

INTEGRATING LOCAL CONTENT IN CURRICULUM DESIGN

Ryan A. Kiefer

Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green

rkiefer85@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

With the current educational push towards ‘international-mindedness’ and developing ‘global citizens,’ teachers may find themselves struggling to balance local and international content. In an increasingly globalized and connected world, international understanding is an important focus of education, but to what extent should internationalism be stressed above local content? This paper presents information from a speech made at the Second Annual National English Department Seminar at STKIP PGRI Banjarmasin. The paper addresses several justifications for integrating local content in curriculum design and a few suggestions of how this can be achieved effectively. The paper draws on the author’s personal teaching experience as well as theoretical perspectives from the literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, the trend towards ‘international-mindedness’ and developing ‘global citizens’ as an educational goal has expanded rapidly. As schools begin to update their curricula with content which would promote these ideals, there exists a danger of leaving behind local wisdom and understanding in favor of focusing on internationality. This paper argues that this approach is not only undesirable, but also detrimental to the distillation of global values. This assertion rests on the premise that in order to understand the diversity of the world, students must first have an understanding of their own cultures and local environments.

The definition of what constitutes ‘international-mindedness’ and ‘global citizens’ is currently being debated and is beyond the scope of this paper. As such, this paper refers to ‘international-mindedness’ as an understanding and acceptance of, and engagement with, the diversity of Earth’s cultures and ideals.

The goals of this paper are to present a theoretical framework and justification for maintaining a localized curriculum and methods to overcome those obstacles.

2. A THEORETICAL CASE FOR LOCALIZING THE CURRICULUM

This section of the paper will attempt to lay a theoretical foundation which supports the inclusion of local content in curriculum development. Drawing on models from the fields of cognitive development and social psychology, this section will explain how local content serves as a necessary foundation for understanding global concepts.

2.1 Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

According to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) children learn best from experiences that they can relate to. Vygotsky's model proposes three 'learning zones' that guide cognitive development.

In a formal educational setting, the first zone consists of environments and information with which students are familiar. The familiarity of this zone makes learning in this zone non-engaging and, therefore, undesirable. In contrast, Vygotsky's third zone consists of concepts and information which are beyond the reach of the student's current abilities. In this zone, the student will often feel overwhelmed and unmotivated to learn as the concepts are too complex.

The second zone consists of concepts and information that is just out beyond students current understanding. Vygotsky refers to this zone as the Zone of Proximal Development. The student learns best in this zone with the help of a 'more knowledgeable other,' such as a teacher or mentor. In a formal educational setting, the teacher would build upon concepts and information which the student is already familiar with in order to guide cognitive development to a higher level.

As one of the goals of the current international education system is to develop an understanding of global concepts and contexts Vygotsky's ZPD model can be used as a framework to argue the importance of a localized curriculum. In this model, the student's immediate environment, such as their home and neighborhood, exist in the first zone. Students learn information about this zone

through observation. On the end of the spectrum, global concepts and contexts, international understanding, and the cultural diversity of the global environment initially exist in the third zone. Therefore, the ZPD, in this case, serves as a bridge between the local and global environments. Students must have an understanding of their own environment in order to better understand the world globally.

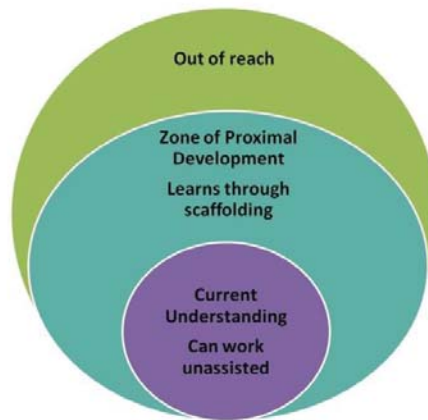


Figure 1. *Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*

2.2 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model

Urie Bronfenbrenner argues that humans exist in various ecological systems simultaneously. The Ecological Systems Model asserts that humans develop through interactions within and across these systems. Each of Bronfenbrenner's five systems are in a state of constant interaction. However, as with Vygotsky's ZPD model, the person makes sense of the outer systems by way of understanding the inner systems.

The individual interacts immediately with the first three systems. As shown in Figure 2, the Microsystem consists of the individual's immediate environment, including family members, the school, and their peers. The second system, the Mesosystem, serves as a connection between the Microsystem and the Exosystem. The Exosystem consists of the extended family, the neighborhood, media, etc. The fourth and most distant system from the individual is the Macrosystem. This system encompasses the attitudes and ideologies of the culture. The Macrosystem include the local culture and more distant cultures. Lastly, Bronfenbrenner later developed the concept of the Chronosystem, which simultaneously influences all

other systems. The Chronosystem adds an elemental of sociohistorical conditions and environmental events that occur throughout one's lifetime.

As a framework for the justification of a localized curriculum, the Ecological Systems Model supports Vygotsky's ZPD model by asserting that development occurs from local to more global contexts.

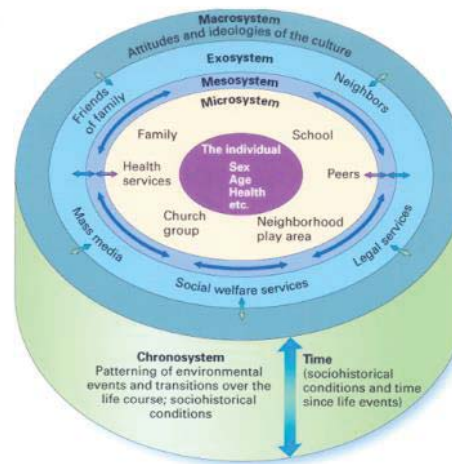


Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model

3. HOW TO LOCALIZE THE CURRICULUM EFFECTIVELY

Despite the many obstacles educators might face when attempting to develop a localized curriculum it remains possible to include local content to suit the needs of students. This section of the paper will suggest ways in which to localize the curriculum.

3.1 Integrating International Curricula

A current issue with curriculum development is the generation of general curriculum by companies which can be used by schools. Thompson (1998) proposed four ways in which curricula could be generated for use in schools.

The first method of curricula development is through exportation. In this system, curricula are developed nationally and marketed and exported throughout the world for use in any school. The problem with this method is that the nationally developed curriculum will likely not be relevant to the culture in which it has been exported.

A second proposed method is adaptation. This method proposes that nationally exported curricula be adapted to suit the local context. The advantage of this method is that it begins to suit the needs of the learners in the culture. A drawback is that it may still be based largely on a national curriculum which does not suit the local education philosophy.

The third method of curriculum development is integration. This method combines the best practices from a variety of curricula into one new curriculum. This method is beneficial in that one national culture is not prioritized over another, but rather the most beneficial aspects of multiple curricula shape a new, localized curriculum.

Lastly, curricula could be developed from scratch, Thompson (1998) refers to this method as creation. This method may be considered the ideal way to develop a localized curriculum in that all of the content and materials are developed directly from the local culture. However, this method also lacks benefit of already being tried and tested.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper sought to make an argument for the inclusion of local content in curriculum development. After laying a theoretical framework, methods to include local content were discussed.

Including local content in international curriculums will aid in the understanding of global concepts. In order to understand the more abstract concepts of the causes, effects, and processes of globalization, students must first have a thorough understanding of their own, immediate environment with which they can relate abstract concepts.

Additionally, teachers must be encouraged and willing to take time to adapt standardized curricula to meet the needs of their students. To do this, they must be familiar with their students' cultures and be willing to adapt materials or develop their own materials when necessary. Lastly, teacher training programs have the responsibility to provide future teachers with the information and tools needed to adapt or develop curricula in a way that would maximize student engagement and learning.

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