

Contextual Analysis of Curriculum Policy Formation of Senior High School Arts and Life Curriculum Guidelines in Taiwan: A Study of the Significant Stakeholders' Discourses

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Summary

“Arts and Life” is a new subject in senior high school arts education curriculum in Taiwan; its relatively new precedence has roused numerous controversies. “Arts and Life” was first initiated in 1995, became a post-revamp requisite subject in 2006, and was re-structured again in 2009. However, the scrutiny of the curriculum formation of “Arts and Life” shows a lack of stability. The consummating leading role the curriculum policy plays designates to the absolute scrutiny in its formation. The purpose of this study is to analyze the discourses of the significant stakeholders involved in shaping the policy, and to envisage the metamorphosis of this policy, and the relationships between the power structures of significant stakeholders involved in shaping the transition of the curriculum.

When “Arts and Life” was first introduced, it displayed a distinct knowledge structure. Nevertheless, its non-mandatory nature sequels to a 10-year lag, whereby “Arts and Life” was only executed in a handful of high schools; it was not until 2006 during the reform of “General Provisional Guidelines for Ordinary Senior High School Curriculum” was “Arts and Life” announced a “requisite,” and with a re-shaped knowledge structure. Just as the curriculum began to fall on track, three years later, the ‘General Guidelines for Ordinary Senior High School Curriculum’ was launched, and the knowledge structure of “Arts and Life” was again re-structured. In order to explore the formation of “Arts and Life,” 17

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significant stakeholders, including policy makers, curriculum reforming committee members, scholars, and school art teachers, were interviewed, and other related documents and public opinions were also analyzed.

According to this study, during the first transition period, the main influence for shaping “Arts and Life” was how policy makers compromised towards the academic community of art education. “Arts and Life” was first surged as a response to people’s impatience against the long-term rigidity of school art education and to the rapid development of Taiwanese society after the abolishment of martial law. The government hoped to infuse some vitality into the perennial constant of school arts by initiating a brand new art subject. However, other than proposing this curriculum policy, the government failed to offer succeeding supplementary, such as training proficient and qualified “Arts and Life” teachers and policies tackling the possible reduction in other art subject teachers, all of which led to the pinching situation of the art academic and school art teachers. Several serious protests against the new curriculum policy forced the government to amend the curriculum policy as an elective course. By 1995 “Arts and Life” had become an oxymoron, whereby which only a few schools offered the course.

Accompanying the legislation of “General Provisional Guidelines for Ordinary Senior High School Curriculum” in 2006, the second transition period of “Arts and Life” started and was again announced as a required course. During this period, the main influence for shaping “Arts and Life” was the concession between the convener of curriculum reforming committees and pressure groups. Because the 1995 “Arts and Life” curriculum was almost unimplemented, the convener of the 2006 “Arts and Life” curriculum reforming committee decided to renew the knowledge structure of this subject. Based on the convener’s professional insight, he sorted “Arts and Life” into four sub areas, each with a distinct content. The goal for this approach was to enhance high school students’ abilities for their college studies. Despite his great apprehension towards this fresh curriculum policy, the convener overlooked the realistic aspects of Taiwanese school art education and once again, led to the crisis of art academic and school art teachers. The high level of unfamiliarity for these four sub areas led school art teachers to believe that they might lose their jobs. Meanwhile, other related art academic scholars also worried that they might lose their vested interests for art schooling. Consequently, in 2006, two more sub areas were added to “Arts and Life”. This concession embedded a remote root for the next transition period.

The political situation in 2009 provoked violent controversy against “General Provisional Guidelines for Ordinary Senior High School Curriculum.” The third transition period of “Arts and Life” began along with the introduction to “General Guidelines for Ordinary Senior High School Curriculum.” According to the government, since the 2006 “Arts and Life” had just been accepted by the public, the reform policy of the 2009 one was minor. However, it ended reversely. During this period, the main influence for shaping “Arts and Life” was the conspiracy of one of the two conveners of curriculum reforming committee and some policy makers. They decided to reshape the knowledge structure of “Arts and Life” into three totally different sub areas in order to connect Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines, and neglected the notorious reputation of this curriculum guidelines. The pressure groups had a strong disagreement with this decision but failed to express their doubt because of the pressing time-limit for reforming the 2009 “Arts and Life.” The third transition period of “Arts and Life” has been finished in a lightning speed.

While observing the curriculum policy formation of “Senior High School Arts and Life Curriculum Guidelines” in Taiwan, this study found a very similar development pattern demonstrated within each transition period, namely, the forming stage, where primary ideas are addressed, the storming and norming stage, where ideas and protocols are negotiated and announced, and the performing stage, where all complimentary measures and policy promotion mechanisms are delivered. The diverse interrelationships within the significant stakeholders during these policy shaping transitions were also revealed. However, all the diverse interrelationships within the significant stakeholders did point out the education hegemony of Taiwanese schooling. Within which, different stakeholders manipulated diverse power structures, whether dominant or recessive, to accomplish their ideal curriculum policy. To sum, the current “Arts and Life” is only at an impermanent status. When the next curriculum policy formation starts, and with new groups of stakeholders competing for their power structures, the knowledge structure of “Arts and Life” might be reshaped again.

Keywords: Arts and Life, senior high school curriculum standards, general provisional guidelines for ordinary senior high school curriculum, general guidelines for ordinary senior high school curriculum, stakeholder, curriculum policy

