Article

Rethinking Goals of Curriculum Practice in Primary and Secondary Schools in Taiwan

Yi-Huang Shih

Center of Teacher Education, Minghsin University of Science and Technology, Hsinchu 30401, Taiwan; shih78465@gmail.com

Abstract: Curriculum reform is a significant topic that often involves revising educational programs to better meet the needs of students, address contemporary challenges, and align with educational goals and values. Hence, changing the curriculum has been viewed as an effective way to change classroom practice and influence student learning to meet the needs of the ever-changing world. This research aims to rethink the goals of curriculum practice in primary and secondary schools in Taiwan in terms of six dimensions, including the Transcendent Self, the Aesthetic Self, the Physical Self, the Social Self, the Emotional Self, and the Intellectual Self. Based on the result of this research, suggestions were made to achieve the goals of curriculum practice in the schools, including (1) Cultivating well-rounded students; (2) Enhancing innovation and critical thinking skills; (3) Promoting global perspective and multicultural understanding; (4) Developing personalized learning and self-directed learning abilities; (5) Enhancing practical skills and career readiness; (6) Strengthening mental health and social-emotional learning; (7) Leveraging technology to promote educational innovation.

1. Introduction

The Republic of China established its national curriculum guidelines in 1929. Since then, the guidelines for elementary and secondary schools have been revised multiple times to ensure them to be in line with the global community. In 1968, the Nine-Year Compulsory Education was implemented to educate Taiwanese citizens to establish a foundation for cultivating talents in Taiwan. (Ministry of Education, 2014). The curriculum has served as the core of the educational enterprise, and educational reform cannot be separated from the reformation of the curriculum. As the pace of social development accelerates, traditional educational beliefs face significant challenges, which makes curriculum reform entrusted with higher expectations and a profound mission. Regarding Taiwan's curriculum reform, the Ministry of Education announced 'the Curriculum Guidelines for 12-Year Basic Education: General Guidelines' in November 2014. The New Curriculum stated that the 12-year basic education curriculum guidelines must be based on the principle of holistic education (Ministry of Education, 2014; Shih, 2024).

Changing the curriculum is an effective way to change classroom practice and influence student learning to meet the needs of the ever-changing world (Luo, 2023; Wang, 2019). Therefore, the importance of curriculum must be understood in the student learning process. Curriculum is also often seen as the culmination of students' diverse learning experiences and the manifestation of their learning significance. From this perspective, the goal of the curriculum practice in the schools must be considered in education. Thus, the goal of curriculum practice in primary and secondary schools in Taiwan was explored in this research to make ions for curriculum reform in Taiwan.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Curriculum Reform

2.1.1. Definition

Curriculum reform involves revising the content, structure, and methods of educational programs to improve the quality of education and be relevant to students' needs and societal demands. Curriculum reform includes updating subject matter, incorporating new teaching methodologies, and aligning curricula with current research and industry standards. Hence, curriculum reform needs to be in line with educational goals. Educational goals are specifically set by individuals or educational institutions to

manage learning and academic progress. These goals can be for short-term outcomes, such as mastering a particular subject or skill in a semester, or for long-term ones, such as earning a degree or achieving proficiency in a profession. Key aspects of educational goals include the following

(1) Personal development: Developing individual skills, knowledge, and competencies;
(2) Career aspirations: For future career plans, acquiring necessary certifications or degrees;
(3) Academic achievement: Focusing on academic success such as achieving a certain GPA, completing coursework, or engaging in research projects;
(4) Lifelong learning: Continuous education and skill development throughout one's life;
(5) Civic and social responsibility: Contributing to society, understanding civic duties, and engaging in community service.

Effective educational goals are typically 'Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART)'. Setting clear educational goals helps students stay motivated, track their progress, and make informed decisions about their learning paths (Khoury, 2023; Hutchinson, 2024).

2.1.2. Suggestions

Taiwan's recent curriculum reform aims to enable students to fully realize their potential and adapt to future challenges. This reform includes the following:

(1) Competency-based education: The development of students' core competencies, including critical thinking, problem-solving skills, teamwork, and creativity needs to be emphasized.
(2) Interdisciplinary learning: Comprehensive learning across disciplines needs to be highlighted to cultivate students' cross-disciplinary knowledge and skills.
(3) Personalized learning: Diverse learning pathways and resources need to be according to each student's interests and needs to encourage self-directed and autonomous learning.
(4) Digital learning: Technology needs to be used to enhance learning outcomes and promote the use of digital teaching resources and tools.
(5) Global perspective: International educational exchanges and cooperation need to be strengthened to cultivate students with global perspectives and competitiveness.
(6) Such reforms address the rapidly changing societal and workplace demands, helping students better prepare for future challenges.

2.2. Curriculum Guidelines for 12-Year Basic Education

Based on fundamental beliefs, four curriculum goals were established by the Ministry of Education (2014) to help students learn and develop their potential.

(1) Inspiring students to unleash their full potential to elicit students' learning motivation, develop their inquisitiveness and ability to explore, think, judge, and act, and develop a willing and active attitude to explore and learn;
(2) Teaching and developing knowledge about life to develop the student's basic knowledge in various aspects of life and integrating distinct methods and use their skills to solve problems;
(3) Promoting students' career development to assist students in developing their careers based on their aptitudes, fully utilizing their talent, and identifying methods for effective learning;
(4) Inculcating students' civic responsibility to enrich students' democratic literacy, legal awareness, human rights, morality and courage, social and tribal consciousness, international understanding and national identity, and self-responsibility.

2.3. Reflections

The goals outlined by the Ministry of Education (2014) aim to enrich students' democratic literacy, legal awareness, human rights, morality, courage, social and tribal consciousness, international understanding, national identity, and self-responsibility. However, these goals can be diversified to cater to a wider range of learning needs and interests as follows.

(1) Cultural competence and diversity
• Intercultural communication skills to enhance the students' abilities to communicate and collaborate across cultural boundaries;
• Global citizenship to foster global responsibility and understand global issues.

(2) Technological Literacy
- Digital citizenship to navigate the digital world responsibly and safely;
- STEM education to focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics for future careers.

(3) Environmental awareness
- Sustainability education to understand and support environmental sustainability;
- Awareness of climate change to understand the impacts of climate change and ways to mitigate them;

(4) Emotional and social well-being
- Mental health to provide resources and support for mental health awareness and self-care;
- Social-emotional learning (SEL) to develop skills for emotional management, empathy, and relationship building.

(5) Creative and critical thinking
- Creative arts to encourage participation in arts to foster creativity and expression;
- Critical thinking to develop students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and create new ideas.

(6) Life skills and financial literacy
- Practical and essential life skills such as cooking, budgeting, and time management;
- Financial literacy to manage finances and investments, and understand economic principles.

By incorporating these goals into the curriculum, the various needs and interests of students can be met, and the students can be prepared for a comprehensive and inclusive future.

3. Discussion

3.1. Rethinking Goals of Curriculum Practice

The curriculum goal in general means a purpose or end-point without criteria of achievement. Curriculum goals are derived from a statement of philosophy, defined aims of education, and assessment of needs. From curriculum goals, curriculum objectives are derived. Curriculum planners hope that students accomplish the curriculum goal in the programs of a school or school system (Patphol, 2024). The purpose of education for an individual is usually to achieve self-awareness and self-realization through the educational process. Therefore, general educational goals are divided into the following six dimensions: the Transcendent Self, the Aesthetic Self, the Physical Self, the Social Self, the Emotional Self, and the Intellectual Self. The goals are inherent to the curriculum in its implementation (Foshay, 2000). In other words, by teaching the curriculum, students perceive their abilities, understand how they interact with others (interpersonal relationships), recognize their emotions, and achieve intellectual growth (Foshay, 2000; Kim, Raza, & Seidman, 2019). Students must enhance their aesthetic judgment and achieve self-transcendence. Thus, when designing the curriculum, how to help students achieve these goals must be considered. Educators must reflect on how to guide students to achieve educational goals when designing curricula. Hence, Foshay (2000) pointed out that the Transcendent Self, the Aesthetic Self, the Physical Self, the Social Self, the Emotional Self, and the Intellectual Self are the basis for discussion about rethinking the goals of curriculum practice.

3.1.1. Transcendent Self

"Transcendence" has been a key subject of Western philosophy of religion and the history of ideas. The meaning of transcendence, however, has changed over time. The concept of the "Transcendent Self" refers to a state of consciousness or being that goes beyond the ordinary limits of the self. It is frequently discussed in philosophical, spiritual, and psychological contexts. The following describes key perspectives on the "Transcendent Self".

(1) Philosophical perspective: In philosophy, the "Transcendent Self" is associated with ideas of a higher self or an ultimate reality that surpasses individual existence. It may involve transcending personal desires, ego, and the material world to achieve a deeper understanding or connection with the universe.
(2) Spiritual perspective: Many spiritual traditions speak of the "Transcendent Self" in terms of enlightenment, nirvana, or union with the divine. Practices such as meditation, prayer, and contemplation are paths to experiencing this transcendent state, where one feels a sense of unity with all of existence and a liberation from the limitations of the ego.
(3) Psychological perspective: In psychology, particularly in humanistic and transpersonal psychology, the "Transcendent Self" is viewed as the realization of one's fullest potential and is often referred to as self-actualization. This involves peak

experiences, where an individual feels a profound sense of connection, creativity, and fulfillment beyond the ordinary sense of self.

(4) Cultural and literary perspective: Literature and art also explore the concept of the "Transcendent Self", often depicting characters who undergo self-discovery and transformation. These narratives highlight the struggle to transcend personal and societal limitations to achieve a higher state of being (Erkan, 2023; Foshay, 2000; Henning & Henning, 2021; Sardella, 2016).

3.1.2. Aesthetic Self

The "Aesthetic Self" refers to the identity that pertains to the sense of aesthetics, beauty, and style. It encompasses how we present ourselves visually and we appreciate or create beauty in various forms, such as art, fashion, design, and surroundings. Cultivating one's aesthetic self often involves exploring personal tastes, developing a sense of what appeals visually or emotionally, and expressing individuality through choices in appearance and environment. The "Aesthetic Self" is a significant part of how we project our identity to the world and how we derive pleasure and meaning from our surroundings and personal presentation. The "Aesthetic Self" also refers to the expression that involves the sense of style, and beauty preferences. What contributes to the "Aesthetic Self" includes the following: (1) the Fashion sense of the clothing and accessories we choose reflect our style, whether it is casual, formal, trendy, or vintage; (2) Grooming and appearance about how we groom ourselves, including hairstyle, makeup (if applicable), and overall personal care routines; (3) Artistic expression related to how we decorate our living spaces, the art we appreciate or create, and our taste in design; (4) Body language and posture including non-verbal cues such as posture, gestures, and facial expressions which contribute to our aesthetic presence; (5) Environmental preferences: The places we choose to spend time in, whether natural settings or urban environments, reflects our aesthetic sensibilities; (6) Digital presence of how to curate our online profiles and social media presence, including choice of photos, captions, and overall visual presentation.

These attributes form a cohesive expression of our aesthetic self, influencing how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us visually (Foshay, 2000; Shih, 2020; Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008).

3.1.3. Physical Self

The "Physical Self" encompasses various tangible existences and bodily experiences. The following aspects present the "Physical Self": (1) Physical appearance: Features such as height, weight, facial features, body shape, and skin tone; (2) Health and fitness: The state of our physical health, fitness level, and overall well-being which contribute to our physical self through exercise habits, diet, and medical conditions; (3) Sensory experience related to how we experience the world through our senses—sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell and how those shape our physical self. Sensory preferences, sensitivities, and the perception of the environment are included; (4) Motor skills and physical abilities to move, coordinate movements, and perform physical tasks related to sports, dance, and manual dexterity; (5) Body image and self-perception related to how we perceive our body and physical appearance, influenced by factors such as cultural norms, societal standards, and personal beliefs; (6) Physical comfort and well-being in various physical environments, ability to relax, and sense of physical safety which are important in the physical self.

Understanding and nurturing our physical self is crucial for overall well-being and plays a significant role in how we interact with the world and others (Cash, 1990; Foshay, 2000; Kékes Szabó, 2015).

3.1.4. Social Self

The "Social Self" refers to an individual's identity that is shaped by interactions with others and the social environment. It encompasses how we perceive ourselves with others, our roles in society, and the influence of social norms and expectations on our behavior and self-concept. Exploring the "Social Self" is fascinating with the following aspects: (1) Self-concept and identity related to how individuals perceive themselves based on their interactions with others and societal roles; (2) Social roles and expectations related to the roles we play in different social contexts which influence our behavior and identity; (3) Social influence and conformity related to how social norms and peer pressure affect individual behavior and decision-making; (4) Self-presentation and impression management to strategically present individuals to others to create specific impressions; (5) Cultural and societal influences of cultural backgrounds and societal norms which shape our understanding of ourselves and our interactions with others; (6) Group dynamics and identity formation in social groups (such as family, friends, communities) which contributes to our sense of identity.

There are other aspects and theories in the realm of the "Social Self" that can be explored in depth (Brewer, 1991; Carter & Marony, 2021; Foshay, 2000).

3.1.5. Emotional Self

The "Emotional Self" refers to the psychological aspect of the individual's identity that involves emotions, feelings, and the way they are experienced and expressed. It encompasses how a person perceives and regulates their emotions, their emotional responses to various stimuli, and their overall emotional well-being. Understanding and managing the emotional self is crucial for personal growth, maintaining relationships, and achieving overall mental health and resilience. The aspects of the "Emotional Self" include the following: (1) Emotional awareness related to how individuals recognize and understand their and other's emotions; (2) Emotional regulation to manage their emotions effectively, such as deep breathing, mindfulness, or cognitive reframing through techniques and strategies; (3) Emotional expression on how emotions are communicated and expressed verbally and non-verbally; (4) Emotional intelligence as an ability to perceive, understand, manage, and use emotions effectively in various situations; (5) Emotional resilience to bounce back from adversity and maintain emotional stability in challenging circumstances; (6) Emotional well-being which presents overall mental health and satisfaction with one's emotional life.

Each of these aspects plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals interact with themselves and others emotionally (Brewer, 1991; Foshay, 2000; Sadiku & Musa, 2021).

3.1.6. Intellectual Self

The "Intellectual Self" refers to oneself that involves cognitive abilities, knowledge, reasoning, and intellectual pursuits. It encompasses an individual's capacity for learning, understanding complex ideas, critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. In the context of personal development or psychology, The "Intellectual Self" contributes to a holistic understanding of an individual's identity and growth. The "Intellectual Self" is discussed in terms of the following:(1) Knowledge and learning including the accumulation of information, facts, and understanding through formal education, self-study, and life experiences; (2) Critical thinking to analyze, evaluate, synthesize information, and form reasoned judgments and make decisions; (3) Problem-solving to identify issues, generate potential solutions, and implement effective strategies to resolve challenges; (4) Creativity to think innovatively, generate new ideas, and approach problems from unconventional perspectives; (5) Intellectual curiosity as a strong desire to seek for new knowledge, explore ideas, and engage in lifelong learning; (6) Open-mindedness to be receptive to different perspectives, ideas, and information, and being willing to reconsider one's beliefs in light of new evidence or insights. Open-mindedness is a component of intellectual humility; (6) Communication skills to articulate ideas clearly and effectively, both verbally and in writing, to convey complex information to others; (7) Self-reflection to critically examine one's thoughts, beliefs, and experiences to gain deeper self-awareness and understanding.

Each of these aspects contributes to the development and cultivation of the intellectual self, fostering growth, adaptability, and resilience in various contexts (Fortes & De Brasi, 2023; Foshay, 2000; Phillips, 2020; Shih, 2018).

3.2. Reflections

In its 2014 "White Paper on Human Resource Development", Taiwan's Ministry of Education suggested that Taiwan's rapid social changes, overextended colleges and universities, and lower birthrate are creating a gap between educational training and careers, and therefore an imbalance between human resource supply and demand. Taiwan's government hopes to resolve these problems, in part, through a new 12-year Curriculum for Basic Education, the development and implementation of which was announced in the White Paper. This "new curriculum" is intended to foster key competencies in future generations and in part to bolster and enhance Taiwan's economic competitiveness (Chen & Fan, 2014). In 'The Curriculum Guidelines for 12-Year Basic Education: General Guidelines', four curriculum goals were established to help students learn and develop their potential (Ministry of Education, 2014).

(1) Inspiring students to unleash their full potential
(2) Teaching and developing students' knowledge about life
(3) Promoting students' career development
(4) Inculcating students' civic responsibility

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the result of this research, for rethinking the goals of curriculum practice in primary and secondary schools (Foshay, 2000), the following is suggested.

It is essential to cultivate well-rounded students through academic achievement and holistic education to ensure that students have a strong foundation in core subjects such as mathematics, science, and language and develop character, social responsibility,

and cultural literacy. To enhance innovation and critical thinking skills, innovative education and critical thinking are mandatory to encourage students to adopt creative approaches in problem-solving, nurture their creativity, and develop independent thinking and critical analysis skills through discussions and debates. It is necessary to promote global perspective and multicultural understanding, by introducing curriculum content with a global perspective to foster understanding and respect for different cultures and strengthening education in English and other foreign languages to equip students with communication skills for a globalized society. Personalized learning and self-directed learning abilities must be developed by providing personalized learning opportunities based on the student's interests and abilities and fostering students' self-management and self-directed learning skills to enable lifelong learning. It is necessary to enhance practical skills and career readiness by introducing career education at the secondary school to help students understand the requirements of different professions and industries and improve practical skills and career readiness through internships and project-based learning. Mental health and social-emotional learning must be enhanced by prioritizing students' mental health, providing counseling and support services, and helping students develop interpersonal relationships and emotional management skills through curriculum and activities. Technology must be used to promote educational innovation to apply information technology to enhance teaching effectiveness and student learning experiences. Online platforms and resources can be used to provide flexible and diverse learning pathways. Such ways can enrich the goals of curriculum practice in primary and secondary schools in Taiwan and enhance students' learning quality for a better future. As a result, the quality of the student's learning experiences can be improved to provide them with better future opportunities. Strategies for curriculum development and teaching methods need to be formulated possibly by integrating innovative educational practices.

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