead of meaningful drills or communicative activities. She believed that her teaching could reduce her students' anxiety and cultivate their learning interests. She was guided by her critical thinking and professional knowledge in her classroom practices.

**Question #3: What are some of the important constraints and difficulties the two EFL teachers face when they implement the new English curriculum, and what are their coping behaviors?**

Both of them admitted that their teaching was still influenced by examinations, not only in the previous curriculum but also in current Grade 1-9 Curriculum. Because of examinations, Teacher A stressed grammar teaching and put more emphases on reading and writing activities. Although she tried her best to develop students' listening and speaking abilities, she could not avoid laying more stress on accuracy than fluency.

On the other hand, Teacher B complained about the emphasis of examinations and tests in the educational environment, but she could not resist its impact on her teaching, either. She continued giving her students quizzes and examinations, ordering test papers and reference books from textbook publishers, just as most teachers did at school. She thought she was forced to reach a compromise reluctantly with examinations and tests within a teaching system.

In addition to examinations, there were other constraints in the participants' workplace. Teacher A complained about the exhausting demand from school administrators and lack of professional development opportunities within the school. Without interaction with colleagues and active assistance from the school, Teacher A struggled alone on the way of implementing Grade 1-9 Curriculum.

In terms of Teacher B, she was deeply disappointed about the lack of sharing and cooperation among colleagues. She felt her colleagues had no motivation to attend workshops or seminars for professional growth. Although experience sharing and cooperation were encouraged in Grade 1-9 Curriculum, her colleagues were not interested. She had tried to inspire them by taking the lead in sharing; however, her colleagues' cold response frustrated her very much and prevented her from trying to change them again.

**Question #4: What are the advantages and disadvantages associated with the implementation of Grade 1-9 English Curriculum in the eyes of these two EFL teachers?**

In the eyes of Teacher A, the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum offered her students opportunities to develop their speaking abilities and contributed to her professional growth and development. As this new English curriculum puts much emphasis on learning to communicate with others, students could be taught through authentic materials and had more opportunities to speak English in class. Responding to the change of curriculum, she was eager to discuss with colleagues about activity design and to observe others' teaching in order to promote her understanding of teaching

knowledge and advance teaching techniques. Thus, she thought Grade 1-9 Curriculum motivated her to grow and develop professionally. In addition, she mentioned that the activity-based design of teaching materials not only saved her time to look for information but also interested her students and developed their abilities. The teaching materials with activities helped create a positive atmosphere, with fun and interests.

In contrast to the perceived advantages, Teacher A did not seem to perceive disadvantages associated with the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum. She had different concerns. Based on her own learning experience in school, she worried that students would develop insufficient language abilities under Grade 1-9 Curriculum.

With respect to Teacher B, she thought the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum achieved the goal of cultivating students' interests in English and particularly benefited students with low-proficiency level. The authentic and activity-based materials, with great improvement, helped get students more involved in class, again especially those with low proficiency. By increasing involvement, students had more interests in learning and were more willing to take part in teaching activities in the classroom. In addition, the authentic and activity-based materials also inspired her to offer students some brain-storming opportunities, which were never seen in the previous curriculum.

Teacher B also perceived disadvantages. The increasing paperwork chores from the central authority were the most troubling problems she had. Because these documents usually occupied the time which should be used in teaching, and they did not seem to have contribution to her students or her teaching. When there was no volunteer to take the tasks, Teacher B was forced to do the required task on her own.

The above four research questions increase our understanding of how junior high school EFL teachers respond to the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum. Obviously, in implementing this new curriculum, these two participants had their concerns and encountered some hindrances, but they also perceived some advantages from this educational reform. In this study, these two participants both appreciated the goal of developing students' communicative competence in English teaching and thought this change brought their students more opportunities to develop speaking and listening abilities. However, based on observations, they often played authoritative roles in their classrooms and paid a lot of attention to the rules of language usage, which could lead to only one part of communicative competence. They often ignored teaching their students how to use the language, which really helped the development of communicative competence. It is clear that there are some factors contributing to the discrepancy between their affirmative attitudes and teaching behaviors.

In this study, examination is one of the factors of the discrepancy between their affirmative attitudes and teaching behaviors. The two teachers said that they disliked giving students any pressure or punishment if their students received bad scores on tests. However, their teaching attitudes and teaching behaviors were really influenced by school-wide routine examinations and the country-wide Academic Attainment Testing. As a matter of fact, examination-oriented teaching culture has been a problem in Taiwan, and it never stops influencing teachers' teaching. Although the educational authority looks forward to replacing the over-emphasis of grades with the proposal of emphasizing competence in this new curriculum, the stress on examination results cannot be replaced easily. One of the reasons is that in our country, students' good performance on the

entrance examination is usually marked as successful teaching and is applauded and rewarded by parents. The approval from parents is one of the factors which influence teachers' confidence in teaching (Sue, 2003). This phenomenon reinforces examination-oriented teaching culture which influences EFL teachers in junior high schools, especially when English is still one subject of the Basic Competence Test. Therefore, most of the teachers still focus their teaching on the understanding of and getting familiar with linguistic knowledge. They give their students paper-pencil tests in the process of their teaching instead of offering situations to have students express their ideas and opinions in English. Because the Academic Attainment Testing still adopts a paper-pencil form without evaluating students' listening and speaking abilities, naturally, teachers put more emphasis on developing students' reading and writing abilities and giving students more paper-pencil tests (Huang et al., 2004). In this situation, the goals proclaimed in Grade 1-9 English Curriculum have very little chance to be reached. When teachers still spend much time on lexis and grammatical teaching, how can teachers really develop students' communicative competence in English? When teachers still give students so many paper-pencil tests, how can students experience learning interests and cultivate good learning methods? It is not likely that teachers will stop suffering from the pressure and submission to examination-oriented teaching in a short time.

In addition to the factor of examinations, teacher-centered orientation also has a significant impact on the discrepancy between teachers' attitudes and teaching behaviors in implementing Grade 1-9 English Curriculum. Although these two teachers deal with different situations in their classrooms, both of them put much emphasis on explaining lexis and grammar rules in most of their class periods. They are engaged in covering all

the materials in their textbooks. In the classroom, they are dominant speakers who employ their native language to facilitate rapid coverage of the lesson material and to ensure students' understanding. These two teachers develop students' interests and competence by activities in which the students participate in highly- controlled ways. They move toward a teacher-dominated mode which adopts traditional teacher roles. This teacher-centered orientation may prevent teachers from adopting a communicative approach in which student-centeredness is encouraged and teachers are mainly facilitators and consultants in the classroom. But the teacher-dominated mode is universally adopted by teachers at secondary level, especially in a highly centralized educational system (Pennington, 1995). For example, Young and Lee (1987) indicate that teachers in Hong Kong have a strong tendency to a directive and transmissional model of the teaching –learning process rather than a facilitative and interpretational model. In Taiwan, there is also a similar situation. Teachers know that it is necessary to incorporate listening and speaking activities in their teaching, but most of the activities are mechanical or controlled rather than communicative (Sue, 2003). Although teachers reveal positive attitudes towards a communicative approach, most of them still remain at a stage of quasi-communicative activities rather than communicative activities (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). This phenomenon is clearly a teacher-centered teaching style, in which teachers are dominators and controllers of classroom activities. To walk more closely toward the goal of developing students' communicative competence, our junior high school EFL teachers may need to give up their authority on the podium and increase the understanding of communicative activities first.

As mentioned above, junior high school EFL teachers' attitudes toward Grade 1-9



Curriculum are mainly affected by the education reform policy, the demand from school administrators, and the Academic Attainment Testing. In addition to examinations, their classroom practice is also affected by other factors, such as students' need, teaching materials, teacher-centered orientation, and teachers' prior learning experience. To compare the result of this study with that of Chen's investigation (2003) into junior high school EFL teachers' teaching attitudes toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum, the demands from parents in Chen's study did not seem to influence teachers' attitudes toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum in this study. Furthermore, this case study of two EFL teachers brings the value of offering teachers' classroom practice to verify teachers' attitudes toward the new curriculum without listening to teachers' statements alone. It provides a comprehensive understanding of not only how junior high school EFL teachers view this curriculum reform but also how they implement this new curriculum in their classroom.

To sum up, building the link between Grade 1-9 English Curriculum and classroom practice is really a big challenge. The internal factors intertwine with the external factor to influence EFL teachers' practice and teaching behaviors in Grade 1-9 Curriculum. Educational authorities should not ignore the impact of examinations on EFL teachers' teaching behaviors in implementing Grade 1-9 English Curriculum. On the other hand, junior high school EFL teachers should actively reflect on their daily practice in light of their understanding of Grade 1-9 English Curriculum. To engage in a deeper level of awareness and response to teaching rather than following routine procedures and lesson plans can help EFL teachers develop positive attitudes toward curriculum change and diminish the discrepancy between their attitudes and teaching behaviors in implementing Grade 1-9 English Curriculum.

## 5.2 Discussion

In this section, the researcher discusses three concerns derived from the previous analysis to further explore the reasons behind the two participants' attitudes and behaviors. The concerns are: (1) teacher autonomy, (2) professionalism, and (3) the policy of liberation of textbooks.

### **Concern #1: Teacher Autonomy**

One of the most important features of Grade 1-9 Curriculum is teacher autonomy. Autonomy is “the right or power of self-governance. In teaching, it is the control or empowerment to choose curriculum, teaching techniques, ways of instructions, and types of assessment” (Franklin, 1988, p.5). To increase teacher autonomy in this curriculum reform, the educational authority asks teachers to develop school-based curriculum, formulate a school curriculum plan, and organize and conduct teaching activities for alternative learning periods. Teachers are encouraged to compile home-made teaching materials and are allowed to select teaching materials based on students' needs, not necessarily to teach only according to textbooks. The central government hopes to transfer its role as a supervisor to that of a supporter. Considering these changes, Grade 1-9 Curriculum does look forward to inspiring teachers' sense of autonomy. Teachers are expected to be curriculum designers rather than curriculum implementers. However, how do teachers experience teacher autonomy in this curriculum reform?

First, the two teachers in this study are bothered by the increasing amount of tasks required by the school administrators or the MOE. Thus, they deal with the tasks in a perfunctory manner. In fact, teachers care about the curriculum that they implement in their classrooms rather than the measures that relate to increased teacher autonomy, such as developing school-based curriculum, formulating school curriculum plan, and organizing and conducting teaching activities for alternative learning periods. In addition, when teachers need to set aside extra time for accomplishing the tasks relevant to these measures without reducing their teaching periods in the school, these measures are possibly considered paperwork chores or bureaucratic requirements by teachers. Consequently, many junior high school teachers may not well accept the measures and may interpret them as orders from the top, which add to their overwhelming workload. In addition, although the MOE announces that teachers can select teaching materials based on students' needs without the limitation of textbooks, most of the junior high school teachers still concern how to deliver the knowledge within textbooks to their students and make their students become familiar with textbook contents in order to have a good performance in the Academic Attainment Testing (Raw, 1999).

Second, from the cases in this study, it is clear that the two EFL teachers have the room to decide their own instruction and teaching techniques, but they actually have no rights to decide their curriculum and types of assessment. They do not really have autonomy in this curriculum reform. One of the reasons is that textbooks are still the primary guide they use to teach in the classroom. The two teachers do not need to spend time designing curriculum or choosing other teaching materials. They just need to teach according to the sequence and arrangement of textbooks. They are not empowered in a

way similar to that of professors in universities or teachers in elementary schools.

Professors generally have no limitation of standards or guidelines. They have rights to design curriculum for their class and choose their teaching materials. Professors can, according to their curricular need, decide textbooks without approval of the authority. On the other hand, although teachers from elementary schools need to follow the textbooks approved by the authority, they own autonomy to select contents from the textbook according to their needs and students' interests. They can set the pace in their teaching without worrying about regular school-wide examinations (Chiang, 2002). With regard to junior high school teachers, the faculty committee also has autonomy in that they could select any parts of the contents from the textbook, similar to the way teachers from elementary schools do. However, junior high school teachers seldom drop any unit in the textbook; on the contrary, they must cover all the materials from different versions of textbooks because they are afraid of missing important concepts which will be covered in the Academic Attainment Testing. This condition reveals that junior high school teachers do not have real control over their work process. Their decision as to which teaching contents and materials to teach is influenced by the Academic Attainment Testing, not completely based on the curricular need or students' need. As their autonomy are partially limited by the Academic Attainment Testing, they can not be considered curriculum designers who own real autonomy.

The other reason for lack of autonomy in junior high schools is the constraint given by parents and school rating system. Junior high school teachers do not have the freedom to decide student rating at the end of school semester. In the public school selected for this study, which is famous for students' academic achievement, both of the teachers

order test papers for their students in the hope to increase students' familiarity with teaching contents. It is clear that paper-pencil test results occupy a large proportion for their assessment. To evaluate students' learning results without paper-pencil tests has its difficulty because the parents in this well established public school highly concern about their children's academic performance and grades on examinations. Parents also concern about the way that assessment is done and thus they would interfere teachers' assessment decisions. Moreover, the Education Department of Taipei City Government (2003) regulates that the proportion of summative evaluation to formative evaluation is 50% to 50%. This means school-wide regular examinations occupy 50% of the final semester grades. Teachers are left only 50% of autonomy to evaluate their students in the process of teaching. Thus, teachers seem to have the right to decide assessment in their teaching, but they are actually left little room to decide the whole process of evaluation. Grade 1-9 Curriculum encourages teachers to apply multiple approaches to assessment in the process of teaching, but it does not give teachers thorough control over the results of assessment at the end of the school semester.

Obviously, this educational reform using a top-down system has not given junior high teachers real autonomy. Grade 1-9 Curriculum claims to give teachers the rights to design teaching activities, interpret teaching contents, and choose teaching methods. But the external constraints such as examinations, parents, and school rating system make it almost impossible to actualize. Therefore, to enhance the sense of teacher autonomy, there is still a lot of room for the authority and teachers to improve and make efforts together.

### **Concern #2: Professionalism**

The emphasis on professional development and growth is another important feature of Grade 1-9 Curriculum. In terms of professionalization of teaching, it “involves the extent to which members of that occupation maintain control over the content of their work and the degree to which society values the work of that occupation” (Darling-Hammond, 1985, p.205). To prompt teachers’ professional status and professional development, Grade 1-9 Curriculum expects teachers to transfer their role from “passive learners” to “active researchers” (Raw, 1999). Teachers are invited to improve teaching problems by research or peer discussion and share teaching experiences with colleagues. Thus, collaborative teaching and cooperation among teachers are supported.

In this study, both of the teachers show their positive attitudes toward professional development and growth. In fact, many junior high school teachers also show positive attitudes toward developing professional abilities. Based on a survey of 325 junior high school EFL teachers by Huang et al. (2004) about the consciousness of Grade 1-9 Curriculum, a high percentage (70%) of the junior high school EFL teachers agree that they have strong motivations to improve their professional abilities and are willing to increase their abilities by taking part in seminars or in-service training programs. They are confident about their professional abilities, but they also admit that their ability to adapt for changes needs to be improved. In another research by Sue (2003) about junior high school EFL teachers’ empowerment, 62.8% of the junior high school EFL teachers believe they will keep developing professional abilities in the process of

their careers. This shows that professional development is considered a necessary part of being a teacher. Such emphasis in Grade 1-9 Curriculum is well accepted. But what strategy does the authority use for professional development in Grade 1-9 Curriculum?

In the initial implementing stage of Grade 1-9 Curriculum, to ask teachers to take part in in-service training programs related to Grade 1-9 Curriculum is a main strategy used by the authority. However, the in-service training programs still follow the traditional pattern. That is, interpretation of curriculum theories and explanation of new concepts are the focus of in-service training programs (Ou, 2000). The authority only tells teachers theories but does not tell or show teachers methods about how to bring theories into practice in classrooms. In addition, all the junior high school teachers are informed to attend the in-service training programs related to Grade 1-9 Curriculum. The authority prescribes certain amount of in-service training hours for teachers. Obviously, this strategy for teacher professional development follows a top-down model and reveals that teachers are still considered technicians, not intellectuals who own a lot of potential and knowledge to deal with the complicated world. This hinders teacher autonomy which is an essential attribute of professionalism (Darling-Hammond, 1985).

Fortunately, the central authority has implemented other supportive measures to encourage teachers' professional development these two years. For example, since 2002, the MOE has conducted the activity named "Guidepost 100" (the MOE, 2003) in which 100 excellent schools or teaching teams are selected to be honored because of their efforts to carry out Grade 1-9 Curriculum. Their award-winning teaching materials are posed in the MOE website to serve as examples for other schools and to offer demonstrations of Grade 1-9 Curriculum implementation. These exemplary schools,

teaching teams, and teachers became “seeding members” who are made responsible for helping local governments and school teachers implement this new curriculum. Up to 2006, there will be about 1000 “curricular seeding members.” We can expect that this measure will help the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum tremendously.

In addition, the MOE also sets a forum on the Internet to encourage teachers and practitioners to exchange ideas for implementing Grade 1-9 Curriculum. To ensure the efficiency of in-service training, the MOE supports the development of local in-service centers and offers financial aids. Other ways of promotion have also recommended, such as task-oriented workshops, action research, reflective thinking, and teaching demonstrations.

Basically, the MOE has made a lot of efforts to help raise teachers’ professionalism. These measures related to professionalism have their practicality and plausibility. However, many of the two teachers’ colleagues show negative attitudes toward seminars outside the school. Based on observations, their negative attitudes might be caused by heavy workload rather than the need to attend seminars. Most EFL teachers in this well established school also serve as homeroom teachers who need to put aside a lot of time to deal with student affairs. Even after school, many of them still work in their office or teach extra classes in the classroom. With the combined burden from teaching and taking care of student affairs, EFL teachers are usually exhausted at the end of the day and therefore their willingness to join seminars outside the school is low naturally.

Among the methods contributing to professionalism, cooperation among teachers is often considered one important means which can really influence teachers’ teaching in the classroom (Yeh, 2004 ). Because peer discussion within the school helps create a



relaxing, supportive environment for teachers to exchange information and share teaching experience. The school English workshop seems to be a good device to serve such a function. However, the occupational isolation among colleagues revealed in the two cases seems to make it clear that peer discussion or experience sharing is almost impossible in this environment. The colleagues in the participants' school are not used to talking about their teaching problems or sharing home-made materials. Maybe they are afraid to be considered incompetence or to be judged unfavorably. I think this problem reveals a traditional teaching culture in all of the junior high schools in Taiwan, not just in this school. Traditionally, our junior high school teachers teach solitarily in their own classrooms and exhibit little interest in issues and events beyond their classroom. Their concern is students' grades on examinations, which can help teachers gain respect from parents. They are not used to being observed in their classroom, so the presence of colleagues is often perceived as a threat. Thus, teachers have few opportunities to interact with one another, to compare what they know, and to develop their professional knowledge. Keeping a distance from other teachers protect the "privacy" of teachers, but they also contribute to the isolation and individualism among teachers (Hargreaves, 1980; Sarason, 1982; Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Hargreaves, 1994). Because of occupational isolation and individualism, teachers' professional growth is reduced (Darling-Hammond, 1985). Teachers lose opportunities to observe and be observed by their colleagues, to jointly diagnose problems, to share ideas, to develop programs and curricula, and to learn from others.

As a consequence, Teacher A who looked forward to growing professionally could not gain assistance and feedback from experienced practitioners Teacher B, for

example. Teacher B, in the same building, could not share teaching experience with colleagues or provide consultative ideas to new teachers, such as Teacher A. Ideally, senior and experienced teachers are usually the best model and play an important role to influence the novice (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). Teacher B can help Teacher A learn to translate theory into practice and they can become effective teachers together. But the occupational isolation and individualism in their workplace make the exchange and interaction impossible. In Su's investigation (2003), the same situation is presented: only 36% of junior high school EFL teachers have opportunities to cooperate with colleagues to develop professional abilities. Regular workshops do not contribute to professional abilities of teachers. Many teachers develop their professional abilities privately, focusing mainly on increasing linguistic competence. Most junior high school EFL teachers in Sue's research show negative attitudes toward peer discussion and colleague observation, similar to the condition in the participants' school. I think one of the reasons school regular workshops are not well responsible for professional development of teachers is that most workshop time is used on discussing teaching chores rather than on solving teaching problems collaboratively or appreciating exemplary teaching performance. In addition, the conservatism of teachers (Lortie, 1975) also influences teachers' professional development in school workshops. Because teachers' conservative attitudes make teachers easily follow their routine in teaching and do not actively engage in teaching improvement. Therefore, in curriculum reform, they can still keep their habitual teaching and perceive no needs to show positive attitudes toward discussing teaching problems or exchanging opinions of teaching.

Lortie (1975) thinks isolation is caused by the egg-crate-like structure of school in

which separated classrooms divide teachers from one another and let them see and understand little of what other colleagues do. It brings many teachers a welcome privacy and segregates un-necessary interference from outside. In contrast, it also dismisses possible sources of praise and support. Isolated teachers seldom receive adult feedback about their value, worth and competence (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Hargreaves, 1994). This professional isolation is interpreted as 'false' autonomy by May (1989), a form of individualism. "The cult of individualism" (Hargreaves, 1980, p.187) has deeply infected the occupational culture of teachers. Individualism stubbornly embedded in the cellular patterns of school organizations is connected to diffidence, defensiveness and anxiety (Hargreaves, 1994). Teachers are less evaluated and observed because they are afraid of the criticism that may be associated with evaluation. To be watched is to inhibit performance. Fear of exposure and incompetence in the more public teaching environment is much stronger than their hope to receive feedback and suggestions from other people. Teachers' anxiety is not rooted in their workplace but in their own naturally vulnerable skills and qualities (Hargreaves, 1980).

Clearly, isolation and individualism make up one particular form of teaching culture. They are problems and primarily shortcomings, resulting in teachers' negative attitudes toward developing professional abilities with colleagues. The fear of exposure and incompetence in a more public environment may not only hinder teachers' opportunities to communicate with others but also damage the essence of Grade 1-9 Curriculum. Although the authority proposes collaborative teaching to improve these phenomena, it does not really work in junior high schools. Because teachers do not perceive the need or necessity to implement collaborative teaching.

### **Concern #3: The Policy of Liberation of Textbooks**

In order to increase decision-making authority, which contributes to raise teachers' sense of self-esteem and lead to a greater sense of professionalism (White, 1992), teachers are allowed to participate in textbook selection in Grade 1-9 Curriculum. The two EFL teacher participants in this study expressed both their appreciation and anxiety for the liberation of textbooks. They thought various versions of textbooks brought them alternative choices, inspired them to develop teaching ideas and enriched their teaching activities. Moreover, students indeed had better abilities on listening and speaking than before Grade 1-9 English Curriculum. However, they also mentioned about their anxiety. Unfinished compilation of all textbooks, curriculum connection between elementary and junior high schools, the mistakes within the textbook, and lack of textbook evaluation were the main sources of their anxiety. So many problems make the two teachers in this study reveal an unfavorable attitude toward the liberation of textbooks.

The liberation of textbooks responds to the call for deregulation in the previous curriculum, but this measure, obviously, does not fully gain teachers' support. I think the concerns of the two teachers may also reflect many other teachers' misconceptions related to the liberation of textbooks.

First, curriculum connection is a serious concern of junior high school teachers. This curriculum connection involves the connection between elementary school curriculum and junior high school and the connection among different versions of textbooks. If the official English education starts from grade 5 in elementary schools,

freshmen at junior high school should have at least two years of English learning experience. These students from different elementary schools usually use different versions of textbooks. Thus junior high school teachers have to fill the curriculum gaps and deal with curriculum connection between different versions used by elementary and junior high schools when students initially enter classrooms. In addition, there is indeed a gap among different versions although all the textbooks are compiled according to the same curriculum principles approved by the authority. Teachers may not only need to select textbooks based on students' need but also have to worry about the gap among different version.

Second, unfinished compilation of all textbooks is another concern. As the central authority hastens to implement this curriculum reform, textbook publishers do not have sufficient time to look for teaching materials and develop textbook curriculum. Thus, they can just compile the new textbook and revise the old textbooks after receiving feedback from teachers at the same time. On the other hand, unfinished compilation of all textbooks leads teachers to lack a thorough understanding of textbook contents. Basically, teachers can only choose to adopt textbooks based on their subjective opinions, but there are no objective criteria for reference. Therefore, teachers will also worry if the textbooks can offer students enough languages forms and meanings.

Third, other concerns revealed by the two teachers in this study, of course, also influence teachers' attitudes, such as the mistakes within the textbook, and lack of thorough textbook review and evaluation.

To respond to teachers' concerns, the MOE has already implemented some measures to solve the problems. For example, the MOE builds a communicative

mechanism among textbook editors, curriculum planners, and textbook approval committee members to help achieve an agreement on the interpretation of ability indexes and diminish the gap among different versions of textbooks. As a matter of fact, many textbook publishers have published materials for curriculum connection in the hope to actively to assist teaching. In addition, the MOE also pays attention to textbook review and evaluation. The textbook publishers are requested to inform teachers or schools about the mistakes in textbooks. The National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT) is responsible for collecting feedback on different versions of textbooks from teachers, parents, and related people to improve the quality of textbooks. Thus, the mistakes found within textbooks have gone down from 0.98% to 0.3% per textbook on average since 2002 (the MOE, 2003).

It is clear that the central authority has taken teachers' concerns into consideration by not only building a system to supervise the textbooks but also trying to solve the problems associated with the liberation of textbooks. In fact, for textbooks, it should take a long time to move from compilation to evaluation, with many experts and curriculum planners working together in the project. However, because of hastening to liberate the control of the authority over textbooks, the process textbooks take to compilation is shortened and thus the quality of textbooks is still not very well controlled. After Grade 1-9 Curriculum was first implemented, many teachers reverted to highly recommend the version compiled by NICT, but only a few teachers think it is necessary to give publishers permission to design multi-versions of textbooks based on curriculum general principles (Huang et al., 2004). Teachers still favor one authoritative version, as the way before.

To gain teachers' support of the policy of liberation of textbooks, the central

authority might need to address teachers' concerns and misconceptions first and then keep supervising the compilation of textbooks in order to offer high-quality teaching materials.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

From the four major concerns of Grade 1-9 Curriculum in this chapter, as revealed by the two cases, it is obvious that in the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum, there are gaps between the ideal and the reality. The ideal curriculum designed by the educational authority is not the same as the curriculum implemented by practitioners. There are many creative measures for this new curriculum and the authority wants practitioners to develop concrete plans for themselves, but because parents do not share the same vision, practitioners cannot do it. In addition, concrete and sequential steps and help related to this curriculum reform are not sufficiently provided to practitioners at the moment.

Maybe the best strategy is to create opportunities for dialogues and discussions, which should allow both parties to shape their own views and to develop realistic plans, taking a collaborative model rather than a top-down pattern. The educational authority needs to make more effort to remove gaps between the ideal and the reality and provide teachers with a supportive environment in which they can articulate their difficulties and gain assistance. While Grade 1-9 Curriculum is still at its beginning stage, there is still much room for improvement.