



School-Based Curriculum Development in Taiwanese Preschools: Reflections on Meaning and Development Strategies

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Article DOI: [10.55677/SSHRB/2026-3050-0106](https://doi.org/10.55677/SSHRB/2026-3050-0106)

DOI URL: <https://doi.org/10.55677/SSHRB/2026-3050-0106>

KEYWORDS: curriculum, school-based curriculum development, young children

ABSTRACT: If curriculum is seen as a linear process of implementing predetermined goals and content, then school-based curriculum risks becoming merely an administrative requirement or a showcase of teaching techniques. Conversely, if curriculum is conceptualized as a form of inquiry in practice (curriculum as inquiry), then teachers become not just implementers but also co-constructors and reflective practitioners. This viewpoint aligns with the theoretical stance of curriculum as praxis, emphasizing that teachers must continuously adjust the curriculum through observation, dialogue, and reflection in concrete teaching contexts, thereby responding to children's immediate learning needs and overall well-being. Based on the above context, this paper aims to offer a reflective examination of the meanings and developmental strategies of school-based curriculum development in Taiwanese preschools, with the intention of deepening teachers' understanding of the nature and practical implications of school-based curriculum development.

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Published: January 13, 2026

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary theoretical and practical context of early childhood education, school-based or center-based curriculum development has gradually become a core issue in both Taiwan's early childhood education policy discourse and pedagogical practice. School-based curriculum development is not merely about the localization of content or the diversification of instructional activities; rather, it represents a curriculum construction process deeply rooted in the unique educational context of each kindergarten. This process emphasizes the dynamic interactions among children, teachers, families, and the community, and views curriculum as a form of ongoing professional practice—one that is continuously generated, reflected upon, and revised. From a policy perspective, Taiwan's Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework clearly states that the curriculum should be child-centered, respecting children's life experiences, developmental needs, and cultural backgrounds. It encourages kindergartens to integrate and design curricula based on their environmental conditions, community resources, and professional characteristics. This policy orientation not only provides an institutional foundation for school-based curriculum

development but also grants teachers a significant degree of professional autonomy in curriculum interpretation and implementation. Nevertheless, in practice, the promotion of school-based curricula often faces tensions between administrative systems, evaluation mechanisms, and standardized quality demands. Consequently, in some kindergartens, the so-called “school-based” curriculum ends up being superficial, merely minor adjustments within existing curricular frameworks rather than genuinely responding to children’s lived experiences and local cultural contexts. Furthermore, the key to school-based curriculum development in Taiwan lies not just in what curriculum content is implemented but also in how the nature of curriculum is understood. If curriculum is seen as a linear process of implementing predetermined goals and content, then school-based curriculum risks becoming merely an administrative requirement or a showcase of teaching techniques. Conversely, if curriculum is conceptualized as a form of inquiry in practice (curriculum as inquiry), then teachers become not just implementers but also co-constructors and reflective practitioners. This viewpoint aligns with the theoretical stance of curriculum as *praxis*, emphasizing that teachers must continuously adjust the curriculum through observation, dialogue, and reflection in concrete teaching contexts, thereby responding to children’s immediate learning needs and overall well-being (Biesta, 2015; Carr, 2001; Moss, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2017; Stenhouse, 1975). Based on the above context, this paper aims to offer a reflective examination of the meanings and developmental strategies of school-based curriculum development in Taiwanese preschools, with the intention of deepening teachers’ understanding of the nature and practical implications of school-based curriculum development.

2. MEANING

School-Based Curriculum Development (SBCD) refers to curriculum development work that is grounded in the school as the primary unit of action. Since the 1970s, countries in Europe and North America have increasingly recognized the importance of schools designing their own curricula and have reconceptualized teachers not merely as users or implementers of curricula, but also as curriculum developers. Originating within schools, school-based curriculum development places the school at the center of curriculum decision-making, regards educational personnel as the primary agents of action, and grants schools responsibility and authority over curriculum design. In contrast, the curriculum movement that became prevalent in the late 1950s adopted a national-level curriculum development model commonly referred to as the Research–Development–Diffusion–Adoption (RDDA) model. This model was characterized by a top-down approach to curriculum design, guided largely by disciplinary experts and frontier academic research. As a result, the formulation of curriculum standards, guidelines, and syllabi tended to be centralized, leaving limited room for schools and teachers to participate meaningfully in curriculum decision-making. From the 1970s onward, however, broader educational trends emphasizing decentralization, democracy, and autonomy gave rise to the school-based curriculum development movement. This movement represented a grassroots, bottom-up approach to curriculum reform, emphasizing curriculum design through the organizational structures and professional practices of individual schools. It enabled schools to innovate, make decisions, and assume responsibility for curriculum development based on their own contextual needs. Moreover, school-based curriculum development involved a reallocation of power, responsibility, and control between central and local governments, granting schools greater legal and administrative autonomy as well as professional authority, thereby fostering self-management and sustainable development. School-based curriculum development gained momentum in the mid-1970s through the combined influence of three major educational reform movements: the school curriculum development movement, the resource movement (which focused on providing teachers with instructional resources and establishing school-based resource centers), and the school-based in-service training movement. All three movements shared a school-centered orientation and placed teachers at the forefront of curriculum reform. Consequently, effective implementation of school-based curriculum development requires the provision of adequate resources, professional support, and continuous training for teachers, as well as the cultivation

of teachers' professional confidence, enabling them to play an active and empowered role in curriculum development (Fang, 2026).

Both conceptually and practically, school-based curriculum development is an essential task that every preschool must intentionally plan and enact. School-based (or center-based) curriculum development in early childhood education refers to a curriculum that is collaboratively constructed within each preschool's unique context—including children's characteristics, teachers' professional expertise, community culture, parental expectations, and locally available resources—rather than the uncritical adoption of standardized textbooks or externally imposed programs (Chen, 2022).

3. DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Establishing a Shared Curriculum Vision

The development of schools as learning communities is a subject of increasing interest and importance internationally. With the broad notion of a learning community widely recognised and well established, the development of learning organisations has become more significant in global education programmes. Effective SBCD requires a shared understanding among educators regarding the purposes and values of early childhood education. Developing a collective curriculum vision through professional dialogue enables teachers to articulate their beliefs about children, learning, and teaching, thereby creating coherence across curriculum practices (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Shih, 2024a, 2024b; Teppo Toikka & Mirja Tarnanen, 2024).

3.2 Grounding Curriculum in Children's Life Worlds

Children have the spontaneous ability to learn. When children develop the ability to explore their environment, be resourceful about the materials, people, and skills that they engage with, and think flexibly about different approaches to a situation, they are better equipped for whatever challenge next confronts them (Shih, 2021, 2026).

Curriculum planning is at the heart of educational success. Imagine a school without a clear path of what students should learn, how they should learn it, and why it's important. It would be chaotic, right? That's why effective curriculum planning is so crucial. It shapes the learning experiences of students, ensuring that education is structured, purposeful, and relevant (Teachers Institute, 2026). Curriculum planning should begin with systematic observation and documentation of children's play, inquiries, and social interactions. Everyday experiences—such as family routines, food practices, or interactions with the natural environment—can serve as meaningful entry points for curriculum inquiry. This approach reflects a phenomenological orientation to curriculum, emphasizing children's subjective meanings and lived experiences (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Shih, 2024; Teppo Toikka & Mirja Tarnanen, 2024).

3.3 Integrating Local Culture and Community Resources

The integration and implementation of local culture curriculum in Taiwanese preschools has emerged as a key focus in early childhood education in Taiwan. The main emphasis lies in the development of school-based curricula that are contextually grounded and characterized by close collaboration among preschools, families, and community stakeholders, thereby promoting holistic learning experiences and community engagement. School districts have always had a vested interest in engaging with families and their local communities. SBCD provides opportunities for preschools to collaborate with families and community members, incorporating local festivals, languages, crafts, and ecological knowledge into the curriculum. Such practices support culturally sustaining pedagogy and counterbalance the homogenizing effects of standardized curriculum packages (Lin, 2024; Paris & Alim, 2017; Renbarger et al, 2025; Shih, 2022).

3.4 Strengthening Professional Learning Communities

A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is commonly defined as a group of educators who continuously engage in collaborative, reflective, critical inquiry into their own practice in a learning-oriented, inclusive, and growth-promoting manner. Central to this concept is the premise that improvements in student learning are fundamentally dependent on the ongoing professional learning of educators. Thus, PLCs are not merely designed to facilitate mutual learning among teachers; rather, their ultimate aim is to foster sustainable educational change that benefits students and all relevant stakeholders. Sustainable change within PLCs can be cultivated through the integration of both individual and collective learning processes, enabling educators to continually refine their pedagogical approaches and enhance their professional practice. Teacher collaboration, therefore, represents a cornerstone of sustainable school-based curriculum development (SBCD). Regular collaborative planning, peer observation, and reflective dialogue reposition curriculum development as a form of professional inquiry. Through these processes, teachers jointly interrogate pedagogical assumptions and iteratively refine curriculum directions based on evidence emerging from practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Shih, 2024; Teppo Toikka & Mirja Tarnanen, 2024; Vičič Krabonja et al, 2024).

3.5 Employing Pedagogical Documentation and Process-Oriented Assessment

Pedagogical documentation—including learning stories, photographs, children’s work samples, and transcripts of children’s dialogue—serves as a reflective tool that makes children’s learning processes visible and informs curriculum decision-making. Rather than merely recording outcomes, documentation enables teachers to interpret how children think, inquire, negotiate meanings, and construct understanding over time (Rinaldi, 2004). In line with Taiwan’s emphasis on process-oriented assessment in early childhood education, pedagogical documentation reframes assessment from a summative judgment to an ongoing interpretive practice that foregrounds children’s learning trajectories, identity construction, and meaning-making processes (Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 2017; Knauf, 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of education affects a country’s development and success, and education serves not only as a catalyst for personal development but also as a powerful instrument for global change. Its influence extends beyond the cultivation of skills required for economic productivity to encompass nation-building, social cohesion, and reconciliation. This perspective affirms education’s essential role in both national development and individual flourishing (Lin & Shih, 2024). With specific regard to early childhood education, substantial brain development occurs during the period from birth to six years of age, making this stage a critical window for educational intervention. Optimal early childhood development—characterized by health, safety, and effective learning experiences—lays the foundation for individuals to realize their full potential in adulthood and to participate meaningfully in economic, social, and civic life. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) therefore plays a pivotal role in advancing equity, social justice, inclusive economic growth, and sustainable development, generating long-term benefits for both children and society. Internationally, diverse curricular approaches to early childhood education have emerged, reflecting differing sociocultural values, educational philosophies, and policy priorities. In Taiwan, early childhood education has undergone significant transformation in response to demographic change, globalization, and increasing attention to children’s rights and well-being. Guided by the Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework, Taiwan emphasizes holistic child development, integrating physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions of learning. The curriculum foregrounds play-based learning, life-centered experiences, and process-oriented assessment, reflecting a commitment to developmentally appropriate practice and child-centered pedagogy. At the policy level, ECEC is increasingly framed as a public good and a foundation for social sustainability, addressing issues of educational equity, family support, and social integration. Within this

context, early childhood education is not merely preparatory for formal schooling but is recognized as a vital space for cultivating democratic values, social responsibility, and lifelong learning dispositions, thereby contributing to Taiwan's broader goals of sustainable national development (Shih, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2017; UNESCO, 2024; Vallberg Roth & Palla, 2023; Wang & Shih, 2023). In the development of early childhood education, school-based curriculum development in Taiwanese preschools constitutes a highly significant and indispensable dimension. Building upon this contextual foundation, this paper seeks to provide a reflective and critical examination of both the meanings and developmental strategies of school-based curriculum development in Taiwanese preschools. The intention is to deepen teachers' understanding of its underlying philosophy, core nature, and practical implications for pedagogical decision-making and curriculum implementation. Accordingly, this paper proposes several key strategies for advancing school-based curriculum development in Taiwanese preschools as follows: (1) Establishing a shared curriculum vision; (2) Grounding curriculum in children's life worlds; (3) Integrating local culture and community resources; (4) Strengthening professional learning communities.

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