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**ETAP 710**  
**Reflection for Curricular Framework**

**Foreword**

In the summer of 2007, I spent two months for vacation in my home country, Turkey. During my stay, I had a lot of time to think about how my doctoral education in the US was going. I asked myself: how much practical knowledge do I have about the education in the US? Am I equipped enough to transfer a significant amount of my experiences and knowledge when I finally return to my country? The answers were a little difficult to confront to be honest with you. Even though my ultimate aim is to take away as much innovative information as possible, I did not feel that my education was matching my goal. I elaborated on the reasons of this problem, some of which were at the personal level, some at institutional. For example, I thought that the PhD program at University at Albany allowed some flexibility such that an international student could manage to graduate from the doctoral program without genuinely getting engaged in the US educational system. That is, most of the course projects are theoretical and do not require the doctoral students to dig into the educational system here. However, I thought that the “development of a curricular framework” project that Dr. Carla Meskill included in the syllabus for ETAP 710 Principles of Curriculum was a good opportunity for me to obtain practical knowledge about how schools run in the US. Bearing this in mind, I did not impulsively join a group in which the main focus was English as a Second Language. Being in line with my empathy for the underprivileged, my classmate Ned’s idea about trying to work things out in a low-income school sounded quite appealing and

challenging to me, so I ended up joining Ned, Chin Ee, Francine and Andy for this collaborative project.

### **Curriculum Development Process**

Honestly speaking, we did not determine a curriculum development model to follow during the platform (Walker as cited in Oliva, 1992) phase even though we designed our curriculum in a logical, step-by-step fashion. We did not define what we understand by curriculum despite the fact “the way someone designs a curriculum is partially rooted in his or her definition of curriculum” (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1993, p. 18). We did not ask ourselves whether we wanted a prescriptive or descriptive curriculum or whether we agreed with the progressive paradigm or not. In brief, we proceeded intuitively in the absence of a curriculum model. However, when I went back to Oliva (1992), I realized that we followed a deductive process in that we started with general (our philosophy, mission statement, aims, goals) and moved to the specific (course objectives, instructional techniques, evaluation). We were all in favor of a prescriptive curriculum due to the nature of the assignment (we wouldn’t be able to claim that our curriculum is experiential (Ellis, 2004) and will be determined based on students’ needs since we had to demonstrate individual frameworks) and due to our previous teaching and learning habits. Even though I believe that the model we followed suits Oliva’s model the best, I must add that our discussions about community as source fit well with Tyler’s model in which “society” is considered one of the main sources to gather data. Another point where our curriculum development fits into Tyler’s model is that we did not consider the sources (teachers, students, parents) as separate entities. We continuously emphasized the interaction between these sources. For this reason, I believe

that our curriculum development process was not too mechanical. In this regard, our curriculum is also supported by Gay's (as cited in Ellis, 2004) description of a curriculum: "the entire culture of the school- not just the subject matter content" (p. 7), instead of Bestor's curriculum which merely included the school subjects that he considered essential.

Oliva (1992) recommends 12 steps for curriculum development on page 175 of his book *Developing the Curriculum* (e.g. specify the needs of students in general, specify the needs of the particular community, specify instructional goals). In our first meeting on October 11<sup>th</sup>, we mainly discussed the first five steps in Oliva's suggestions. We all agreed to gather data regarding the student needs in a low-income school, what research tell about the improvements in these schools, what kind of a mission we should have, so on and so forth. We utilized this first opportunity to make an outline and a timeline for ourselves as well as sharing personal philosophies about education such as if school uniform is a good idea or not.

We began our second meeting on October 18<sup>th</sup> by working on the demographics of our fictitious school, and then moved to the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> steps of Oliva's model. We discussed what kinds of subject matters we should include in our framework based on our expertise areas. The first two meetings did not move smoothly since everybody was trying to have an idea of what kind of a curriculum we wanted. We were still in the 'awareness' stage of the decision-making process (awareness, design, choice and action) according to Stufflebeam as cited in Oliva, 1992. As time went by, we made changes in many things that we discussed in the first two meetings. For example, we decided not to include a principle's speech since it was not directly related to curriculum and we

changed our minds in order to design a web site for our school since there was not enough time to do it. We agreed to work on the individual frameworks till the next meeting, thus the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> steps in Oliva's model were covered individually.

The third meeting was very fruitful in terms of the deliberation (Walker as cited in Oliva, 1992) phase. Most of the specifics (mission statement, demographics, background, and rationale) were clarified and the group spirit reached its peak in terms of collaboration. We revisited the discussion about our curriculum goals (7<sup>th</sup> step) and agreed on three c's: cultivation, civility and creativity. In fact, this is when we talked about balancing among the three types of curricula that Ellis put forward (2004). Cultivation represented the knowledge-based curriculum, civility the society-based, and creativity referred to the learner-based curriculum. Later on, we exchanged ideas about our individual frameworks. We came up with our bi-weekly accountability meetings, teachers-as-resource and parents-as-resource ideas. Finally, we discussed the ways how we can meet and exceed the standards.

On Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>, we did not have a face-to-face class, so we met in the science library. We worked on the PowerPoint presentation of our curriculum and shared ideas regarding how each of us should proceed with the actual presentation in the class.

Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> was the day of our presentation. Except from the time-management problem and some of the questions that came from the stakeholders, everything went as we expected.

### **Roles in our Faculty Team**

From the first meeting on, Chin Ee volunteered to be the leader of our team, so we mostly followed her suggestions regarding the mechanics of the process. As a curriculum

leader, she demonstrated effective decision-making skills and was a good discussion leader (Oliva, 1992). She kept the team on task (Oliva, 1992), especially in the first two weeks. I must add that Ned was the second leader of our team. The interpersonal relations within the team worked out well, too. Team members were responsible in terms of submitting their work on time, and responsive to each other's suggestions and questions. We were also tolerant towards each other when things did not work as we expected.

In terms of the group task roles that Oliva (1992) talks about, I can say that all of the team members were initiator-contributors and opinion seekers when necessary; Francine and Andy, due to their unfamiliarity with the PhD program and me, due to my lack of practical knowledge about the educational system in the US, acted as the information seekers at times; Chin Ee and Ned played the primary roles as opinion givers; Chin Ee was the elaborator most of the time as well as being the evaluator-critic, energizer and procedural technician. Francine and Chin Ee shared their reflections on a regular basis on the group's site on Blackboard, in this sense they were the recorders. As for the group building and maintenance roles, Francine, me and Andy were the compromisers since we were willing to modify our positions for the sake of the team's harmony. Chin Ee and Ned did well as leaders throughout the project but there were times when they were resistant to suggestions coming from the other members.

As for me, I believe that I worked with my group in harmony and contributed major ideas (e.g. I was the one who suggested that we should have a parent involvement program embedded into our curriculum); however, most of the time I resented the fact that I had to communicate with my group in a language other than my first language. Especially during the first two meetings, I maintained my silence and spoke only if I

wanted to contribute something important or if I needed to ask a question. Another reason of my silence was my lack of practical knowledge about how schools work in the US. Indeed, it was a real impediment for me since I did not have a scheme in my mind in order to produce thoughts and suggestions. However, I managed to learn how schools work to a certain extent by reading online resources, talking to my American friends, e-mailing them about their schools, asking questions whenever possible. However, I must admit that I felt challenged by these facts to a great extent. Even during the question and answer stage of our presentation, I had to keep my silence despite the fact that how much I wanted to contribute to the group's efforts in answering the questions. What was bothering me most was the fact that I was not performing up to my potential due to the language factor and my lack of profound knowledge of the US secondary school system. I felt that it was a compatibility problem that I was having more than anything.

### **References**

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- Oliva, P. (1992). *Developing the curriculum*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Ornstein, A.C., & Hunkins, F. (1993). *Curriculum: Foundations, principles and theory*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.