

STRATEGY OF LOCAL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT BY PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH: A CASE STUDY IN MULTI-ETHNIC SCHOOL, CHIANG MAI, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to develop local curriculum with the strategy of participatory research in a multiracial school in Wat Ket Karam, Muang district, Chiang Mai province. The research methodology was Participatory Action Research which required the cooperation of people in the community in developing and integrating multicultural education concept to the local curriculum. The study was separated into four stages: 1) planning (to prepare and study the community), 2) curriculum development, 3) implementation, and 4) evaluation.

The result of the study in the first and the second stages showed that the local curriculum currently used in the school was not related to the life style and culture in Wat Ket community and was not related to multicultural learners who came from different racial background. In the mean time, the result of the stage three was the construction of grade 4 to 6 new local curriculum based on multicultural education concept.

The result of the last stage, which was about curriculum implementation and evaluation, showed that there were positive effects towards the learners. First, the learners were able to see the cultural differences of people living in Wat ket community equally. Secondly, the learners accepted various forms of culture and life style among different groups of people living in Wat Ket community. Thirdly, the learners respected culture and life style of every group of people in Wat Ket community. Finally, the learners understood and saw the cultural value of every group of people in Wat Ket community, which was related to the research objectives.

Keywords: Curriculum Development, Ethnicity, Education, Wat Ket Community, Multicultural Education.

INTRODUCTION

Even though, there have been many processes in constructing and developing local curriculum in school widely since the academic year of 1999. It was found that the local curriculum in Thailand did not respond to the real diversity in local community (Ministry of Education, 2001). According to the study of Pipatpen (2007) “*A Practice of Local Wisdom Assembly to School Education*”, it can be seen that the local curriculum does not tend to connect and negotiate with local knowledge, intellectual and history in the mainstream of Thai internationalism. Learners are not proud of local identity, cannot see the value of localism, and connect with the local knowledge. Local wisdom and academic knowledge from school

curriculum are different from the reality in terms of ideology, knowledge, and how to use the knowledge in real life. Moreover, the locals did not take part in local curriculum development. Therefore, there are some limitations in showing the real local knowledge because “*knowledge*” in the local curriculum was created from other people who are not directly the owner of the culture (Nawarat, 2019).

Chiang Mai has been a representation of diversity since the past in terms of race, culture and financial status (Chairat, 2006). This diversity is oppressed by Lanna mainstream culture. The value of diversity, which is the beauty and strength of Chiang Mai, is reduced. This issue is reflected through the local curriculum in a school located in at Wat Ket community in Chiang Mai even if the locals and the students are multiracial.

It was found that the school local curriculum did not respond the diversity among learners in Wat Ket Karam municipal school. The content did not include the ethnicity of the students to be a part of the curriculum such as Chan people, the Burmese and hill tribes. Instead, the content is full of Lanna culture which is the mainstream culture of Chiang Mai. The reason was that the local curriculum was created by school management team and teachers, who raised and praised only Lanna culture. This curriculum was not from the cooperation of the real locals. As a result, the curriculum did not reflect the reality of the community which was composed of Lanna people, Chan people, and other groups of hill tribes.

This phenomenon is the beginning of this research in order to find strategies in developing the local curriculum, called “*Chiang Mai Muang Ngam*” or “*Chiang Mai as a Beautiful City*”. So, the new local curriculum will include all groups of people in the community. The learners will be proud of their tradition and culture as a member of the community. This new curriculum will also encourage the learners to see the values and respect every group living in the community equally. The development processes were done through “*Participatory Action Research*”. All community stakeholders (school management team, teachers, the locals, religious representatives, parent representative, and student representatives were invited to take part in the processes.

The development strategy in this study was categorized into four stages. The first stage is “*deconstruction*”, which means to deconstruct “*Chiang Mai Muang Ngam*” curriculum (currently used in Wat Ket Karam municipal school). The second stage is to deconstruct Wat Ket community. The first two stages was to study and analyze Wat Ket community, and to criticize “*Chiang Mai Muang Ngam*” curriculum to look for problems that did not meet the community’s needs and respond to the reality of the community by using the concept of multicultural education. The third stage is “*reconstruction*” which refers to the local curriculum development under multicultural education. The purpose of this study was to make the demands to educational profession to review the local curriculum construction. There should be fairness for every group of people. The curriculum should not obstruct some group of people or detain the past. The curriculum should be straightforward to all people in the community which will be the foundation among people in the community to equally accept, respect and see the value of the stories of life style, culture and wisdom in the society (Thongtew, 2002).

Research Objective

This research aimed to develop the local curriculum under the concept of multicultural education by using participatory action research as a methodology.

Research Area

This research is a participatory qualitative action research conducting in upper primary school in Chiang Mai urban area or Wat Ket Karam municipal school. The purpose is to deconstruct and reconstruct the localism in the local curriculum under the concept of multicultural education and the third space. The research areas chosen by the researcher are as follow:

Scope of Area

Wat Ket Community, Muang district, Chiang Mai province. The researcher used the consciousness of people, who identify themselves through “*the localness*” instead of geographical factors, to indicate people in the community.

Scope of Stakeholders

- 1) School management team of Wat Ket Karam municipal school
- 2) Teachers of Wat Ket Karam municipal school
- 3) Students in grade 4 to 6 of Wat Ket Karam municipal school
- 4) Parents
- 5) Formal and informal community leaders
- 6) Religious organizations
- 7) Public and private organizations
- 8) Local people living in Wat Ket community

Educational Advantages

The new local curriculum with the concept of multicultural education and the third space was constructed. Strategic suggestions in constructing and developing local curriculum for multiracial learners under the concept of multicultural education and the third space were created and compiled.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was to construct local curriculum by using two methodologies.

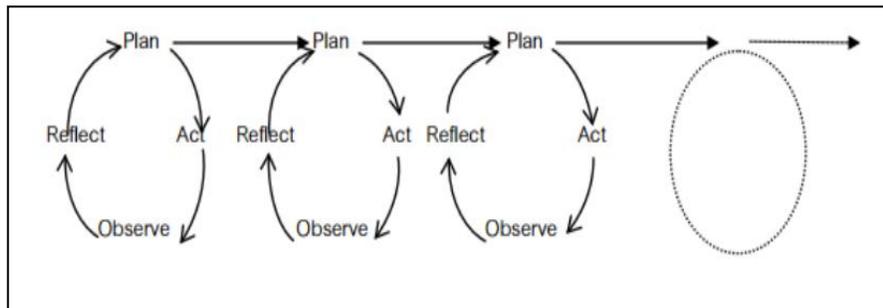
PAR

PAR was used in local curriculum development strategies. Kemmis & McTaggart (1988) revealed that participatory action research was composed of two concepts; action and participation. Action means activities arranged by the research project. Participation means all stakeholders are required to take part in research activities by analyzing a problem or circumstance and making a decision throughout the process. PAR was used in this study in order to develop the local curriculum and solve the problems from the previous curriculum which did not reflect the reality of the community. The locals did not take part in the process because they were seen as people who did not have knowledge. Every process of this study were done through PAOR which is a research process reflecting the result of the performances according to the concept of Kemmis & McTaggart (1988).

This process is composed of four stages or a complete cycle of participatory qualitative action research. The processes are as follow:

- Planning
- Observing
- Action
- Reflection

The cycle of participatory qualitative action research (PAOR) contains research and integrated practice in each stage to solve the problems, apply, observe the results and use the outcome to exchange and learn as the diagram below.



Source: Wongwanich (2009)

FIGURE 1
ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

PAOR engage in a dynamic process involving iterations of activities, such as a “*spiral*” of activities. The key idea is that the researcher “*spirals*” back and forth between reflection about a problem, data collection, and action. At some point in the process, the action researcher formulates an action plan in response to the problem of curriculum development (Brock & Pettit, 2007). This plan will be simply presenting the data to important stakeholders. It may be a formal written plan or an informal discussion about how to proceed, and it may engage a few individuals or involve an entire community (Chantawanich, 1998).

Multicultural education

Banks (1993) sees education in school as a primary goal or a basic goal in providing multicultural education. The school should be reformed so that all learners can have knowledge, attitude and skills in living in the world full with racial and ethnic diversity by accepting the equality of differences. Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform to provide advantages to learners. To construct curriculum, lessons and learning activities, it should be focused on learners themselves to see cultural differences. Therefore, learners will respect and accept cultural diversity in the society.

Research Processes

First Stage: Planning

- 1) Start with the community survey in order to look for community's needs and learning centers in the community which helps construct the local curriculum by interviewing, observing and deep survey.
- 2) Analyze basic community information and related document.
- 3) Build a research team composing of the researcher, teachers, students, the locals and people who are interested in the research project. This group was selected from volunteers.
- 4) The research team and the community brainstorm to look for the community's needs, the importance of the research topic by conducting a focus group.
- 5) The research team analyzes the community's needs and students individually in order to set up the content and learning resources.
- 6) All stakeholders plan the local curriculum development together.

Second Stage: Curriculum Development

The research team and the community used focus group, mind map and analyzing related document to choose the topic and content in constructing local curriculum by following the curriculum components; principles, goals, structure, course description, content area, time, learning method, tools, assessment, and teaching plan.

Third Stage: Implementation

The researcher applied the curriculum with primary school students in grade 4 to 6 from 15 October 2017 to 10 February 2018. In curriculum implementation, the researcher used 5 lessons and all lessons were arranged in the same direction. The learning method was separated into two parts. The first part was to study the content in the classroom. The second part was to create the activities that helped students learn the content in the classroom.

Fourth Stage: Curriculum Evaluation

The researcher and the locals summarized and evaluated the success of curriculum implementation from the outcome, focus group, observation, after action review and mind map. Summarize the research project by using content analysis. Discuss the findings and problems from curriculum implementation.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Stage One: Planning and Studying the Community

The previous local curriculum of the school only focuses on cultural dimension from the Lanna people who come from four major religious groups. There is no story about life style and culture of people from other group. In fact, Wat Ket community is composed of various groups of people such as Chan people and hill tribes, not only Lanna people. The curriculum does not promote multiculturalism and localism. The locals do not take part in constructing the local curriculum. The learners become a product of cultural oppression. They are not culturally free as the curriculum should let them be. The local curriculum should be a tool in providing a space of negotiation between the ethnicity or marginalized and the education providing Thai nation state.

To create the learners' identity in educational management, learners should learn from the mainstream culture without any oppression. They should be truly proud, respect, and see the value of intellectual and cultural diversity among themselves and the community.

The result of the study showed that the locals in Wat Ket community had been composed of different ethnic and religious group since the past. However, this kind of diversity did not mention about migrant workers and hill tribes in the community document and the story telling from the locals. The history of people who moved to the community was arranged respectively, but migrant workers and hill tribes were excluded.

- 1) The locals have been living among religious and ethnic diversity. So, Wat Ket community was called *"the community of four religious groups and ethnicity"*.
- 2) Migrant workers and hill tribes are not included to the community as members.

There are new ethnic groups seen by the locals as they are inferior to the migrant workers and hill tribes because they are marginalized ethnicity who move from the mountains to the community; Hmong, Karen, Lahu, and Akha. People from Chan state are also a new group of immigrants in Wat Ket community. The locals think that the hill tribes and Chan people are inferior to other group of people in the community according to the following reasons.

- 1) They have different languages.
- 2) They have different culture apart from the four major religious groups.
- 3) Their financial status is lower than other groups of people. They are the poorest of the community.
- 4) They are daily employee and labors.

Stage 2: Local Curriculum Development

The local curriculum was developed through the process of participatory qualitative action research. The stakeholders are the school management team, teachers, student representatives from grade 4 to 6, parent representatives, formal and informal community leaders, religious groups, public and private organizations, and the local representatives. The conference was held eight times from 23 July to 29 November 2016 to make a clear understanding about local curriculum construction, brainstorm, reflect, and develop the curriculum. The curriculum was evaluated by the experts before implementing with primary school students from grade 4 to 6. The contents of the curriculum can be summarized as follow;

- Lesson 1: The history of Wat Ket community
- Lesson 2: Relationship with the community
- Lesson 3: Tradition and culture in the community
- Lesson 4: Belief and religion in the community
- Lesson 5: Current and future Wat Ket community

In Lesson 1, the content was about the history of Wat Ket community which was not told by a single group. The content should be about the history of every group of people living in the community including migrant workers and hill tribes.

In Lesson 2, the content was about the story of people, tradition and culture from where learners come from so that learners can widely learn about themselves.

In Lesson 3, the content was about the tradition and culture of every group of people in Wat Ket community including migrant workers and hill tribes.

In Lesson 4, the content was about belief and religion of all groups of people in Wat Ket community. Learners were able to classify themselves into different kinds of religious groups.

In Lesson 5, Learners were able to find a conclusion of their “*self and identity*”. What are their identities and which group do they belong to in the 21st century world.

Stage Four: Curriculum Implementation

The researcher started the local curriculum trail “*Follow Ole Traces of our Wat Ket Community*” with primary school students in grade 4 to 6 from 15 October 2017 to 10 February 2018. All five lessons were used in the same direction. Teaching and learning activities were separated to two parts. The first part was to study the content in the classroom. The objective was to encourage learners to see differences and diversity of the society, people and culture in the community. The second part was to create activities that helps make better understanding with the content learnt in the class. The second part objective was to encourage learners to see cultural value differences among various sources of culture. Both parts were created by the concept of multicultural education that stimulated learners to see the values of cultural diversity. The expected outcome showed learners that different culture from different community leads to the same common goal and respond to human’s ways of life.

Stage Three: Implementation

The new local curriculum was used in grade four to six classrooms from 15 October 2017 to 10 February 2018. The contents of the curriculum were categorized into five chapters as mentioned in the second stage. Learning processes and activities were separated into two main parts. The first part was content which helped learners understand differences and diversity of people and culture in the community. The second part was creating in-class activities to support the content which helped learners see cultural value differences. Learners would realize that different culture was finally created for a common goal of human.

Learning processes and activities were based on the concept of multicultural education and third space creation. Teachers provided learning process that assisted students to respect, accept and see the values of different ways of life and culture among people in Wat Ket community. Learning process based on the third space concept encouraged learners to see values of different culture which would lead to cultural hybridity. Learners would be free from imprisonment from the certain national and local identity. They had freedom in creating and choosing their own identity which was the basic requirements of youth in the modern world.

Stage Four: Curriculum Evaluation

Curriculum evaluation was evaluated from the achievement of the learners. The summary of the evaluation was from classroom observation and focus group.

Learners were able to see the cultural diversity among people who live in Wat Ket community equally. According to the observation and focus group, it can be concluded that all learners were able to see the diversity among Wat Ket people from the past to the present apart from the original local groups mentioned in the lessons and the community story telling.

Learners accepted cultural diversity and people’s ways of life apart from Lanna culture or the mainstream culture mentioned in the lessons. They saw the diversity of sub-cultures in Wat Ket community which were not mentioned or brought to the classroom lessons in school even if they were culture of the learners and their classmates.

Learners respect culture and people's ways of life in Wat Ket community. From the observation and focus group, it could be summed up that most learners respect culture and people's ways of life in Wat Ket Community. It was a result of being open-minded to different culture. Learners also quickly believed in themselves in cultural diversity and they reflected their ideas through class activities.

Learners saw cultural value differences in terms of lifestyle of people in Wat Ket community. After the learners saw the different, they accepted and respected the diversity. Activities in the class stimulated learners to see cultural value differences. It was not only about respect, learners were also saw cultural value differences in terms of lifestyle of people in Wat Ket community.

Suggestions

1. The important strategy in constructing a curriculum by using participatory action research requires the readiness of the community, school policy, school personnel and community's cooperation. If the community does not focus on the participation in educational management in the community school, it is difficult to effectively create the local curriculum.
2. The curriculum should relate to the community's condition and needs. Learners are able to learn things around them such as village, community, tradition, culture, environment and natural resources. So, they can be quick learners, understand things more easily and use the knowledge in their daily life.
3. The local philosophers should have good understanding and experiences about tradition, art and culture about their own community. They should have different techniques in encouraging students to learn because students have different level of knowledge and ability.
4. Before using the local curriculum, there should be a study about the curriculum structure, learning process management method and learning activity plan. The reason is that the curriculum was adjusted in terms of content, activity, time range and implementation period to fit with the students and the community.
5. The school management team and teachers should focus on the equality of the knowledge that comes from different culture. They should also see diversity as a tool to build the strength of the community and the learners. Learners do not only gain different sets of knowledge, but they also respect and see the value of diversity.

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