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AN ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTUALIZATION FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT : THE CASE OF EDUCATIONAL PROJECT FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY CONTEXT IN THE SOUTHERN BORDER SCHOOLS OF THAILAND

Abstract

In the article the author has discussed the necessity for integrating two conceptualizations of curriculum namely the Curriculum as an Agenda for Social Resolution, and the Curriculum as the Learner's Reflective Learning Experience in the creation the 'Good Health for Quality Lives' Project. One of the main purposes of this Project is to contribute greater equity in 'quality lives' for Thai students from Southern Border schools, those who have different cultural and social background and live in different context from students in the Central part of Thailand.

The utilization of the duo conceptualization of curriculum as the underlying concept for the Project development allows researchers, local teachers, local educators, and local community members in this Project to design specific educational program more relevant to the circumstances of the students' lives despite the fact that Thai teachers are oppressively working under the dominant conceptualizations of curriculum: Curriculum under standard based framework, and Curriculum as planned and imposed intended outcomes.

The author's main message is that despite the dominant conceptualizations of curriculum, it is possible for Thai educators, teachers, and researchers to design their own ways of organizing more relevant content, and instructional process in addition to the ones officially provided so that to be benefit students in their specific circumstances, in this case toward greater equity of good lives.

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Background Issues :

An attempt to establish the National Basic School Curriculum B.E. 2551, developed under standard based framework in schools throughout Thailand has been rather challenged by a range of theorists, researchers, and practitioners who devote their professional time studying and developing curriculum under other frameworks or characterizations of curriculum. Although several elements within the standards movement have served as school accountability to guarantee high academic standards, which have been set by powerful institution for all students, there are also a few elements from the other commitment perspectives needed to be considered as well. One of the issues raised is whether we should limit our contempt to just the quality knowledge and skills demanded by the competitive world market? Are we not concerned about their ability to apply the high quality knowledge and other obtained competence in the thoughtful, reflective, and practical ways so that to create quality life in their existing social and cultural contexts?

Within the standard based domain, the focus is obviously on the creation of specific knowledge and skills which all students must acquire. It is undeniable that such specific knowledge and skills, labeled as standards are chosen through political discussion and discretely organized for students to be learned. Every student, regardless of their socio-cultural background, learning ability, and even social issues advance or are retained based only on their actual learning achievement. That is the emphasis is strictly on criterion-referenced assessment which must aligned to the standards. School accountability through standard based curriculum elaborated above is necessary considering competitive world trends, but school accountability through community rights as stated in the 1977 Constitution and the National Education Act must certainly take on another form and function. Based on the principles and guidelines provided by the 1977 Constitution, it is hoped that the National Education Plan will involve all segments of society in designing and decision making concerning public activities (OEC, 2004). In addition, it is stated in Section 46 that in providing education, the conservation and restoration of local wisdom will be taken into consideration (OEC, 2004). This is to ensure that the National Education Plan will not only

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empower Thais so that they are able to live in competitive world, but also create healthier and better life standards relevant to their social and cultural context. In this case, school accountability must seriously take local participants' input and demand into consideration. What is overlooked by standard based curriculum as currently conceived by ONEC is that it insists mainly on the quantification of learning outcomes as prescribed by standards, meanwhile ignoring local participants' right as client groups.

Having described the challenge Thai educators and practitioners have faced, we come to the main point of this paper which is the introduction of the new framework for curriculum development and implementation: the Duo Conceptualizations of Curriculum framework. The new framework is essential as it allows a teacher to fulfill the requirement of curriculum standards without losing sights of the learners and the milieu, the other two essential elements in the curriculum field (Schwab, 1973). Thus, it is worthwhile mentioning at this point that to effectively accomplish the task the teacher must be equipped with not only the content and pedagogical knowledge, but also the knowledge in rural history and community development. In addition, and perhaps the most crucial element of the new framework is the interest in matters and mind of the rural participants.

Right after the brief introduction of the Duo Conceptualizations of Curriculum, general scope and precise description of the Project Good Health for Happy Lives, which is one of the many development projects initiated by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn is provided so that to give picture of how the new framework is being implemented without disturbing those who are working under the existing standard based curriculum framework.

Introduction : Duo Conceptualizations in Curriculum as a New Framework for Curriculum Implementation

The attempt to integrate the two conceptualizations of curriculum framework, the *Curriculum as the Learner's Reflective Learning Experience* and the *Curriculum as Agenda for*

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Social Resolution together and create a new framework to be utilized hand in hand with the standard based curriculum is to allow my students, those in southern border schools in particular to create meaningful and practical learning outcomes from the intended learning outcomes prescribed in the standard based curriculum. Although the author has introduced the two conceptualizations separately, it is noted that both conceptualizations are designed to be utilized together, infusing as one framework.

Curriculum as the learner's reflective learning experience. According to Ralph Tyler (1949) knowledge from course content and class activities provided throughout carefully designed curriculum has quite different meaning when it meets the experiential repertoire of the students. Considering the power of a student's experience on his experiential learning, one needs to focus his attention on the cultural and religious issues, and particularly low quality of life issues of the people living in the southern border provinces. If this is the case, then a teacher must not take for granted that the intended or planned outcomes the students achieved are in fact learned. It is also possible that what they learned might be categorized as the unintended outcomes, the more advance or even contradict to the planned ones. It is suggested that a teacher must artistically facilitate the student's search for meaningful learning experience, the set of knowledge and skills relevant to the solution of their problem out of the planned outcome provided. In order to master the task, the teacher must pay attention not only to the planned outcomes, but to the students' reservoir of experience, and also to the immediate social issues. As for the student, he or she must attend to his provided planned outcomes, then reflectively, making sense of meaning and direction of the action, circumstances, and anticipate the consequences of such action. Through such learning process each student will come up with different meaning of action relevant to his specific need and circumstance although each one is provided with the same planned activities

Curriculum as an Agenda for Social Resolution: This conceptualization of curriculum framework is inspired and developed from John Dewey's conception of schools. According to Dewey, no culture or society is perfect and it is the school's responsibility to provide an agenda of

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knowledge and values that lead students to better their society and cultural institutions. Furthermore, the schools are to empower students so that they can create activities to support the improved society. At this point it is worthwhile reminding that the knowledge and values mentioned are not just those in the planned outcomes, but focusing also on the ones from the students' meaningful learning experiences. This is to render the space for students' creativity and self actualization. The orientation may start with knowledge and values from standard based curriculum, then involve reflective learning experiences as considerable input from students on how to improve or better their existing health condition. It is crucial to equip students with critical thinking abilities and the desire to improve their society through at least four essential questions: what needed to be improved?, why?, how?, and with what particular knowledge and skill?

Project Good Health for Happy Lives

Target Groups: The Project involved 50 teachers from 20 schools in Hala Bala Conservation Project in Narathiwat province.

Objectives: As teachers in the 20 southern border schools in Narathiwat province were facing increasing challenges in their work in order to provide efficient access to good health and happy lives for their students, the 50 school teachers and the researcher team identified three major goals for teachers.

- To develop 8 sets of learning plans for students in grade 1-8, designed after students' repertoire of rural experiences and within standards so that to enhance both the knowledge required and relevant knowledge skills necessary for good health and happy lives.
- To create story-telling reading materials basing on substantial information from health authorities, and related rural wisdom.
- To evaluate the quality of the Project through the actual implementation of the learning lessons, and students' learning achievement.

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Duo Conceptualization of Curriculum in the Project Development

There were five stages in the Project development.

The first stage was to introduce all teachers to the objectives and the focus of the Project.

The second stage provided the teachers with knowledge and knowledge skills in the development of effective learning plans, focusing on standards while maintaining students' learning experiences. The teachers were also requested to develop the learning plans, and improve them under the researchers' advice. The 8 learning plans with students' health related titles considering the actual students' health issues were expected to be completed as the result of the second workshop. Knowledge on food sanitation and control of malnutrition, control of infection disease, dental care, preventive measure for alcohol, and drug use, control of respiratory disease, and control of digestive disease were to be included in the learning plans.

The third stage was to familiarize the teachers with story-telling material, and its developmental techniques. The teachers were encouraged to create a story-telling books of reading to accompany each learning plan. Students' reflection on health issues and effective solutions obtained from rural wisdom, together with information from Public Health authorities were recommended to be presented in the materials. The edited version of the children books and materials were later published as instructional materials to be utilized in participating schools.

The fourth stage focused on activities, and evaluation techniques to be used in the Project. Reflective learning activities were emphasized, assisting students in examining their daily life experiences and moving toward a new understanding of information provided. Using story-telling books of reading developed to have students reflect better on their health habits. As for evaluation, the Project introduced the concept of dynamic assessment which was suggested by Holt and Willard-Holt (2000) to be another way of assessing the true potential of students in addition of the conventional tests. According to the concept, assessment was seen as a two way process involving interaction between teacher and student to find out ways to improve student's actual

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health performance. Dialogue discussion on the four essential questions (what needed to be improved?, why?, how?, and with what particular knowledge and skill?) was emphasized.

The fifth stage was the introduction of the implementation stage of the Project. The teachers were provided an overview of how to infuse and conduct the developed learning plans in actual classes. Variety of data needed and necessary data collection techniques were also presented.

Conclusion:

At best the duo-conceptualization of curriculum framework outlined in this paper seeks to reorient the teachers 'role as curriculum designer involving in designing health education program and instructional materials relevant to the circumstances of the students' lives despite the fact that they had to work under standard based framework. The new framework is essential as it allows a teacher to fulfill the requirement of curriculum standards without losing sights of the learners' experiences and the actual health issues context. The author argues strongly that to effectively accomplish the task the teacher must be equipped with not only the content and pedagogical knowledge, but also the recognition of the matter and mind of the rural participants. The most crucial element of the new framework is in the attempt to eliminate any disparities in health information prescribed in standard based curriculum and the actual health issues of the students so that to provide more equity of health education in the southern border community.

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