

An Evaluation of Thai Preschool Teacher Socio-Moral in Classroom

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Rationale:

When the whole development of child seems to be the aim of education, both Dewey and Piaget converged in their emphasis on children's interests and cooperating with children rather than coercing. Piagets work leading to the term of "constructivist education", has inspired many educators to form a connected general view of classroom experiences with child-centered approach including pretend play, blockbuilding, art, music, woodworking, stories, also, new types of activities such as arithmetic debates, group games, and physical knowledge activities. The teaching of literacy follows a Whole Language approach, and subject-matter goals are to be achieved through an integrated curriculum organized around projects and themes such as making handicrafts and simple machines.

A recent work (DeVries & Zan, 1994) has shown that it is possible for a teacher to conduct and use all the activities mentioned above without strictly implementing the most essential aspects of constructivist approach. Activities, materials, and classroom organization by themselves are not the essence of this educational approach. The first principle is to cultivate a sociomoral atmosphere in which respect for others is continually practiced. This leads teachers and children to value fairness and cooperative methods of resolving social and moral conflicts in a community characterized by caring relationships. This mutual respect also leads to democratic processes which in turn cultivate democratic way of life both inside and outside school.

The theoretical foundation for the recent work on sociomoral atmosphere and sociomoral development bases on three parallels in Piagets theory of sociomoral and cognitive development. The three parallels which suggest the similar conditions for sociomoral development and intellectual development are that

Just as knowledge of the object world is constructed by the child, so too must psychological knowledge be constructed: sociomoral thought and sociomoral understanding in action undergo qualitative transformations.

Just as affect is an indissociable motivational element in intellectual development, socioaffective bonds (or their lack) motivate social and moral development.

An equilibration (or self-regulating) process can be described for social and moral development as for cognitive development. (eg., this equilibration involves affirmation of the self and conservation of the other as a desired partner). In particular, it is emphasized how decentering become conscious of different points of view is necessary for reciprocal adjustments, mutual comprehension in shared systems of meaning, and social coordination.

Thus this sociomoral atmosphere may also be viewed as an intellectual atmosphere in which the teachers respect for children leads to valuing their discovery, invention, debate about ideas, and especially their wrong ideas and reasoning. Therefore, the conditions that promote sociomoral development are the same conditions that promote intellectual development. Piagets view of the necessary role of social life in the development of intelligence was elaborated by Kohlberg and Lickona who advocated social and moral discussion, rule making, capitalizing on conflict, and an emphasis on community and responsibility. They pointed out that children must construct their moral understandings from the raw material of their day-to-day social interactions.

Among day-to-day social interaction there are two types of adult-child relationships which correspond to two types of morality. The first type of adult-child relationship is coercive and

promotes heteronomous morality. In this relation, the adult prescribes what the child must do by giving ready-made rules and specific instructions for behavior; respect is a one-way affair. That is, the child is expected to respect the adult, and the adult uses authority to socialize and instruct the child. The adult controls the child's behavior. The child's reason for behaving is therefore external to her own reasoning and system of personal interests and values. The child is forced to submit to a whole set of rules whose reasons are incomprehensible to him or her. Therefore, the obligations to eat certain foods at certain times, not to touch certain delicate or important objects, etc., can only be felt by the child as external since these obligations cannot be felt from within. So long as adults keep the child occupied with learning what adults want him to do and with obeying their rules, he will not be motivated to question, analyze, or examine his own convictions and construct his own reasons for following rules. The teacher whose objective is obedience must be coercive, even if he or she attempts to foster obedience through positive means such as coaxing or bribing. Certainly heteronomous practices can be seen as a continuum from extreme hostile and punitive methods to sugar-coated coercion. What these all have in common is emphasis on obedient behavior. The teacher is clearly the authority, and children's behavior is regulated by what the teacher wants. Piaget noted that extensive coercion can produce three unfortunate reactions: Rebellion, mindless conformity, or calculation (following adults' rules only as long as under surveillance).

The second type of relation is characterized by mutual respect and cooperation. The adult returns the child's respect by giving him the possibility to regulate his behavior voluntarily. Piaget calls this type of relation "autonomous and cooperative". Only by refraining from exercising authority, the adult can open the way for child to develop a mind capable of thinking independently and creatively, to construct a decentered personality, and to develop moral feelings and convictions that take into account the best interests of all parties. In terms of power, heteronomy is a relation of unequal power in which the adult has it all, while, cooperation is a relation in which power is equalized. It is clear that children and adults are not equals. However, when the adult is able to respect the child as a person with a right to exercise his will, there would be a development of certain psychological equality in the

relationship. In reality, coercion should be minimized as much as possible and be practical. The desirable relationship should be a mixture increasingly in favor of the child's regulation of his own behavior.

Autonomous relationship operates through cooperation. It means mindfully coordinating one's own feelings and perspective with another's feelings and point of view. The feelings of mutual affection and mutual trust are the roots of the motive for decentering and reciprocity. And then emerge the feelings of sympathy and consciousness of intentions of others. The constructivist teacher appeals to cooperation rather than obedience by asking rather than telling, suggesting rather than demanding, and persuading rather than controlling. Nevertheless, there are some situations in real life that heteronomy is often appropriate and certainly sometimes unavoidable in adult-child interactions. However, when it is necessary to coerce a child, it is important how one does so. A teacher can be disrespectful by saying, "Do it because I say so," or respectful by explaining why something is required in a way the child can understand.

Decentering, autonomy, and cooperation simultaneously involve both cognitive and emotional processes. Adult coercion produces a constriction of children's minds, personalities, and feelings. Adult cooperation produces a liberation of children's possibilities for construction of their intelligence, their personalities, and their moral and social feelings. It has been agreed that no child's life is totally coercive or totally cooperative. Each child presents a unique history of coercive and cooperative experiences. Also, each classroom will provide a mixture of coercive and cooperative experiences. It is plausible to be convinced that classrooms with a sociomoral atmosphere will promote moral development in children, as well as emotional, social, and intellectual development.

In accordance with the National Education Reform, which marks the new era of education in Thailand, child-centered based educational system is a crucial part of the reform. The system

now involves not only for the effectiveness on the development of physical, cognitive, socio-emotional aspects of children, but also morality.

In 2000, Office of the National Economic and Social Development Commission, Office of the Prime Minister, Kingdom of Thailand, had funded a study on the evaluation of the provision of preschool education in Thailand. Part of the evaluation concerned the sociomoral atmosphere as an contributing factor on the development of morality within classroom environment.

Methodology:

The researchers had videotaped one day morning activity session for 20 preschool teachers on teacher-child interaction that built up sociomoral atmosphere in the actual classroom in childcare centers and public/private preschools.

The sample studied in this research consisted of preschool teachers under the jurisdiction of the Office of National Primary Education Commission, the Office of Private Education Commission, Community Development Department, and Bureau of Local Education Administration.

To evaluate the sociomoral atmosphere established through teacher-child interactions, the researchers coded teachers and children using digitized videoclips and electronic scoring system followed the coding manual that is derived from Selman Schultz's conceptualized developmental levels of interpersonal understanding in terms of two types of experiences: Negotiation, where the developmental goal is identity separate from others, and Shared Experience where the goal is connection, intimacy, or mutuality with others.

Negotiation strategies (NS) : describe interaction when an interpersonal dynamic is in disequilibrium. Disequilibrium is present in a certain tension between interactors that requires some action to resolve it. The tension may be mild as when one actor makes an assertion of option (to which the other responds by agreeing, disagreeing, or ignoring or strong as when one attacks the other physically or verbally to which the other responds by counter-attacking or giving in). Negotiation at Level 0 is the impulsive exercise of raw will or giving in to raw will: Others are objects. At this level, negotiation strategies are primarily physical actions to get what one wants or allow oneself to be overwhelmed by another's physical intimidation. Level 1 negotiation is unilateral expression of the Self's needs or wishes: Others are to control or be controlled by. Level 2 negotiation reflects consideration of the Other's needs or wishes through an effort to coordinate these with one's own: Others are to persuade or be persuaded by. Level 3 negotiation strives for mutual understanding: Others are to understand and be understood by.

Shared experienced (SE) : describe interaction when an interpersonal dynamic is in equilibrium. Equilibrium is present when an interaction is characterized by an absence of tension, precluding the necessity for resolution. The equilibrium may be weak as when one actor briefly acknowledges the other, or strong as when two laugh together at shared secret. Level 0 shared experience is impulsive and operates by a process of contagious enthusiasm. Level 1 involves more conscious sharing but remains unilateral as the Other's perspective is not taken into account. Level 2 involves reciprocal sharing of the Other's perspective with one's own. Level 3 involves mutual collaboration in sharing.

Results:

Most of the preschool teacher's sociomoral behaviors on both shared experiences and negotiation strategies were largely found at level 1 in which the negotiation is the unilateral

expression of self's needs or wishes: others are to control or be controlled by. There were a few level 2 shared experiences which involves more conscious sharing but still remains unilateral as the other's perspective is not taken into account. The negotiation strategies were found in much higher percentage more than shared experiences.

Discussion:

DeVries, Haney, and Zan (1991) has emphasized the main factors of constructivist-based sociomoral development, of which their variables are teaching and the atmosphere of learning. Teacher's role will vary according to teaching model. For example, in direct-instruction program, teacher has his/her role in solely providing activities for children. Its classroom atmosphere looks alike "boot camp". The teacher would not allow or promote their children to do things the way they want. Competitive, not cooperative learning, is frequently seen in this program. This program corresponds to Kohlberg and Mayer's cultural transmission, in which teacher transmits knowledge to child. In this research, the preschool teachers under the jurisdiction of the Office of Private Education Commission had shown repetitive commands that give strong pressure for obedience.

In constructivist program, teacher takes role as "Mentor" who values and affirms children's idea and encourages their pride in having good ideas. The teacher uses persuasive strategies such as making suggestions, elaborating on children's ideas, reminding of reasons for rules, offering choices, encouraging the generation of ideas, and upholding the value of fairness. Conflicts in the classroom of this program are taken seriously as opportunities to help children think about others' points of view and figure out how to negotiate with others. As Mentor, the teacher is a companion guide who organizes a program of activities designed to stimulate children's reasoning and provide them with a supportive environment in which to explore and experiment, to make inevitable errors in reasoning, and to invent new ways of reasoning. The children are free to be themselves in the constructivist atmosphere which match Kohlberg and Mayer's cognitive developmental. In this study, there were not any

preschools that exactly corresponds to this aspect. However, some schools under the jurisdiction of the Office of National Primary Education Commission had partially shown this type of atmosphere.

Eclectice teaching is a kind of program that shares some characteristics of both the direct-instruction and constructivist programs. It is neither as negative as that in the first program, nor as positive as in the second. The teachers believes strongly in the value of the right answers and corrects all errors. The classroom of this program is not so rigidly controlled that conflict do not occur. Generally, the teachers respons to conflicts between children by forcing an apology, sermonizing, and exhorting children to be more careful in the case of physical harm. Also, emphasize in this program is on production. This sort of atmosphere could be seen in some schools under the jurisdiction of the Office of National Primary Education Commission. However, most of the time had been spent on subject matter proceeded by the teacher.

There were distinctive classroom atmospheres appeared on the coding processes that should be mentioned as case studies.

Case Study 1: One teacher of a preschool under the Bureau of Local Education Administration used a red crow puppet as an agent for teaching a Thai vowel. All students sat at their table reciting what the teacher wrote on blackboard by following the tapping sound of long stick. Thereafter came an art activity related to that Thai vowel. The children had been divided into 3 groups. Each group had its own leader. The leader would select the best work of his group and all the class started appraisal. Any work that the children voted to be beautiful one but was contrast to the teacher's opinion would receive insulting argument. Then, all children changed their minds and automatically accepted whatever the teacher had said.

Case Study 2: One teacher of a preschool under the Community Development Department pointed her finger to 2 x 1 1/2 feet poster hung on the wall in front of 40 children who were sitting close to the wall. She asked all the children to recite what was on poster. It seemed that she ignored whether some children would see what on the poster or not. Abruptly, she changed the activity to musical chair and followed shortly by painting. Other teacher came by and turned on VDO tape for 3 -4 minutes and then turned off. Both teachers told the children to clean up their stuffs. Then the children gathered in group, one teacher read a storybook to them.

Case Study 3: One teacher of a preschool under the jurisdiction of the Office of National Primary Education Commission set up a Thai dessert cooking activity called "Klong Klang". Before the activity started, all the children practiced short meditation. Then they passed a lighted candle in circle along with individual verbal praying for a bless with pronouncing the name of a famous Buddhist monk. During the blessing, the teacher warned the children that if they didn't have meditative mind the candle would fall off their hands. No spirit would come to get their dessert. The teacher threatened that whoever did not sit tight, would be excluded from the activity. However, during the activity the teacher showed friendship, built up relax atmosphere, and sometime brought up her own experience.

Conclusion:

The analysis of teacher's behaviors in various classroom atmospheres shows significant similarity in interactions of teacher-child. Most of the preschool teacher's sociomoral behaviors on both shared experiences and negotiation strategies were largely found at level 1. The negotiation strategies were found in much higher percentage than shared experiences. Sociomoral behaviors on level 1 suggests that we must seriously consider the possibility that heavily academic, teacher-centered programs may hinder children's development of interpersonal understanding and sociomoral competence. The study also bring up one question that is needed to be answered; whether providing child-centered activities in

teacher-centered atmosphere does compensate for the sociomoral disadvantages of a heavy academic emphasis.

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