

Cultural Perspectives on Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum Theorizing: An Autobiographical Case Study

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Abstract: *The autobiographical study revealed three Ph.D. students and inservice teachers' perceptions of curriculum theorizing. Three teachers in the study are one from China, one in the United States and one from Saudi Arabia. Reflective journals, written philosophies of curriculum theorizing, and weekly discussions were used as the data to examine the three teachers' perceptions through cultural lenses. With reference to Pinar's (2012) Allegory, which consists of "horizontality," "verticality," and "Montage" in curriculum theorizing, three researchers and participants examined how their cultural backgrounds (verticality), teaching experiences, and doctoral learning experiences (horizontality) informed their perceptions of the curriculum. In the final part, three teachers also made the reflections on explained what might be an ideal state (Montage) of curriculum theorizing in the time of globalization.*

Keywords: Autobiographical Study, Cultural Perspectives, Curriculum Theorizing.

Introduction

Pinar (2012) gives us his definition of the curriculum by re-conceptualizing curriculum not as course objectives but as a complicated conversation. He calls us to move away from thinking of curriculum as structured lesson plans and engage in complicated conversation that asks the question: What is worth knowing? In order to explore this question, Pinar uses the concept of allegory whereby "understanding curriculum allegorically self-consciously incorporates the past into the present, threaded through one's subjectivity" (p. 50). The past is reconstructed to find meaning for the present through our experiences and historical context in order to conceive of a future direction, which results in a complicated conversation. Pinar (2007) applies a two dimensional structure to this complicated conversation, with a vertical and a horizontal aspect. The verticality of the conversation calls attention to the events of the past while the horizontality of the conversation applies to the present circumstances, and in both cases paying attention to the significance of external influences on curriculum such as social and political. The present has been shaped by the past, and complicated conversation provides an avenue to reconstruct our understanding of what is worth knowing in order to direct our future.

Framed with Pinar's Allegory, this study narrates three participants' lived stories from vertical to horizontal perspectives, that is, three researchers and participants reported how their cultural backgrounds, theorizing their teaching experiences, and doctoral learning experiences informed their perceptions of the curriculum.

Literature Review

History of Curriculum Theorizing

The curriculum theorizing history is considered as one of the main subjects in the last few decades, especially the second half of the twentieth century. However, it is not fair to ignore the contributions that emerged in the 15th and 16th centuries (Hamilton, 2009). Understanding the nature of the good citizen was one of the contributions that Boppitt (1918) contributed in order to set the underpinnings of education principles. He said for example that "education is now to develop a type of wisdom that can grow only out of participation in the living experiences of men and never out of mere memorization of verbal statements of facts" (page, 10). One of the great contributions though is believed, to begin with

Tyler (1949) when he introduced his rationale. In his book Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction he attempted to answer four questions as a guide for setting a comprehensive understanding of schooling. However, Tyler "outlines one way of viewing an instructional program as a functioning instrument of education" (Flinders & Thornton, 2012, p.59). The questions that Tyler organized were formulated to help illustrate some essential features of education. They were arranged as stating objectives, selecting learning experiences, organizing learning experiences and evaluating the curriculum. This attempt to formulate the basic principles of the curriculum was one of the first to flourish the curriculum understanding.

Pinar's Complicated Conversation

Some of the new emerging themes regarding curriculum such as Complicated Conversation (Pinar, 2012; 2013) spread and got clear and sound consideration. Talking about curriculum as a lively process in which real and deep discussion emerges as for how to understand and organize its components is what Pinar tried to explain. For example, Pinar (2012) has clear views regarding what is curriculum theory as he thinks of as "the scholarly effort to understand the curriculum conceived here as complicated conversation" (p.1). This complicated conversation is what makes curriculum theorizing difficult to understand as multiple levels of interactions. This complicated conversation is the process in which the curriculum components get the sound ground to be implemented. As Pinar (2012) illustrates that he said: "the curriculum is that complicated conversation between teachers and students over the past and its meaning for the present as well as what both portend for the future (thus) the curriculum is our key conveyance into the world" (p.2). However, since the world around us is not fully understood, it is hard to understand history, present, and future. In this regard, educators can consider it as a constructivist view; it is important to distinguish between the human beings or the human activities and their portrayed picture conceived here as the surroundings shaping the images regarding what are these activities and how they act in different settings.

Methodology

Participants

Yang Gao Yang has taught English to Chinese EFL (English as a foreign language) learners for ten years. He is now the Executive President of the School of Zhouji (Intercontinental) Foreign Languages, Dalian, China. He is also doing his Ph.D. degree and working as a graduate assistant at the School of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Studies, Kent State

University. He earned his Bachelor Degree in Applied English from Heilongjiang University and Master Degree in Applied Linguistics from Dalian Maritime University. He also gained a TESOL post-master certificate from Kent State University. He used to participate in several national research projects funded by the Ministry of Education in China and published several articles. Yang started his EFL teaching career in 2003, and then he sequentially taught students from preschool to college. In 2011, after having taught almost all levels of EFL learners, he decided to go to the United States for his Ph.D. study, a journey which can help him extend his both content and pedagogical knowledge in his teaching career.

Lucy Kulbago Lucy is a female doctoral student from the United States and has attended a private Catholic elementary school and public high school. She shares her experiences as both a student and a parent of students attending schools in the United States. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in physics from John Carroll University, a small liberal arts private Jesuit (Catholic) University, and a Master of Engineering degree in acoustics from Pennsylvania State University, a large public state University. She is now pursuing her doctor of philosophy in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in science education from Kent State University, a large public state University. She has taught astronomy and general physics at John Carroll University as an adjunct instructor for ten years and has worked with K-12 students through several informal settings, including Girl Scouts, Science Olympiad, and Chess Club. She reflects on her North American culture as infused with a Catholic and Jesuit perspective on learning and teaching to develop her emerging understanding of curriculum theorizing.

Aziz Alamri Aziz is a lecturer in Tabuk University, Saudi Arabia. He earned his bachelor degree in elementary education with a minor in science education. He began his career as a science teacher from 2001 until 2010. After realizing the way by which teachers used to teach science was very traditional, he decided to get a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Umm Alquraa University with a focus on curriculum and science teaching methods and then he completed the study by 2008. Aziz now is a Ph.D. student at Kent State University in the United States. With the very rich science education environment in the United States, he is hoping to develop views by which science is better taught. The idea about science and science education in his views is to incorporate science with learners everyday lives as a lively process by which learners can see a valuable combination between what they learn and what they experience.

Why Narrative Inquiry?

This qualitative study design examines the contextualized experiences of three doctoral students as they explicitly examine their emerging understanding of curriculum theorizing. According to Hatch (2002), a narrative analysis shaped by the constructivist paradigm is applicable to this type of analysis where the emphasis is on the “meanings individuals generate through stories” (p. 28) while the participants co-construct their emerging understanding through analysis of experience and culture. As part of a group class assignment at Kent State University, the participants individually wrote a paper about their emerging understanding of curriculum theorizing, viewed through the lens of their personal, cultural experiences, while applying Pinar's (2007) notion of verticality and horizontality. These papers served as the starting point for conversation and analysis between the participants, helping each other construct their current understanding of the

curriculum. “Qualitative research is an emergent design in its negotiated outcomes. Meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources because it is the “subjects’ realities that the researcher attempts to reconstruct” (Creswell, 2003, p. 199). The importance of cultural perspectives is relevant and informed by the different cultural backgrounds of the participants, including the United States of America, China, and Saudi Arabia.

Research Context

The study was conducted during one semester when three participants were taking one of their doctoral courses in the United States. The course is Theory and Research in Curriculum, which undoubtedly introduced history, major schools, and relevant literature, etc. in the field of curriculum studies. While the course actually focused on the curriculum studies in North America, especially in the United States and Canada, the doctoral students were suggested to reflect on and apply what they had learned to their own countries. As the three participants were assigned the same group to discuss and co-work on their own assignments in this course, they spent much time discussing and sharing their ideas with each other about how they perceived curriculum theorizing.

Data Analysis and Collection

Data collection in this study was conducted in two phases. Phase I was the first half of the semester when three participants kept reading assigned literature, doing their reading analyses, and sharing their opinions. Three individuals at this stage recorded their reading and learning analyses on their own. Phase II was the second half of the semester when three participants began to work on their co-worked project, which was the first assignment of the course. As this assignment required three participants to write a scholarly professional narrative which introduced how they perceived the curriculum theorizing, it served as the primary data for this present study. In the process of completing this assignment, three participants designed a peer-review rubric (see Appendix I), which was designed on the curriculum tenets they had learned in this course, to check if their narratives met the basic requirements. Besides the three participants' narratives, they also created a schedule, which led them to track when to submit their reflection excerpts, biographies, etc. All these submitted writings contributed to the data collection of this present study.

Findings and Discussion

It is worth mentioning that while the paper is extended from a cultural perspective, the culture in this study is not limited only to the geographical locations, namely, cultures from Asia, North America, and Saudi Arabia. It is defined in this study as some norms that are accompanied by the participants' growth and rooted in their minds and thus influence their ways of thinking. For Yang, while he is influenced by Asian tenets like Taoism and Confucianism, he is more affected by theories and knowledge in his public education. For Lucy, she is not only influenced by Catholic tenets, but also by her lived experiences as a parent, a teacher and an adult learner. It is the same with Aziz, who is not only greatly influenced by his religious worship, but also learning and teaching experiences. Therefore, the following part is framed with four sections, i.e., cultural backgrounds, teaching experiences, learning experiences as Ph.D. students, and an ideal curriculum theorizing (CT).

The Influence of Cultural Backgrounds

Yang – Chinese Collective Culture

Cultural backgrounds exerted great influence to the three participants' perceptions of curriculum theorizing. Yang was born in China, a country embodying Taoism and Confucianism.

As China fully opens its door to the western world in the 1970s, some of the western theories did not swarm into China until then. Yang stated:

For centuries before the Economic Reform in 1978, China had been relatively conservative, embracing cultures of way or wisdom (Tao), virtue (De), and classics (Ching) as in Taoism, and mercy, social order, and responsibilities as in Confucianism (Chan, 1963). Thanks to the Economic Reform, people born in the 80's like me, began to have English as one of the compulsory courses from grade 3 to grade 9. English for me is not only a language but a mediator leading me to perceive a different world.

The traditional Chinese culture shaped curriculum in China as something static and structured. In addition, as power is everywhere (Foucault, 1969; 1970; Deleuze, 1994; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Derrida, 1976), curriculum development in China in the 1970s and 1990s was typically controlled by the country's ideology. As a collective culture, curriculum design is implemented from a top-down sequence, as Yang said:

Generally, the Ministry of Education served as the highest level of issuing any news on the new curriculum, and it passed down a "general syllabus," which is similar to Common Core State Standards in the United States now, to all the school boards. Then, school boards passed down the syllabus to teachers, and teachers taught based on the syllabus.

Curricula at primary school during that time were Chinese, mathematics, music, physical education, nature, and labor, etc. English was only offered to students above grade 3 at that time, while now it is offered even in the preschool. As curriculum development is to some extent influenced by the theories or worldviews that dominate the concurrent time, designing or implementing curricula in China at that time were basically the embodiment of behaviorism and structuralism. Yang remembered:

I had been taught to read and repeat sentences like "How do you do?", and "My name is..." for several years, even before I actually knew the meanings of every single word in the sentences.

Teachers parroted what the textbooks said to their students, and students jotted down and memorized all the notes. This is especially true when it comes to the English curriculum design, when English teachers paid great attention to the rules of English as a language and made sure that every sentence they uttered was grammatically correct. Grammar-translation is the typical means to learn and teach the English. English reading and writing were over emphasized, with little attention to the speaking and listening.

Lucy - Catholic School Culture in the United States

Catholic settlers founded the Province of Maryland in 1634 while the other colonies were primarily Protestant, maintaining a fundamentalist Protestant majority in the new American colonies. In part due to anti-Catholic sentiments, Catholic parishes began establishing schools which became part of organized parish work. Today, Catholic schools are private schools that charge tuition for each student with very little financial aid from the state. Catholic schools are founded on the guiding principles of the importance of the spiritual formation of the child. Morality is best taught when based on religion, and the unification of moral and academic instruction is pedagogically beneficial for young students (Ryan, et. al., 1912). Elementary schools are K-8 mixed gender, and high schools include grades 9 – 12 and are generally college preparatory schools, offering advanced courses in all traditional subjects like math, language, literature, history, and science.

Catholic high schools usually have high standards of academic excellence and high standards of moral and ethical behavior for their students. Lucy reflects on her schooling experience as a child:

As a child, I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio in an urban setting with a rich diversity of cultural heritages. I attended a public school for Kindergarten, and remember feeling afraid when going to school because of the physical bullying I witnessed between older students. For the next eight years, I attended a local Catholic elementary school and felt safe at school.

The Jesuit order of Catholic priests called the Society of Jesus was founded by St. Ignatius of Loyolla in 1540. The Jesuit model of education is based on the guiding document *Ratio Studiorum* published in 1599 by Claudius Aquaviva, the fifth Superior General. McMahon (2004) quotes the *Ratio Studiorum*: "The development of the student's intellectual capacity is the school's most characteristic part. However, this development will be defective and even dangerous unless it is strengthened and completed by the training of the will and the formation of character." The *Ratio Studiorum* provides the structure and practical code for establishing and conducting schools as well as emphasizing the importance of the teachers. The teachers set an example of moral living through all their curricular decisions. Lucy comments on her experiences with Jesuit education:

Attending a Jesuit university combined a strong academic program with institutions emphasis on developing students that would become men and women for others. I participated in social work programs along with my professors, and these professors were role models in how to serve others in our daily lives.

Curriculum decisions are, at their heart, moral decisions. They touch the core of what it means to be human, to live in a community with others, to find meaning and purpose, and to create a more just and peaceful world" (Henderson & Kesson, 2004, p. 6). Walker includes morality as a mark of quality in curriculum theory, yet acknowledges that there is not a common moral standard in contemporary American society. While there are common legal standards among the citizens, moral standards are usually generated in the family and from religious groups, which are very diverse (2003). Lucy remembers early influences of moral living:

Through different service experiences at school and through Girl Scouts, I developed a passion for serving others and respecting all life, from plants to animals to humans from diverse backgrounds and cultures. I attended a suburban public high school which offered a challenging academic curriculum, and I pursued social work through programs offered at our local Catholic church.

Most curriculum texts of the late 1950s, especially those addressed to secondary schooling, continued to pay attention to curricula for a "general education: or the "core curriculum" idea while addressing democratic ideals and their related aspects such as interpersonal relations (Marshall, et. al., 2007, p. 37). Others have argued for the continued inclusion of ethical and aesthetic language in schooling and where a moral vision of education should be of primary importance in curriculum theorizing (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2012, p. 106; Pinar, 2008, p. 500).

Aziz ALamri: Economy, Religion, and the culture of Saudi Arabia.

In his book, *Curriculum and the Aesthetic life*, Blumfeld (2012) tried to understand curriculum from an aesthetic eye.

His long time dealing with art especially dancing inspired his imagination to the notions of beauty and how they are important in setting and formulating new methods of seeing the curriculum. His understanding of the intervention between curriculum and aesthetic life is appealing. He said, “without curriculum, I would not have had the opportunity to rise above the specifics of what I do and see in new ways” (p.1). These new aesthetic views of curriculum, aesthetic views, would lead as he thinks to change our views of curriculum hence help us find new solutions to curriculum problems. He emphasized that the aesthetic experience is important as it to understand the world in a particular way of being in it which brings enhancement to all we do (p.17).

In this context, I find myself more inspired by this new way of seeing the curriculum. It is important to use different angles to define, practice, evaluate, and improve curriculum understanding in my country. I do not believe that we tried to see how our country is beautiful and how our future could be more beautiful. This emerging understanding has to be adopted by curricular theorist in my country, if there is any, as the domain of curriculum has no end. I might find hard though to adhere to such views regarding curriculum.

Taylor’s rationale as a way of conceiving curriculum is good, to begin with, at least from a constructivist view. His four questions for instance state a concrete ground for how a curriculum should be. However, it has to be considered as a beginning phase for how to organize the curriculum.

Taylor’s rational as a guide for how the curriculum should last for a long time until I realized that I have to make my views out of the box by experiencing new vents in the whole picture of the curriculum. For example, if I asked any Saudi teacher about his meaning of curriculum I would totally get a clear and direct answer from him as the subject-matter portion of the education system and how to organize it through the school year.

The views of curriculum got affected by the different cultural and societal influences that shaped people’s understanding of how the curriculum should be based on. Talking about Pinar (2012) ideas regarding this issue it is important to focus attention on the basic influences that shaped society in a way that does not contradict with the common cores that this society is based on. For example, this complicated conversation that Pinar believes can be valuable if it really helped see the connections between what a society value and how to understand this value.

There is no connection between colleges and education departments in Saudi Arabia to study in the deep analysis the complications and the problems emerged in the field of education. In fact, the connection between every aspect in the society is hard to explain and hard to organize. I believe that we live in a vacuum in which there is no roles control the progression of ideas, and therefore, adopt them in a healthy environment.

Many effects have influenced the Saudi Educational system. First, there is an economic aspect by which people changed their views about how to deal with the emerging oil income. The oil era changed the country upside down especially after the eighties where a lot of oil income began building the country from almost nothing.

Before the eighties, the first stage in this regard, Saudi Arabia was considered very poor with a lot of economic problems and deficit dilemmas. The number of schools was very limited, and the population rate was small. The type of education was influenced by many who were donating their times and efforts

to help people at least know how to write and read. In addition, with this environment, the female education was very rare, and many refused to have their girls to study in public schools. This notion was dominant until king Faisal issued a decree to allow women to study in public schools. After the eighties, the second stage, and with the great income that the country generated from oil everything changed rapidly and with less attention to the quality at the time. Hundreds of schools were built at the time to begin the new era of educating Saudi citizens the new disciplines over the world, other than reading and writing. Of course, in my view this movement was necessary at the time. However, less attention has been paid to the problem faced this rapid movement. One of the major problems was that there were no clear goals towards what the next step should be.

Saudi Arabia is the heart of the Islamic world. The prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, began delivering his message from Makkah where the holy mosque is. This holy message began influencing people living in the Arabian Peninsula since 622 AD when he began his message. This heritage is considered as one of the basic principles shaping people understanding of how they live and what they study for a long period of time in Saudi Arabia. It is understood that religion can affect how society sees education if it is allowed to. In this regard, the religion constitutes a concrete part of what Saudi Arabian educational system is. It almost controls how education system should be adopted and practiced. It is important though to distinguish between what is considered as real Islam and what people images of the application of those religious beliefs.

Many still believe that the religion has to occupy the great attention of all the understanding of the educational system in Saudi Arabia. This major influence played and still plays a major role in developing Saudi educators views regarding what should be taught and what should not. In this critical issue, I think that we are still in the first corner of developing such lively views about religion as a subject for both the material and the spiritual parts of life.

In this regard, the state of the Saudi education system is still in the middle of adopting an acceptable level of religion intervention into what should education be. There are two views regarding this issue. Some think that religion has to be a part of what students learn and only a part without further integration in the whole system. Others might argue that if we as Saudis lost or ignored this fact of our history we might lose our identity as people and as a country, hence, will be milted in what is considered a western understanding influence.

How Doctoral Learning Experiences Inform Their CT Perceptions

Three participants in the study have all been studying in their doctoral programs for nearly two years. As they are in the program of Curriculum and Instruction, they have been required to take Fundamentals of Curriculum at the beginning of their program, and then Theory and Research in Curriculum in the following semesters. The two courses as well as other courses such as Theory and Research in Teaching helped them have access to the field of curriculum studies and informed their teaching experiences and perceptions of curriculum theorizing.

Yang At the end of 2011, Yang came to the United States for his Ph.D. study. With five years college teaching experience in China, he was hoping that he would absorb many North American thoughts on curriculum and instruction and mediate them with his Asian perspectives to better serve his English as

a foreign language (EFL) students. His first course in the doctoral program is Fundamentals of Curriculum instructed by Dr. Henderson, the founder of 3S (subject matter, self and social) Understandings (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). While he had learned English in China for more than two decades and taught English for years, he still found the language in this course demanding. Then, he realized that it was not the language of the course difficult, but instead, it was the language in the field of curriculum difficult to digest. Yang explained:

For the first time, I read so many great canon works in the North America circle of curriculum studies. For example, both Paulo Freire and Michael Apple led me to a world of radical, oppressive, and multicultural curriculum (Freire, 1968; Apple, 2006); both Maxine Greene and Nel Noddings paved my way to see curriculum studies through the lens of feminism, with the Greene (1988) focusing more on the aesthetic sense of curriculum and Noddings (2005) more on the caring and love in education; William Pinar, who embodies Ted Aoki's spirit, taught me how to regard curriculum as a progressive journey, "currere", instead of something static and conservative (Pinar, 2013). Eisner (1994), who proposed more imagination should be incorporated in education and curriculum design, also shares the same aesthetic sense of curriculum with Greene. All these new reading and learning experiences led me a step closer to viewing curriculum theories as a science.

Yang's perception of the curriculum at this stage made some changes. First, his increasing knowledge on content area led him to regard curriculum as a dynamic concept. The more he read and learned, the more blood he input into the field of curriculum.

Sometimes, I thought one theory, for example, Chomsky's (1957) Universal Grammar, was useful to shape my understanding of curriculum; but on some occasion, I found, for example, Halliday's (1994) Functional Grammar made more sense to my curriculum design.

The constant shifts among different tenets made his curriculum beliefs linger around different schools, thus making curriculum a dynamic concept. He got some resonance with this sort of experience when he went through the credos from a couple of scholars, as Deleuze's (1994) "multiplicity," and Larsen-Freeman's (2008) "complex systems" in SLA.

Second, he made a change in his curriculum belief at this stage is that he became more critical thinking. He found critical thinking a way to see things from an objective, reasonable and multiple perspectives. It is not a tool that makes one hypercritical, but, instead, a way that helps people reach their conclusion in a reasonable process. He added:

Curriculum theories should also be critical, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach in the field to make all teachers and school faculties satisfied. What we should do is to keep a critical eye on the curriculum we are implementing, and make a timely update on it when we notice something inappropriate.

Generally, Yang's learning experiences at the doctoral level changed his stereotype of the curriculum as something static and structured and led him to regard curriculum as something dynamic, which requires people's critical thinking.

Lucy While Lucy had earned formal science degrees, she has not yet taken any formal education courses. She had been teaching undergraduate physics and astronomy courses part-time, following traditional course formats of lecture followed by homework problems, and a few exams. Lucy knew that more engagement in the classroom was needed, and so attended a workshop that explained and demonstrated techniques developed by astronomy education researchers to revise the

instruction format for a large-enrollment introductory astronomy course through the use of lecture tutorials (Prather, Rudolph, Brissenden & Schlingman, 2008). This was the impetus that sparked her interest in education research, and Lucy entered the doctoral program in curriculum and instruction with a focus on science education. She reflects on her first encounter with curriculum theorizing:

My past experiences strongly influenced the manner in which I raised my children and approached teaching. While I didn't know about Dewey's (1938) experiential learning or Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism, I created that environment for my children, while also incorporating social work and teaching respect for all life. My children attended Catholic elementary and high schools, and my son attended a Jesuit high school. I felt it was important for academic instruction to be taught alongside social activism and respect for others, and reinforced at both school and home. This personal moral compass influenced my interactions with other children through informal teaching programs of Girl Scouts, Science Olympiad, and Chess Club, where I provided an example of respect for others, honesty, teamwork, the importance of experience and democratic decision making (Dewey, 1938) and constructing new knowledge with others (Vygotsky, 1978).

Lucy identifies that she had come to discover ways of teaching her own children through parenting and teaching other children through informal teaching programs that aligned with the theorists discussed in the curriculum theory courses in her doctoral program. She now had a connection to these theorists and could study their ideas more fully and apply them to her own experiences.

Aziz Horizontality in curriculum refers to "the concepts that structure disciplinary conversation now" (Pinar, 2013, p.3). Aziz believes that his vision of what constitute his new understanding of Curriculum Theorizing should be based on the contemporary understanding this field. However, is cautious because he also believes that not everything new in CT can be adopted anywhere, in his case in Saudi Arabia. In talking about the existing understanding of curriculum in Saudi Arabia is Aziz believes it still considers it as hard to explain. Even though there are many attempts to reform the educational system in Saudi Arabia, he believes that the process needs more and more attention and patience. For example, the Saudi government dedicates a considerable portion of its total income to education. However, the Saudi ranking in comparison with other countries in the world is weak. Aziz will discuss some issues regarding how Saudi educators and Saudi people, in general, used to develop their views regarding education in order to explain his ideas regarding how his views changed and improved.

For example, Aziz considers the societal, cultural beliefs and understandings to what shaped the recent thinking regarding how a particular people lived over time as a concrete aspect that has to be considered when evaluating any successful education system. Aziz sees Culture as all the human activities that shaped a society to be as it is. That includes the religion, language, traditions, history, and many other terms that refer to the broad understanding of culture. In this case, he mentions some specific features that contribute to the struggle that Saudis face in their educational system. Democracy, for example, is considered as a terrifying term to the government, however, Aziz considers democracy as a concrete part of each lively society. Democracy in this sense is one of the key points that make a huge difference in which Saudi Arabia is not likely

to accept some of the notions that Pinar, Dewey, or other scholars ask for. In this regard Aziz says:

In order to have genuine reforms and gain valuable results in any educational system, we have to prepare the ground for democratic means by which people can interact in a way that makes them responsible and effective for their progress. I believe we are still struggling with this issue particularly. Again this is one of the major influences that some religious people in the country gain support from because the democratic views that are practiced in other countries are not applicable in an Islamic country, as they believe, and they are against Islam in particular. Moreover, many problems emerge in Saudi Arabia regarding misinterpreting many religious terms, however, Islam as a religion has nothing to do with the current situation of the education system in Saudi Arabia.

The second that constitute Aziz's new emerging themes reading how a curriculum should be considered is Knowledge. He thinks that this feature is important. However, the most important is what type of knowledge is provided and allowed to be studied. With all the new discoveries in almost every human aspect, Aziz believes that the Saudi education system still concerned of the quantity over quality. Teaching using heavy text books in all grades from first grades to the latest year of high school still requires students to save knowledge not to understand them. Aziz thinks that these ways of acquiring knowledge are what make critical thinking understanding rare in Saudi Arabia. With the new Saudi reform, which insists critical thinking over other features, he finds it hard to implement such initiative. In this regard he says:

Culture and knowledge have to be both compatible in a way that infuses clear ground by which students experiences can gain valuable results in making sense of their society and how to see it, and therefore, how to improve it. Over my years in studying in the Saudi educational system, I still remember the huge amount of texts that I had to save in mind with all disintegrated materials that I thought of as not related to what I see and experience.

That might answer why many Saudi students tend to tear up their books after finishing their exams. Aziz thinks that they saw no value of studying such texts, and therefore, they tear them up as a way to protest.

Aziz thinks that those two aspects, culture and knowledge are important however he believes that without implementing them in a valuable way they will get lost in the circle of the wasting of time attempts. That leads to the third aspect which is shaping how Saudis see their educational system. This aspect is the experience by which a student can get a sense of how he sees his life around him. I think the Saudi text books, by the way, the Saudis have free public schools with free text books for all the disciplines, are neglecting a concrete part of students' personality.

Talking about experience I believe that knowledge has to go through the lenses of both the culture, with all its many aspects, and the experience of students in an epistemological perspective that takes in consideration students ontological beliefs, who they are and how do they see themselves and their understanding of what makes sense to their lives.

In this context, Aziz thinks that we are not taking such steps to connect students to what makes them see value in their studies in all grades. That is why many students consider schools as prisons.

To me, I did not consider it that way, however, many of my classmates had such views about schools as a very boring environment which they were forced to attain. To be honest, I

do not think this view has changed in the past few years and believe that students still hold such views about schools.

How Teaching Experiences Shape Their CT Understanding

Yang Yang's teaching experiences also made his perception of curriculum theorizing changed in some way. Specifically, he thinks the curriculum is dialogic. This idea was generalized when he went through Pinar's Presidential Address in the first triennial meeting of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies in Shanghai, China. Pinar (2005) referred to Ted Aoki in his address and highlighted the importance of a dialogue between curriculum developer and curriculum theories.

For me, a dialogic curriculum involves the constant conversation between teachers and students, teachers and school boards, as well as school boards and governments, etc. Feedbacks from each role reinforce the feasibility of any curriculum. This is especially true when I was teaching college students at this stage.

Different from young learners, adult students had their own voices which they would like teachers to hear. When Yang was working as the director for English test-prep courses at a cram school, he kept receiving feedbacks or even complaints from students at that school and made some changes in the curricula accordingly. He also went to parties with these students sometimes, observing their performance and analyzing their characteristics.

Yang also reflects on his teaching experiences from what Deleuze (1994) criticized as dogmatism, which worships the tenets from canon works but never ponders on these ideas from a critical perspective. He also had a similar experience showing the demerits of dogmatism. He had taken it for granted that his learning experience gained from the United States would benefit his Chinese EFL students before he came back to China last summer for a semester teaching. However, some techniques or strategies he used during the summer did not work well with the college students. While some students liked the class design he made, some others thought it was a waste of time to "play" with them in English and gave them more time to reflect. Then he realized that he had to take all factors that matter into account to make a sound and reasonable curriculum decision. It turns out that he failed to take one factor, political ideology, into consideration when he designed the class. While China now claims a diversified ideology, it still primarily holds post-positivism and constructivism in hand. Student acceptance is another factor he forgot to consider. Students in China have been accustomed to the crammed education with tons of high-stake tests. It is relatively difficult for them to make some modification in their learning style

Lucy After Lucy attended the astronomy education workshop, she began implementing some of the techniques learned through the workshop, as well as incorporating constructivist ideas into her teaching practices. Learning about the theorists and the currently accepted best practices, including scientific inquiry, she felt empowered to teach her science courses using active engagement techniques and alternative methods of assessment, which varied from traditional methods. She also discovered a growing movement within the physics and astronomy communities toward discipline based education research, seeking to break away from traditional lecture formats and incorporate active engagement formats.

As my understanding of ways knowledge can be taught and learned has changed, I have recently implemented a flipped

classroom structure with the hopes of improving the experience of students and provide a variety of tools to help meet the diverse needs and learning styles of the students I teach.

This goal to meet the diverse needs of students and create an individualized curriculum has also lead Lucy to homeschool her youngest child, moving away from the prescribed curriculum and mandated pace of instruction to an individualized curriculum which fosters an independent love for learning and reawakening curiosity and self-directed studies.

Lucy also comments on her interactions with her students, based on Nel Nodding's (2005) ideas of caring and moral vision of education:

I also take the time to build relationships with my students, to listen and be caring. This caring nature encompasses what I mean by moral living, caring about the needs of those around you, considering how your actions impact both people, but also the environment, and to live responsibly.

It is through caring that it may be possible to create an enjoyable learning experience that is valued by the student, moving away from standardized instruction, and treating each student as an individual with individual strengths and potential.

Aziz Aziz' teaching experiences were very based on standardized paradigms in which any the successful student is the one who passes the exams provided in higher grades. Over the years of Aziz years of teaching, he did not feel of education as a lively by which students see a value of what they learn.

Over the years of teaching science, I felt like I am stuck in the middle between how I see science and how science is conceived in the textbooks that I have to teach. Science in my view has to be based on what students appreciate and understand based on their own experiences to the world around them. It is again science, not words written in such a book to be saved in mind and thrown on papers by the end of the semester.

To Aziz, the teaching that he used to do was wasting time. He is so disappointed by the system that is used in Saudi Arabia to evaluate students and their teachers. For example, he thinks that the new emerging themes in his journey toward a good teaching system lead him to some particular directions. However, Aziz understanding of experience is unique as he believes in the operational defention of it as it is shown in his words:

In my classroom as a science teacher, I would love my students to bring on their own understanding to the lesson being taught based on their experiences to that particular lesson. For example, if the lesson was about rocks I believe that students have to learn almost no more than their rocks that they see around them. Any extra attention to other types might lead my students to unrelated directions by which they will get lost, and therefore, not willing to pursue their learning. I believe that this understanding of experience is what makes sense to students not what is forced to make sense by their teachers and educators.

Aziz though believes that this operational definition of experience is not easy to be applied. In his understanding, he thinks that experience is so different than shaping it. He thinks that teachers have to:

As a science teacher, I believe that the very important task is how a teacher can go through the many levels of experience with his students. I mean that for a student to use and see the value of his experience the teacher has to build upon what students already know and value. When a student uses his own experience to describe a phenomenon his motivations to learn

and further explore about the lesson being studied.

An Ideal Curriculum

Yang Based on what Yang had learned, he viewed curriculum theorizing as an ongoing journey of transformation, deliberation, and multiplicity. Yang explained why he regarded curriculum theorizing as a journey:

The metaphor has some connotations. First, as scholars fail to reach consensus about whether there is indeed theories in the field of curriculum studies, I will keep myself away from blindly giving a positive answer to the question. Second, given the dynamic, critical and multiplicit nature of curriculum theorizing, I prefer to name it as something ongoing and nonstop. Third, like Greene (1988) and Blumenfeld-Jones (2012), I would like to give curriculum theorizing a name from the aesthetic perspective.

For each of the constructs in the journey, it embraces a couple of characteristics. For transformation, it requires scholars to be critical thinking and caring. It is only when a teacher or educator cares about their students or the education that curriculum theorizing can occur. Without thinking about others, teachers will take it for granted that they just need to parrot what they read and prepared to their students. For deliberation, it calls for scholars to be more creative and persistent. Regardless of the Montage in Pinar's (2012) term or the imagination in Eisner's (1994) word, these great educators all give credits to the creativity in the journey of curriculum theorizing. Without imagination or creativity, we cannot generate, develop, and deliberate new tenet in the field of curriculum studies. For multiplicity, it needs teachers or educators to have a multicultural and international sense. I cannot emphasize too much on the importance of having an international sense of curriculum theorizing, as we are now facing a stage of curriculum internationalization (Baker, 2009; Hendry, 2011; Pinar, 2012; Walker, 2003).

Lucy For Lucy, life adjustment education aimed to provide experiences that were appropriate to learning capacities of the students and to provide individualized learning outcomes. Every youth should have access to secondary school through the twelfth grade as a fundamental right based on the inherent dignity of all people, and the education they receive will enable them to live democratically and will meet the needs of youth in society (Janet, 1954).

In my emerging understanding of curriculum theory, I would envision a school where the needs of the individual students are met, allowing students to discover their talents and explore a variety of experiences, similar to the life adjustment curriculum of the 1940's.

While it is important to attend to the needs of all students, "educational critics feared that so much attention to dropouts and the general education of all students had taken time, attention, and resources away from the schools' ability to mine the intellectual potential of their best students" (Marshall, Sears, Allen, Roberts & Schubert, 2007, p. 39). Some schools are returning to progressive ideas that are similar to the life adjustment curriculum, for example redesigning large high schools into smaller learning communities that are designed around student interests and talents, including a community of college, bound advanced learners (David, 2008).

This progressive manner of education should also demand a certain level of rigor among fundamental knowledge and skills that are needed to function in the current society and to prepare students for the current job market. Lucy also draws on her experience in science education by addressing the importance of scientific literacy by including an appropriately sophisticated

understanding of science and technology in order to make informed decisions as a citizen in the fast-paced technological society in which we currently live (AAAS, 1993). Based on her experiences as a parent and teacher of academically gifted students, she calls for attention to be paid to those students that exhibit talents as gifted learners, for they deserve the same attention as remedial learners, in order to reach their full potential (Tomlinson, 1997). Additionally, morality, respect, ethics, citizenship, and democratic social living should be integrated throughout the curriculum (Henderson & Kesson, 2004). Lucy concludes by drawing on the need for Pinar's (2007) complicated conversation in order to provide curricular developers and theorizers with a direction to benefit future generations of learners. Continual reflection and critique will hopefully allow educational systems to evolve into institutions that benefit all students under its care.

Aziz Aziz believes in the efforts to make education and curriculum better. He thinks that any education system that ignores what people value will not succeed. The underpinnings that constitute a society are very important when evaluating any good education system. He thinks that the good education system is what balances the three curriculum underpinnings. In this regard, he believes that without careful consideration of knowledge, culture, and experience there will not be a lively combination among them hence each item might distort the other. In his words:

The knowledge that does not go along with students' experiences and build on their own understanding will not stick to their minds. For example, I believe that if a teacher tried to teach his kids a lesson about volcanoes without an existing picture and understanding of volcanoes their ideas regarding this particular aspect would be distorted. Any curriculum that does not these aspects of knowledge, experience, and culture would get lost in nonsense details that students do not care about, and therefore, they will not get motivated to pursue further analysis to this particular aspect that been taught.

Up to this point, Aziz is considering an organized curriculum as a lively and ongoing process by which the country or the society gets its reliability. This reliability is what makes people in that particular country or society sees the value of education and school in their system. Schools in this sense are conceived as an open space and place in which people gather to review and evaluate their existing problems in a democratic and a healthy environment in which there are no fences. In this understanding, schools are leading entities in which all understandings of the curriculum have to begin and finish.

Conclusion

At the stage of curriculum internationalization (Pinar, 2012; Walker, 2003), the topic of curriculum theorizing has too much room to explore through a cultural lens. Different people from different countries perceive curriculum in different ways; however, similar learning and teaching experiences can also lead them towards a similar direction, thus having something in common in their perceptions. In the present study, different cultural elements, namely, high-stake tests in Yang's Taoism culture, moral issues and social services in Lucy's Catholic culture, and worship in Aziz' Islamic culture used to cast great influence to the three participants' perceptions of curricula. However, with the similar doctoral learning experiences and years' teaching experiences, the three participants, in the end, all come to regard an ideal curriculum as something constructive and transformative: Yang's "lingering" among different curriculum theories, Lucy's concept of curriculum "differentiation", and Aziz' "ongoing" process of curriculum

theorizing all characterize an ideal curriculum as a constructive and transformative journey, which is the ultimate goal of their deliberation.

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