

## On the Development of School-Based Curriculum for Symbiosis Education in Ethnic Regions

ZHOU Dazhong<sup>[a], \*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Center for Studies of Education and Psychology of Ethnic Minorities in Southwest China, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

\*Corresponding author.

**Supported by** the National Social Science Fund “Investigation and Study on Education Effect of Inland Tibetan Class (School)” (11BMZ025).

Received 13 August 2014; accepted 25 September 2014  
Published online 26 November 2014

### Abstract

The introduction of foreign culture brings about a powerful impact on ethnic culture. In the meanwhile, the ecological environment in ethnic regions gets even worse because of blind and excessive exploitation of resources. This is the current situation the ethnic regions are faced with. The idea of the symbiosis education can contribute to improving the present situation because it is aimed at interacting human and nature, ethnic culture and mainstream culture. Moreover, the development of school-based curriculum in ethnic regions helps to accomplish the symbiosis education because it can educate the people in the ethnic regions, inherit the ethnic culture and reflect the mainstream culture.

**Key words:** Ethnic regions; School-based curriculum; Symbiosis education

Zhou, D. Z. (2014). On the Development of School-Based Curriculum for Symbiosis Education in Ethnic Regions. *Studies in Sociology of Science*, 5(4), 106-110. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sss/article/view/5935>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/5935>

### INTRODUCTION

The conception of Symbiosis, presented by Anton DeBary, was a biological definition and then extends to the area of social science. In the area of biology, it means two

species living in a mutually beneficial relationship while in the area of social sciences, it means a state of interdependent and common development between things and it is usually used to reflect the behavior pattern of “self-center” and “anthropocentrism”. The pursuit of Human Symbiosis eventually brings a turn to Symbiosis of Education. By education, a combination between external world and people’s internal world can be realized. In the contemporary, the present situation of ethnic autonomous region is depressing and disturbing: The introduction of foreign culture brings about a powerful impact on ethnic culture. In the meanwhile, the ecological environment in ethnic regions gets even worse because of blind and excessive exploitation of resources. Faced with the double pressure from inside and outside, ethnic culture has a difficulty in surviving. In such a case, it is no doubt that symbiosis education is an available point and the development of school-based curriculum in ethnic regions helps to accomplish the symbiosis education.

### 1. THE CONNOTATION OF THE SYMBIOSIS EDUCATION IN ETHNIC REGIONS

The symbiosis education is “to help develop talents with symbiotic thinking, personal qualities and behavior habits in a certain symbiotic environment.” (Qiu, 2010) The symbiosis education makes educators equipped with abilities to get along well with others or the nature, to coordinate or handle the relationship of inside and outside and to realize a harmonious development between individual and society. In terms of ethnic education, the symbiosis education is required to achieve “a state of heterogeneous coexistence, mutual benefits and collaborative development based on a deep understanding of current situation, a better comprehension of ethnic

culture, a clear insight of self vitality and an effective interaction between foreign cultures.” (Sun & Li, 2010)

### 1.1 The Symbiosis of Human and Nature

In the splendid man's history, different ethnic groups in different surroundings have formed its own unique culture, in which people experienced distinctive cultural merits and kept the harmony between inner and outside world. In such a background, the symbiosis education came into being in the pursuit of better living conditions for ethnic regions. Any person who acts as an educator comes from the nature, so he is a component of the nature. The nature has its own rules which cannot be obeyed. As a result, adaptation to the nature is what the education should follow.

However, for education, adaptation to the nature not only refers to conform to the nature development law of human beings, but also making educators keep the symbiosis with nature in mind. So, “the mission of education is to keep an eye on the function of the nature, as well as to guide educators to follow the nature.” (Comenius, 1984) On the other hand, the education is means to inherit the culture. If limited to the single natural dimension, education is inevitably hollow and empty. Thus, the symbiosis education is supposed to combine nature and humanism, “to give consideration to both environment and zoology and to take root in the fundamental part of human culture, and to develop eventually as a foundation that provides a full support to human growth and education.” (Sun, 2010)

### 1.2 The Symbiosis of Ethnic Culture and Mainstream Culture

It is essential for the symbiosis education to realize the symbiosis of ethnic culture and mainstream culture. Affected by the ideology, the mainstream culture plays a leading role within a country's limits. It is formed as a result of historic public identity and keeps pace with social development and holds firmly the right of speech in the cultural level. Therefore, such modern and inclusive culture appeals to the ethnic groups. Moreover, learning the mainstream culture is a passport for people in ethnic autonomous region to get involved in the society, and a base to get a better opportunity for development. However, if the mainstream culture is paid the only attention in the ethnic regions, the ethnic culture will be inevitably weaken and unlikely to live, influencing the multi-culture pattern. So, while the importance of mainstream culture is more and more realized, education in ethnic regions is supposed to give an appropriate consideration to the learning and inheritance of the ethnic culture.

---

## 2. THE VALUES OF THE SYMBIOSIS EDUCATION IN ETHNIC REGIONS

---

The symbiosis education in ethnic regions is designed to solve two problems: one is the relationship between

the human growth and the outside world. The symbiosis education expects to build a complementary symbiotic system between the human and the nature, rather than brazenly snatch in a profit-driven. The other is the relationship between ethnic culture and alien culture, especially the mainstream culture. The symbiosis education wants to preserve complementary symbiotic system between ethnic culture and mainstream culture. In this way, the education in ethnic region is not only to follow and to promote the foreign school system in top-bottom pattern, but to change the local landmarks and cultural features into a leading discourse to form a nutrient-rich medium to develop the educational practice. “And such education could cultivate people who respect the nature, identify their own culture and appreciate the cultures of other ethnic groups.” (Zhang, 2009)

### 2.1 Cultivation of “Ethnic People”

The most important educational objective in ethnic region is to help people to obtain the ethnic identity, and then to cultivate the citizens of a nation. Therefore, the concept of “ethnic people” implies the compatibility between ethnic characters and general characters of national citizens. But it is an indisputable fact that the ethnic people are weakening their ethnic characters, which are related to monistic cultural orientation in curriculum system of ethnic areas. Moreover, powerful economic attraction of mainstream culture makes the ethnic culture retreat little by little in the erosion of utilitarian orientation. Consequently, the loss of ethnic cultural infiltration leads the ethnic people to undifferentiated and homogeneous existence. In turn, these people who fail to inherit the ethnic culture from the beginning to discredit the ethnic culture, which has shaken their own hidden foundation.

In this context, to promote the symbiosis education could undoubtedly open another educational pattern in the minority areas: it could awaken the ethnic people to respect the nature with the reverent emotion based on harmonious coexistence between the man and the nature; it could reconstruct the life-caring cultural trust based on the harmonious coexistence of the man and the native culture; it could provide a limitless developmental and inclusive cultural horizon based on harmonious coexistence between the man and the alien cultures. Similarly, under the influence of this educational pattern, the man could be called “ethnic people”.

### 2.2 Inheritance of Ethnic Culture

Ethnic areas have multiplex and luxuriant culture types, such as architectural culture, dressing culture, entertainment culture, etiquette culture and religious culture etc. Since a long time ago, these cultures achieve the purpose of intergenerational transmission by methods of teaching orally and practicing personally in family and social fields. Meantime, to maintain the transmission, there is a necessary precondition that the parents are proud of their own ethnic culture and have pride-based

cultural confidence. This condition is easier to obtain in a closed natural environment and pure humanistic environment. But in the present information age, even the precipitous mountains and rushing rivers cannot stop the harassment from alien cultures. Those alien cultures with advanced material civilization greatly affect the people's harmonious living and abundant conditions, devastating the original cultural pride and provoking hopeless defense. Unfortunately, the disadvantages of modern education reinforce these negative impacts. The utilitarian education erodes the foundation of ethnic cultural inheritance under the orientation of instrumental rationality.

The loss of ethnic cultures changes the steady-going living conditions of minority member into unsettled lifestyle. This rootless status implies frustrating situation because they could neither be merged into their own ethnic group nor be identified with the "alien". Therefore, the school system in ethnic regions needs to shoulder the important cultural responsibility, such as mending the faultage of ethnic culture, remodeling the new balance between different cultures and exploring ways of backing to spirits of traditional culture etc.. Faced with this situation, "symbiosis education coincides with the demands of educational reform, because it goes for harmonious development to deal with the man-nature and man-culture relationship." (Li, 2005)

### 2.3 Reflection of Mainstream Culture

The mainstream culture's holding cultural discourse makes the mainstream culture obtain psychological advantage over non-mainstream cultures. But this psychological advantage could bring the mainstream culture to an unavoidable involution, then losing gradually the cultural vitality. Therefore, the dominant culture must be given huge root system which deepens into the soil of multiculturalism. This could help the dominant culture to absorb reasonable factors of ethnic culture, and to accept its rational recommendations, then helping the dominant culture to form a universal cultural ideal with the attitude of "putting others' place in one's own" instead of "putting one's own in others' place". In this case, "through contacting with ethnic cultures, the dominant culture could understand itself, obtain its own consciousness, and form a penetrating insight which is sensitive to the implied meaning of various cultural practices," (Wang, 2012) then complete the reflection on itself under the vision of "harmony without uniformity."

The ideal of symbiosis education contains an ardent expectation on cultural pattern of "diversity and unity". The practice of symbiosis education provides an effective way to inherit and to develop diverse cultures. Thus, the development of dominant culture can be influenced by prudential judgment of ethnic cultures permanently. As a conclusion, the ethnic culture not only obtains meaning and value in ethnic group, but gains recognition of status in cultural system.

## 3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM IN ETHNIC REGIONS: THE CONJUNCTION OF SYMBIOTIC VALUE OF EDUCATION

To form a symbiotic relationship is the aim of education in ethnic regions. Meanwhile, the concept of symbiosis implies many possible paths to realize this goal, which is the harmony multi-culture achieves in school. Therefore, ethnic culture is the inevitable choice to realize the aim of symbiotic education. The implementations of the system of three level curriculums (The nation's curriculum, the local curriculum and the school-based curriculum) provide a guarantee in education for the school-based curriculum. However, according to characteristics of distribution of our nationalities, which is that living together over vast areas while some living in individual concentrated communities in small areas, the local curriculum is endowed with a unified tendency. Therefore, only the school-based curriculum rooted in the national characteristics schools of the local specialty can boost the realization of the aim of conjunction of symbiotic value of education.

### 3.1 The Function of Cultivation of the "Ethnic People"

The cultivation of the "ethnic people" not only needs the acquisition of the mainstream culture and the internalization of values but also the succession of national characteristics. However, the obtainment of ethnic characteristics is an impossible goal based on national and local courses, which has to depend on the school-based curriculum rooted in the minority culture, humanity system and the natural scenery, especially under the national culture depreciated background. The original value and cultural consciousness, skills and behavior features influenced by families and customs have to depend on the school education, especially the school-based curriculum according to the national culture. In this way, "the school-based curriculum makes people accept some courses and learn them with their heart and soul in the natural system they have grown up" (Ye, 2002). This kind of growth is not only a universal growth, but also a growth of national people.

At the same time, school-based curriculum realizes the coexistence of mainstream culture and ethnic culture, offering a comparable independent and reflective room and promoting balanced development of their ability.

As long as the national culture is healthy and high-grade, they could provide students with opportunities to play various roles, undertake different obligations, and devote themselves to the informal cultural activities they are interested in. This can become a kind of exercise which is helpful to their intelligence, social activities and adaptability, dig out their own potentials from different perspectives and choose the direction of development and increase the confidence of development. (Ye, 1999)

### **3.2 The Function of Inheritance of Ethnic Culture of School-Based Curriculum**

China is a country with many nations and each nation has created specific splendid culture among their progression. But this unanimous format loses its foundation gradually and its value is inundated in the pursuit of interests. The minority area has become a byword for poverty. Accordingly, national culture is also regarded as obsolete object and is shelved and forgotten. The ignorance and invalidation of the traditional inheritance make national culture face an unparalleled crisis.

Schools, as the main camp of culture transmission, have to take the responsibilities while facing this kind of situation. The exploitation of school-based curriculum in minority area can make the disappeared, disappearing and current national culture dug out and protected. Meanwhile, the national culture enters system of curriculum with mainstream culture, making people treat the national culture more legally, digging out the unique value of national culture and changing the passive inheritance of national culture to make national people proud of their own culture and transmit national culture more positively. Furthermore, school-based curriculum can activate students' passion to investigate, explore and experience their native culture. During this process, their reflection and internalization will definitely inject vitality into the national culture. Therefore, the construction of school-based curriculum in minority areas make school education more various, rather than depending on the only way to know about and be familiar with their native culture and national culture, so that they could strengthen students' sense of identity and keep and maintain the root of traditional culture.

### **3.3 The Function of Reflection on the Mainstream Culture of School-Based Curriculum**

Entering the system of regular school curriculum in a form of school-based curriculum, national culture is endowed as an equal position of the mainstream culture. Having been affirmed and spread in the whole country, the mainstream culture and its value roots in the minority areas, expressing the whole society's attention towards the life in the minority areas. However, from the perspective of nation and national culture, a good wish may bring a subversive result. "A nation is made up of many different kinship clans, tribes, which influence and are influenced by each other and finally break down the kinship relations to form another community because of sharing the common geographical environment." (Ma, 2004) This is a long historical process, which also gestates unique national culture. There is a saying that "Existence is reasonable". The progression of history gives national culture a reasonable identity.

After putting the national culture into the curricula, two kinds of rationalities can meet each other equally and

the dialogue becomes possible. Meanwhile, the system of national culture and its stand can provide good reflections of the mainstream culture and its adherent. Take these things as examples: The viewpoint of emphasizing harmonious relationship between human beings and nature in national culture provides reflections for the realistic value of extorting and exploring without any control; the importance of morality and the valid way of education in national culture offers reference for the problem in the realistic society, including taking interests as the most important and slippery of the whole current atmosphere in the society. The ontology of culture in national culture can offer a fulcrum for the rational culture. In a word, putting the national culture into curricula cultivates various grounds of culture. The pattern of clashes, reflections and references between different cultures provides vitalities and corrects the right direction for different cultures.

## **4. DEVELOPMENTAL STRATEGIES OF SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM IN ETHNIC REGIONS: THE REALIZATION OF SYMBIOSIS EDUCATION**

From the viewpoint of ethnic culture, school-based curriculum is of great significance, but it is still faced with many difficulties, such as teachers' low-lying cultural quality, lack of skills for curriculum development, and the cracks between tradition and modernity which is hidden in people's minds. But the rethinking of cultural value is not measured by the minds from outside world. At the same time, to improve teachers' cultural quality always needs long-term efforts. So, faced with this situation, the writer believes that two things have to be done: one is emergency strategy, and the other is long-term planning.

### **4.1 Strengthening Cooperation and Developing by Surrounding Advantages**

The development of school-based curriculum is unfamiliar territory for many teachers in ethnic areas. But they have to participate in school-based curriculum development, because that is their part of responsibility. However, when it is asked to be completed independently, even if it could achieve the purpose, but they cannot realize the original intention of school-based curriculum development, because their low-lying cultural quality will reduce the level of school-based curriculum. Therefore, strengthening cooperation and development by surrounding advantages is valuable strategy.

Firstly, the curriculum developers should strengthen cooperation with universities and research institutes, especially those institutions which are engaged in educational research for minorities. The majority of college teachers have theoretical knowledge and practical abilities about curriculum development. Their excellent research capability enables them to draw out the meaning

and value of cultural ontology through deep description on cultural phenomena when they take part in ethnic education and culture research. To cooperate with these people not only enhances theoretical level of school-based curriculum, but also alters the existing phenomena of cultural debris accumulation in curriculum development. As a conclusion, this could enhance the cultural quality of school-based curriculum in ethnic areas. Secondly, the curriculum developers should strengthen cooperation with ethnic culture carriers. It is an indisputable fact that the influence of ethnic culture weakens gradually, but there are still many insightful people who not only have a thorough understanding of ethnic culture, but also make unremitting efforts to inherit it. Therefore, if they could cooperate with these ethnic culture carriers closely, the school-based curriculum developers will break through the disadvantage of freely organized curriculum content, offer logic and organized ethnic culture system in school-based curriculum.

#### **4.2 The Optimization of Teachers' Cultural Quality and Curriculum Development Skill**

The school-based curriculum of ethnic culture is not one-off construction, because the content of curriculum is open and progressive. In this case, curriculum developers must have higher cultural quality and better capability in order to respond to the new situation in the development. For the purpose of improving teachers' ability of school-based curriculum development in minority areas, first of all, they have to get involved in the process of school-based curriculum development, learn curriculum theory and practice strategy from experts. This practical learning is beneficial to enhance their capacity. Secondly, teachers' training about school-based curriculum development should be strengthened, allowing teachers to understand basic principles of curriculum intensively. In addition, teachers should also enhance their learning activity, and continually acquire knowledge. They will not only cultivate comprehensive, profound and systematic

understanding about ethnic culture, but also obtain a multicultural vision, and then they are able to handle the relationship between ethnic culture and alien culture properly. In this context, the value of ethnic culture can be fully confirmed.

In a word, the teachers' literacy determines cultural quality of school-based curriculum. And their comprehension of ethnic culture affects its application effect, eventually influences practical result of symbiotic education in the minority areas.

---

## **REFERENCES**

---

- Comenius, A. (1984). *Magna didactica* (p.105). Beijing, China: People's Education Press.
- Li, Y. (2005). *The outline of the symbiosis education* (p.122). Jinan, China: Shandong Normal University Press.
- Ma, S. W. (2004). The main stream and the differences: On the generality and individuality of the same nationality. *Journal of Yunnan Nationalities University: Social Sciences*, 21(5), 95-99.
- Qiu, G. J. (2010). Discrimination of symbiotic education. *Journal of Educational Development*, 28(8), 5-8.
- Sun, J. Y. (2010). On symbiosis education of nature and humanity. *Educational Research*, 31(12), 51-55.
- Sun, J. Y., & Li, Y. K. (2010). Symbiosis Education: The ideal choice under the condition of cultural imbalance. *Journal of Guangxi Normal University*, 46(12), 5-8.
- Wang, M. M. (2012). *What is anthropology* (pp.24-73). China: Peking University Press.
- Ye, L. (1999). *The exploratory research papers of new elementary education* (p.207). Shanghai, China: Sanlian Bookstore.
- Ye, L. (2002). *The cultural missions of reformation of Chinese elementary education* (p.224). Beijing, China: Education & Science Press.
- Zhang, S. Y. (2009). Symbiosis education theory: New approach on the education development in western rural areas. *Contemporary Education and Culture*, 1(1), 55-57.