

From Policy to Practice

Research on the Construction of High School Community in Taiwan

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Abstract

To make the effectiveness of present educational resources become greater, Taiwan senior high school and vocational high school education has engaged to expand the vertical schooling opportunities, and more, MOE has promoted the importance of popularization of education, diversity, community and life-long education in this resent decade. MOE has planned step by step to form the post-secondary high school communities to promote the homogeneity of educational resources among different types of post-secondary high schools by the means of giving financial aids to schools to adjust the conditions of schooling including programs and it is so called school-based reforms. What the MOE of Taiwan has engaged to promote the goal of the homogeneity of educational resources could be realized can be categorized in the following dimensions. In the dimension of policy, MOE has announced a lot of regulations for schools to adjust the curriculums and programs and even to merge different types of schools, and for the transformation of school at risk and the organization adjustment. In the dimension of curriculum, constructing the regional across schools cooperation relationship and system within school communities to supply the diverse and aptitude suitable learning environment. In the dimension of regional cooperation, strengthening the regional cooperation among schools, industry, and vocational training institutes in order to fully meet the needs of community development. All of these is for the balance and homogeneity of educational resources among and within the school communities in Taiwan and for the realization of the policy of 12-year-basic- education which is the biggest transformation of Taiwan education in recent years aiming to make students to enroll in nearby schools.

In particular, the school community promotion refers to the school as a center of education and cultivation of manpower for the community, but it must be based on the fact that most of the students enroll in the nearby schools. Under the circumstance of Taiwan tracking system the students have to be ensure that they can find the programs in accord with their aptitudes. Therefore, the policy to form the high school communities must be based on a balanced distribution of educational resources among school communities including programs and investment in the equipment and qualified teachers. Or parents will choose the schools for

their children because of the reputation or the programs of the school that maybe very far away from their homes. From 2001 up to now, the smooth of big transformation in Taiwan education system, 12-year-basic-education, has been lying in the priority of the school community construction which basically required completed four learning systems-normal, disability, the gifted and vocational systems, to fulfill of the community students' learning needs and to meet the expectations of parents.

Post-secondary high school community construction project and Educational resources homogeneity among post-secondary high school communities project, the two specific policies aimed for this goal should more thoroughly and deeply consider about the factors that could affect nearby students enrollment percentage which should include: the geography distribution of student, community scope, appropriate learning opportunities, the discrepancy of resources among schools.

The preliminary results of the policy are schools open to community, peer schools cooperate to support instruction and learning activities of the students. We can say that they gradually reached the goal of the policy. But if we explore the degree of satisfaction of the students' learning needs, we will find that there is still a gap. That is, through the documents study and analyze the plans implementing by school communities all over Taiwan based on the Post-secondary high school communities construction project from 2001 to 2008 and the Educational resources homogeneity among post-secondary high school communities project from 2009 to 2015, the researcher found that there are very few post-secondary high school community has adjusted the programs especially the vocational programs and even none to adjust for the needs of students learning, most of them are engaged in creating the across school cooperation in curriculum and the reforms of curriculum within single school which did not contribute to the transformation of educational system structure much and especially the public schools change little.

The research concluded that when the government said that every graduates of junior high can go to the nearby schools to accept the suitable education to realize the policy of 12-year-basic- education, the first point has to be conducted is the cooperation of curriculum in different profession and to create the equal schooling opportunity. And it requires a lot of tasks which should be ready. The tasks include investigation of schooling needs for tracking system and the resources of schools should be rearranged under different legal situations of schools such as private and public situation. Moreover, the research has found that open data is the key component of the maintenance of the cooperation to form the systematic collaborations.

Keywords: the opportunities of schooling, the cooperation of curriculum across schools, the investigation of schooling needs, school open data

1. Background/ Objectives and Goals

School has been recognized as cultivation of manpower for the society, nowadays, the democracy of the society has risen highly to a degree of taking the opportunities of schooling for different aptitudes as the rights of people in Taiwan, where has taken the tracking education for decades. Taiwan has been adopting new educational policy for several years to prepare for 12-year-basic-education to supply the equal opportunities for any students with different aptitudes. But what makes the policy put into practice? The reality of educational policy comes from the school sites. This is the interest of the research.

2. Methods

The paper adopted the qualitative research approach. The method is multiple-case study and this research analyzed the data from secondary qualitative study such as the reports of schools and the annual reports of the plans of government subsidies from schools cooperation plans. From the reports data about the gaps of schooling opportunities between school communities all over Taiwan can be collected and to be discussed by the type of cooperation and the ways to promote it.

3. Results

3.1 The meaning and definition of policy to construct High School Community in Taiwan

The base of community common view condensation is school and it is also the field of education. School and community are correlative. Due to most schools are located in communities especially the elementary and junior high schools, therefore students come from communities. A community as to school is the external environment not only provides space of activities outside schools for students but also is the field of the practice of school educational value. Therefore, the types of community, the socioeconomic background, the structure of population and culture traits all effect the measures and development of a school. For example, birth rate, gender ratio and the migration not only effect the numbers of students and classes, school organization types and ways of instruction but also limit the school development. Otherwise, the prosperity and development of the community also depends on education. And a school is public property, so what a school has done is obligated to be responsible to the community. Moreover, only when the needs of community has understood by schools and supports from community has gained and the community has participated in the school activities, does school education develop smoothly.

"Integrating with community " can be defined as "become members of the community".

"Community" refers to the area where we live in. "High school community" refers to the post-secondary education functions as the community institutions coexisting with communities; it is not only the geographical position in the community, it is more important to integrate into the community (Huang, Chen-jyen, 2001). Therefore, when it comes to "High school community", it should be a school opens to the community and all of its educational objectives, curriculum content and instructions allow the community to participate in. It also means that schools within the community can make full use of the resources of community including manpower, materials, financial aids, institutions to improve schools in the quality of education. "High school community" means not only community people to participate in learning but also the school should pay attention to that a community is the epitome of a school within the community. So school education measures should reflect the expectations of the community, and the school itself is a learning community and the power of holistic community development (Ke, Zheng-feng, 2002).

Sociologically, the school is kinds of social organization; the class is a social system. Education has the function of socialization and selection. Schools cannot and will not be the outsider of the community, so the school is one of components of the community which acts as a large social system. "High school community" is an inevitable way for school development (Ke, Zheng-feng, 2002).

After surveying the Taiwan education acts echoed "High school community" spirit, the researcher found that the 8th article in Educational Fundamental Act says "school should be supervised by local government and should tie with community development to provides good learning environment" (MOE,2001). At present, the members of community has participated in the educational activities in schools, such as school teachers review committee, the curriculum development committee, textbook chosen committee, principal selection committee which have been put into the proportions ranging from community representatives or parents. This suggests that both in law and in practical action, "High school community" has been the subject of concern and attention.

3.2 The objects of policy to construct High School Community in Taiwan

Taiwan MOE (1995) on "Towards the educational vision for 21st century ", the white paper of education had stated that according to the theory of education, family education, school education and social education the three ones should cooperate, exchange with one another and integrate as one of the basic unit of the community. So forming "High school community" policy is the mainstream of Taiwan post-secondary education from then on. Post-secondary high school community construction project and Educational resources homogeneity among post-secondary high school community project are the two projects to

support this policy by supplying post-secondary schools financial aids to form the "High school community". The basic conditions of a school community must be at least 3 partner schools including disability, normal and vocational education programs offered in these schools. And they must be nearby in location. The tasks of each high school community are ① to promote the junior high school graduates in the community to enroll in the post-secondary schools within the community. Actually, Taiwan has adopted the tracking system in post-secondary education and it is free for parents to choose schools to attend for their children no matter in the type of school or the location, the only condition is the national entrance exam grades. ② to develop the across schools programs within the community and the expected result is to develop the wholesome educational systems within each community, that is there are disability, normal, vocational and the gifted educational systems. Not just aim to develop the wholesome educational systems but also aim to open each school gate to make the curriculum can be offered within the community not just for one school. That means one school students can take the courses of another school and the credits and grades can be transformed.

The policy supposed that students will be satisfied by such across school programs. Furthermore, to enhance the effect of "High school community" policy schools and communities must promote post-secondary high schools quality. In promoting measures, after the MOE research group survey found that 78.9% samples of educators and parents representatives agreed to implement this policy (Qiu, Yu- chan, 2003). It proved that stakeholders all expect that schools can make the full use of educational resources to create a diverse and suitable education environment, to enhance the quality of post- secondary education resulting in the educational resources homogeneity among schools and among communities which is indeed the foundation for the implementation of 12-year-basic-education.

3.3 The practice of policy to construct High School Community in Taiwan

From 2001 to 2008, Taiwan MOE spent 7 years in the implementation of the Post-secondary high school community construction project which organized 45 high school communities based on the survey of schooling needs and the geographic factors, since then all the post-secondary high schools in Taiwan are divided into 45 high school communities: Taipei City is divided into northern, Eastern, and Southern community; Kaohsiung City is also divided into northern, Central, and Southern community; except these two direct-controlled municipality city, the other areas all over Taiwan are divided into 39 communities. The Post-secondary high school community construction project aimed to construct the network of across schools programs through the financial aids plans hosted by the 45 communities. In addition to the curriculum reforms, the project also concerned about the students

counselling, improvement and the effectiveness of students' learning.

Linking school to community has happened as early as education activity initiated, so it is rather than a new idea, it should be a practice. They are closely interdependent. Because of the school system is an organized system, "High school community" policy should integrate its existing human resources and material resources with this educational reform.

But in reality, there are three completely different curriculum guides in Taiwan post-secondary high schools applied to the different tracks of education-normal, vocational and comprehensive high school. The most difficult point to reach the goal of the "High school community" policy is the diversity of the post- secondary high school curriculum. It is hard for students' transformation. As a result, most of the across school programs are partial to the curriculum and even limited to 2 to 4 credits which is just a very small percentage of the whole credits a student is required to graduate.

Besides, currently Taiwan post- secondary high schools admissions capacity is far over the needs. And in the community, the proportion of public and private schools are not equal. It is still a problem for the promotion of "High school community" policy, because in traditional, the tuition of private schools was about 3 times to public schools'. Under such circumstance, the tuition makes most of the private high schools and the vocational schools became the second choice. And the students with poor learning achievements often were forced to attend the private vocational high schools. It also formed the general parents' attitudes in Taiwan towards schooling choice which is public schools are superior to private ones. The private schools run with student tuition income which is the main school operation funds even have to bear the amorous personnel costs, resulting in sufficient discrepancy of private educational resources comparing to public schools, and the burden makes the quality of the private schools are not as good as the public schools'. Even from 2012, due to the implement of 12-year-basic- education policy, the private school students' tuition is subsidized by MOE, the condition is still the same.

Furthermore, the problem of high schools admission capacity oversupply in Taiwan is getting worse and worse. The number of junior high school graduates in 2014 was 283,724 which will decrease to 199,889 till 2020, a decline of 30%. The excess of admissions capacity plus the inequality of the geographic distribution, the educational resources overlap or insufficiency all of these existing facts make school education cannot match with the needs of community. And students often need to attend the schools far away from their homes. It cost a lot of social capital. The promotion of "High school community" policy is targeted to solve these conditions gradually. Under the goal of the policy, the assessment of number of junior high school graduates, and the learning needs distribution structure are the essential

aspects of the "High school community" policy

In the promotion of the policy, "construction a community satisfied the students' learning needs" is the core. But, in Taiwan, the post- secondary education has tracked for a very long time, so only when the normal and vocational programs are balanced then the ideal of the policy can be put into practice. Under such present tracking educational system, the offering of normal and vocational schooling opportunities is the reality of each community. Adjustments of the reality are quite difficultly. MOE announced the policy and expected to figure out some cooperative and complementary strategies in curriculum. And MOE suggested schools and communities to link with each other from across schools programs and then go further to change the concept of schooling. The ideal is that a student when he/she graduated from a junior high school, he/she can go to a school for his/her post-secondary education near his/her home. If the programs offered in the school is not fitted with his/her aptitude, he/she can attend another school's program within the community. The most practical approach lies in five basic strategies:

- ① Assessment of community needs: the focus is on students ' aptitudes, abilities, educational needs, community resources for education as a whole, and also has to explore and study the community history, culture, and trends of development.
- ② Assessment of the available resources of education: it should be based on the needs of the community, further assessment of the status of the overall educational resources, insufficient resources and surplus resources within the community.
- ③ Plans for multiple adaptive system: after the assessment of community needs and resources, use the integrative methods to adjust the post-secondary education as a whole.
- ④ Coordinating of community educational resources: with a high school community as a unit, and take advantage of the method of horizontal integration and vertical integration to coordinate the resources available within the community to build a completed community system and working mechanism, and then expand to form a network between different systems.
- ⑤ Establishment of feedback networks: between the school and community should build up ways of communication such as Commissions and regular or non-regular communication (Qiu, Yu-chan, 2003, Shen, Hua-hai, Lin, Jun-yan, 2000, Yang, Chao-xiang, 2001).

To enable interaction among schools within a community more active, according to the survey of the 45 community plans, researcher found that establishing the window of opinion exchange and data open is the first step. The measures of window establishment present as below: establish the database to share the information on the website that is the open data of the school inputs, outputs, performance and fulfillment of accountability. Also, the information of school improvement plans and all the school portfolios should be on the

website and open to the stakeholders. The open data serves as the right to be informed of the stakeholders. In the policy, open data of schools is very important for monitoring the accountability of schools. It is important to give the parents information when they are choosing schools. The parents could not be blind.

By case study and documents survey, the researcher found that since 2002 till 2014 during the implement of "High school community" policy, only three high school communities has conducted the projects related to adjustment of programs. All the communities have conducted curriculum cooperation projects but it still did not result in transforming the programs in the schools. As a result, the schooling choices are still based on the traditional viewpoints. The wholesome educational systems within each community are still an ideal not a practice till now. According to the reports of the "High school community" policy, the reason for this is that programs transformation is a very big task which involves the transformation of teachers, equipment and more it should be fit to the needs of learning needs of the graduates of junior high. A single school is hard to take over such pressure. Especially, the assessment of learning needs. So the discrepancy between enrollment and offering has handed to the market. Most of post-secondary high schools spent time and money to promote their programs and their performance but few schools spent time and money to do the assessment. Unfortunately, MOE just investigated the existed facts not predicted the trend of transformation of each community. According to the study of 45 communities and the paper on this policy, the researcher found that the percentage of nearby-enrollment increases year by year. The increases are higher in remote counties and lower in urban areas. And the percentage of the student enrollment in the nearby schools is near 70% on the average. The most important factor that affects parents' and students' choices of schools is learning interests and does not depend on whether the nearby enrollment rates are high, low, increasing or decreasing. However, when making decisions on choosing schools, parents have different considerations from their children. The better performance and the rise in the achievements of a school's overall operation, and the development of school distinctive features helped to increase nearby-enrollment rates (Song, Xiu-de, Su, Jing-jin, 2010). So when the MOE promotes the "High school community" policy, the emphasis should be on the school number, schools' geographical distribution, and the opportunities of vocational and normal schooling within a community these fundamental problems.

From policy to practice, now, as we have been hands in hands and should be towards an ideal reality of education, but in the dimension of practice where to go is still a problem. Because of lacking of long-term assessment of educational needs, schools cannot do the big task on transformation. As to a single school, it always waits to see the result of the change of

external environment, not as enterprise the school is more conservative to face the issue of transformation. The transformation in the opportunities of schooling cannot just depends on the cooperation of curriculum across schools. The investigation of schooling needs is very important for schools to understand how and what to adjust. As to encourage students to enroll in the nearby schools the schools and the community should present the school open data on the website to inform the stakeholders to know the conditions of the education well and then the choice of schools will be made by the rational reason.

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