

Reflection on 8th anniversary of “Activating Teaching and Diversified Learning Program”: Autonomy and rural experience become main focuses

Interviewee: Professor Yeh Hsing-hua

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It is eight years since the MOE implemented the “Activating Teaching and Diversified Learning Program.” The program emphasizes the “autonomy” of teachers and schools, with its effectiveness reflected in student learning. The program also serves as a bridge and support, providing a stepping stone for schools, teachers, and students to move from basic to advanced levels.

The current 2019 curriculum emphasizes the three principles of “spontaneity, interaction, and common good,” leading to changes in curriculum and teaching methods. Professor Yeh Hsing-hua from the Department of Learning and Materials Design at UT said the changes in junior high school are more pronounced compared to elementary schools. Moving away from the previous focus on entrance exams, there is now the inclusion of alternative learning, leading to the emergence of new types of courses, including guiding students toward autonomous learning and interdisciplinary exploration.

The K-12 Administration also provides considerable support for teachers. Taking the refinement program as an example, Yeh said

that while the guidance and resources provided by the Digital Learning Enhancement Plan may lead to some schools having insufficient resources, others may have stronger momentum, such as the pilot schools. Last year, the phased tasks of the pilot schools ended, but the K-12 Administration continues to assist schools willing to develop professionally, in order to reinvest into their own curriculum and teaching, making student learning more diverse.

Yeh said the activated teaching program assists school teachers in revitalizing teaching by providing funding to support schools in continuous school-developed curriculum improvement after basic learning. For example, schools in remote areas have close relationships with the community. The program can help integrate diverse teaching with local resources, promote community development, or preserve Indigenous culture.

With the assistance of the program, schools have been exploring a number of fields. Over the past couple of years, they have also aligned with current events and SDG indicators, developing projects such as traffic safety education,

agricultural education, social-emotional learning, gender equality, and media literacy. For example, Dapu Junior and Elementary School in Chiayi County have planned edible campus landscapes and built vegetable gardens to enhance teachers' agricultural knowledge and skills. In addition, teachers at Ma-Ling Elementary School in Keelung have integrated life education themes into the curriculum using picture books. They also review student community visit outcomes in alternative curriculum, allowing students to understand the contributions and importance of individuals to their families and society.

Another focus of the MOE last year was to guide schools and teachers in conducting curriculum evaluations to enhance the quality and content of alternative curriculum. Through reflection, teachers are encouraged to engage in self-improvement and mutual interaction.

Speaking of cross-school communities, Yeh said that teachers from different campuses come together through projects, especially teachers in subjects that are less common, or in remote areas, so they can find cross-district and cross-school partners to discuss and improve their profession. Teachers who teach more popular subjects can also gather together to discuss specific topics, exchange ideas, and collaborate.

In addition to providing resources and respecting teachers' needs and plans, the MOE also gives more flexibility and guides teachers to empower students. It encourages teachers participating in projects to share their achievements, attracting more people to join cross-school communities. Yeh agrees with the openness and flexibility of community participation. Teachers can provide feedback to students after progressing, while others can use community resources to enhance their professionalism.

The Activated Teaching and Diversified Learning Program emphasizes supporting rural education. In addition to the “mandated curriculum” and

“school-developed curriculum,” extended learning also requires the injection of resources. Yeh said that students in rural areas lack opportunities to engage in diverse activities and learn skills after school compared with city school students. Schools can utilize project funds to hire extracurricular activity instructors according to student needs or take students on field trips.

To this end, the plan allocates more funds for rural students to organize a wide variety of extracurricular activities. These activities may be integrated with regular courses, including language-related activities such as writing and English speaking, or courses in arts, music, physical education, etc., allowing rural students to discover their talents and interests.

Yeh said that schools in Taiwan vary in their characteristics, depending on whether they are in mountainous or coastal areas, and they therefore face different challenges. Over the years, the project has been dedicated to developing good practices at a variety of schools because these experiences are not merely theoretical but originate “from the ground up” at rural schools and have been practically verified, thus aiding other schools in learning from them.

Yeh gave an example of some inherent challenges in rural areas, such as difficulties in sourcing teachers and having fewer students. Some primary schools in close proximity in Tainan have formed an alliance and take turns organizing activities. This approach allows them to collectively plan, hire teachers, and execute activities, thus reducing the burden and facilitating interactions among students. Teacher training and professional development should be organized similarly, allowing rural schools to share resources and knowledge. When faced with challenges, they can also seek assistance from experts.

Yeh admitted that some problems are difficult to overcome, but through mutual learning, methods can be found to face difficulties together. This is also where the value of the project lies.