Abstract

Educational reform over the past decade in Taiwan has created new curricular tasks and responsibilities for teachers. The decentralization of curriculum to a school-based development approach has created both new challenges for teachers and schools as well as new opportunities for teachers to grow and develop as professionals and for schools and communities to work together in the formation of curriculum that is deemed appropriate for students. Teacher education, likewise, has new responsibilities, since teachers previously have not needed to be prepared for the kinds of curricular responsibilities they now have. In the past, teacher education could focus on providing teachers with knowledge and skills that were relevant to the school curriculum that was in place. Now, teacher education is needed that helps teachers develop their capacities for developing curriculum. This article addresses the needs of teachers for guidance and support in their widened curricular responsibilities and the needs of teacher education to provide these in preparing teachers for their new roles.

Three perspectives of curriculum are discussed. These perspectives have histories of varying lengths in formal schooling and one or more of them are reflected in all countries with formal schooling systems. The perspectives represent values and assumptions underlying curriculum and ways of thinking about curriculum. Each perspective is discussed in terms of the ways of thinking and assumptions and values it reflects, roles of teachers and learners, ways of designing curriculum, and its consequences and implications. Examples of curriculum and curriculum design reflecting each perspective
are described. An understanding of the curriculum perspectives helps educators and those working with them to create curriculum to consider their own curricular perspectives, values, and priorities. Examining one’s own values and beliefs enables one to be clear about purposes for curriculum that is being developed and ways of designing it that are consistent with those purposes. The likely result from such processes is coherent curriculum that addresses consciously chosen purposes and goals.

The article focuses on use of the three perspectives by teachers and school curriculum committees in developing new curriculum and in evaluating already developed curriculum and curricular materials. It is suggested that one of the perspectives provides an overarching frame within which the other two can be used when appropriate. The perspectives’ usefulness in teacher education for helping current and prospective teachers fulfill their new roles as curriculum decision makers and designers is discussed. Conditions that facilitate and hinder adoption of new perspectives and practices are discussed in relation to this time of curriculum change in Taiwan. It is suggested that along with the challenges that the changes have brought, this is also a time of opportunity to consider new perspectives and possibilities.

**Keywords: curriculum, teacher education, education reform**
Alternative Curriculum Perspectives: Implications for Teachers' Curriculum Development in Taiwan

During the early 1990s, the Taiwanese government recognized many impending crises in its educational system. One of these was concern that many of Taiwan’s citizens had few opportunities to develop their abilities to adjust to a rapidly changing world. The higher education system served only an elite portion of the population and the university entrance examination system that had been used for decades resulted in excluding a large portion of young people from university study. The entrance examination system caused students and their families a great deal of stress, because they focused their lives almost exclusively on preparing for the examinations. There were many stories of students breaking down under the pressure (Pan & Yu, 1999; Vulliamy, 1998). As a result, Taiwanese people pleaded for new educational ideas and material that could both help them acclimate to a rapidly changing world and upgrade Taiwan Island’s ability to compete in the world economy by enhancing the capacities of Taiwanese people. Educational reform was seen as an avenue for helping Taiwan, a small island, survive and maintain its existence in the world. Major changes for the entire education system were planned during a series of educational reform meetings (Government Information Office, 2004a). In order to hasten implementing the reforms, the Taiwanese Ministry of Education and other education authorities coordinated initiatives to revise existing laws and enact new laws (Yang, 2001).

In one of the most significant changes, the national curriculum was decentralized across all levels of schools, which shifted responsibility for developing appropriate curricula from a group of government-identified experts to schools and teachers (Law, 2002; Lee, 2001). Previously, the Taiwanese national curriculum had been dictated by the
Ministry of Education, designed by a group of experts, and assigned to school teachers to implement. Schools were provided with curricula, and teachers were told what subjects to teach and how to teach those subjects (Government Information Office, 2004b; Tsai, 2002).

Today, Taiwan no longer uses a national curriculum or mandated textbooks. The new curricula changed the previous separately taught subjects in elementary and junior high schools to a so-called “Grade 1-9 Curriculum”¹ (九年一貫課程) in 2001. The “Grade 1-9 Curriculum” links subjects with each other in function and integrates subjects (from grade 1 to grade 9) into seven fields: (1) Language Arts, (2) Health and Physical Education, (3) Social Sciences, (4) Arts and Humanities, (5) Science and Technology, (6) Mathematics, and (7) Integrative Activities (Huang, 2001; Li, 2005; Ministry of Education, 1999, 2004; Yang, 2001). These seven fields represent the extent of curriculum prescription by the Ministry of Education. Responsibility for specific curriculum planning has been given to schools and is identified as “school-based curriculum development.”

With “school-based curriculum development” as a principle, many schools have started to form Curriculum Development Education Committees, composed of teachers, parents, principals, other administrators, curriculum development experts, and other community members to determine what should be included in the curriculum (Chen & Chung, 2000). For example, San-He Junior High School has formed a Curriculum Development Committee. Taipei county schools are collaborating with each other through a group known as the Alliance of Curriculum Development Committee.

These changes have created two important issues for teachers. First, teachers are no longer simply “executors” who follow established textbooks without having to think about what they should teach. Second, the laws have empowered teachers to design their curricula to be more student and community centered, and more connected with students’ real lives. The new laws also changed the image of teaching jobs. Teaching in school is no longer viewed as a simple job where teachers can teach from the same required textbook repeatedly. Left with only a curriculum guideline, developing appropriate curricula has become a burden for teachers. Teachers have felt that there were too many changes and too many new responsibilities that make their work difficult. Many teachers have rushed to take more in-service training and have tried to design more “activities” for their new “Grade 1-9 Curriculum” (九年一貫課程). Most teachers, however, still have problems with the rapid change they have experienced and are confused about the new term, “Grade 1-9 Curriculum” (九年一貫課程). Examples of their reactions include: “I don’t know what it really is,” I don’t know how to do it,” and “I often feel lost” (Chen & Chung, 2000; Tsai, 2003). The teachers’ retirement rate has risen since the reform started (Hwang, 2004) mainly because planning for the reform was not completely developed before changes began to be implemented and teachers were not well-prepared for the
changes (Chou, 2004; Hwang, 2003; Yang, 2002).

Although in-service teachers are trying to perform their new roles as curriculum designers, they need conceptual frames for selecting and developing curricula. In an effort to provide support for teachers’ curriculum development activities, this article will describe three alternative curriculum perspectives and discuss the basic values and assumptions that underscore each perspective. The three perspectives can also be used to examine and evaluate already existing curriculum. The perspectives are also relevant to all educational levels, but in this article, discussion will focus on elementary and secondary education settings.

Three Alternative Curriculum Perspectives

Every curriculum design is related to certain social interests and values (Apple, 1980; Barker, 2002). In the process of curriculum development, the designer should be aware of which curriculum serves whose interests, and what values underlie the curriculum so that the curriculum that is developed appropriately fits its intended purposes.

The three alternative curriculum perspectives described here connote different values and different educational purposes: preservation, improvement, and attunement. Gaining an understanding of the perspectives will help teachers reflect on their own beliefs that relate to the curriculum they plan to develop. The three curriculum perspectives were formulated by the first author based on curriculum history in the United States, and ideas that reflect historical developments in many nations. The perspectives reflect deep-lying motivations underlying educational practice. Educational philosophies, knowledge paradigms, and modes of inquiry that may be already familiar to readers have fueled their development. Some of these will be pointed out in the discussion that follows. What is unique about these three perspectives, however, is their clear focus on deep motivations underlying the actions of educators.

Awareness of these three perspectives enables educators to be more conscious of how their own perspectives influence their teaching and learning and provides lenses for critically evaluating curriculum designs they and others develop. Our purpose in presenting these three perspectives is not to recommend one perspective versus another. Rather, our intent is to raise awareness that all three perspectives contribute significantly to teaching and learning processes, that each perspective is well suited to certain kinds of educational purposes, and that it is important for educators to thoughtfully determine the perspective(s) appropriate to their educational purposes. The argument is made that one of the perspectives can encompass the other two, which gives it much potential as an
overarching curricular frame in which all three perspectives can be used. Each curriculum perspective is discussed in the following sections in terms of its (a) basic orientation and underlying values (central focus and priorities), (b) some examples (examples are noted early in the discussion of each perspective to orient the reader; other examples are provided throughout discussion of the other dimensions), (c) assumptions about the world and humans (beliefs about the nature of the world, how the world works, the nature of human beings and how they should live and work together), (d) human goals (what human beings are seen as striving for), (e) roles of educators and learners (what are seen as appropriate roles for educators and for learners), (f) curriculum design (processes and concepts related to curriculum development and design), and (g) consequences and implications (where this perspective leads, what results from its use). These dimensions highlight differences among the three curriculum perspectives. The dimensions are relevant to curricular analysis and comparison and are reflected in educational philosophy and curriculum literature (Frankena, 1974; Schwartz, Wilkosz, DeBoe, Grote, & Torgerson, 1986).

The Preservation Perspective. The Preservation Perspective has existed over centuries of human teaching and learning. It is reflected in both formal education and in the informal education that occurs in community settings in any society.

Basic orientation and underlying values. The Preservation Perspective seeks to preserve the heritage and traditions of a people, a country, a group, or a family. The main orientation of the Preservation Perspective is to transmit from one generation to another traditional values and customs perceived as valuable.

Some examples. Throughout human history, people have used the Preservation Perspective to educate their young, at home, in communities, and eventually, in schools. Today, preservation-oriented teaching and learning goes on in these same contexts.

“Traditional” and “classical” education are terms that are often used to refer to preservation-oriented teaching and learning in formal schooling. They typically mean education that emphasizes literature deemed great and subjects that cultural leaders view as essential for students if the current order is to be preserved.

Taiwanese society has used this perspective to educate new generations. In 1966, Taiwan’s ruling KMTKuo Min Tang(KMT, 中國國民黨) government promoted a Cultural Renaissance Movement” by changing the textbooks to “preserve” Confucianism. Since that time, Taiwan has peacefully redefined the government, resulting in the Democratic Progressive Party’s [DPP] winning the presidency with the election in 2000. In 2001 Taiwan began using the Preservation Perspective in teaching the “Taiwanese language,” “Hakka language,” or other indigenous language in formal classroom settings in order to preserve the Taiwanese people’s own identity and to preserve the traditional language and the indigenous identity of most Taiwanese (Law, 2002). The Commissioner
of the Department of Education in Taipei City, Dr. Wu, declared that one purpose of Taipei’s educational system was to be sure that children have a sense of national identity. Thus, schools become an important place for students to learn this “sense of national identity” (Wu, 2004, p.1).

A Chinese example of preservation-oriented education in the community is reflected in the traditional disciplined method of training young children for the Chinese Opera. The children were required to stay with the Master Protagonist. They lived and worked closely with their Master, who narrated the plays whenever he had time to speak with them. The children had a chance to closely observe their master teacher in performances, in groups with other people, and in managing daily life. The result of this process was that the young disciples learned everything through living and working together under the Master’s guidance. They learned not only the skills necessary to perform Chinese Opera, but also the values inherent in each play and other cultural values. This method of delivering and maintaining the heritage of the Chinese Opera is a form of traditional education.

This perspective is also evident outside of school when older adults share their own cultural perspectives with children, and when children learn by listening, and by watching adults’ activities and participating in them (Rogoff, 1990; Suina & Smolkin, 1994). For example, in Africa, some tribes live by herding. The knowledge of keeping herds safe is not usually recorded in books; rather, it is passed on through experiences in which parents instruct their children (Saitoti, 1986).

Assumptions about the world and humans. An assumption underlying the Preservation Perspective is that the world is stable, unchanging, and cyclic. Elders are viewed as possessing the necessary knowledge of the “correct” way to live because they have lived a long time, have experienced many things, and have survived. It is assumed that younger generations should become like older generations in their ways of thinking, living, and educating their offspring (Suina & Smolkin, 1994).

Human goals. The goals reflected in the Preservation Perspective focus on survival of a people and their heritage, culture, traditions, and values. Humans try to survive in their environment and to pass on their skills and knowledge for survival in their specific contexts. Passing on the way of life that has worked for a group over time is seen as critical to the survival of future generations. While this may include teaching such things as hunting, food processing, and weaving material for clothing in order to keep warm, it might also include teaching children how to behave in ways that are deemed appropriate for one’s family background. For example, upper class families may teach their children to recognize who the family deems to be appropriate associates and who are not. Such families often teach “proper” social behavior for their social class, and economic, social, and political strategies that contribute to maintaining the family’s
fortune and status. Immigrant families and communities might seek to teach their children to prepare traditional foods and to carry out traditional customs from their countries of origin in an attempt to preserve their cultural heritage. Schools often teach children what is culturally viewed as proper behavior for greeting others, to sing traditional songs, and to read what is considered to be the culture’s great literature. Most countries, states and provinces require that schools teach their history in order to preserve in their citizens an understanding of and appreciation for the roots, ideas, and significant historical figures that are central to their political and social identity and values.

Role of educators and learners. Adults are responsible for passing their knowledge on to children and for maintaining traditional values that are viewed as important to preserve. Elders who have developed abilities and knowledge pass on those abilities and that knowledge, along with underlying values, by correcting children’s wrong behavior, and encouraging and demonstrating correct behavior. The child in this perspective is a participant—sometimes in an apprenticeship role—who learns values through mimicry and by participating in rituals and other adult activities. In teaching and learning situations, the social structure places members of the older generation in a position of authority; respect is due them by children, who are expected to adopt appropriate behavior.

Educators’ and learners’ roles are quite distinct. Usually, educators are elders who have the authority to educate children. They take responsibility for teaching children what needs to be learned in order for the group and its ways to survive. The learners, usually children and youth, follow their elders’ guidance and learn what they are taught. The learners are recipients of others’ knowledge; their responsibilities are to learn what their teachers want them to learn. As long as the learners follow their leaders and teachers, they will learn what is perceived as the way they should live their lives.

Curriculum design. Important questions to ask when designing curriculum from the Preservation Perspective are: “Whose values should be kept?” and “Who decides the most valuable aspects of this culture to be kept?” With the newly accepted “school-based curriculum development” approach in Taiwan, the answers to these questions can vary from one school, community, or county to another. For example, schools in aboriginal villages in the central mountain areas of the country might emphasize their own language and their own ancestors’ arts, while schools in Tainan City in southwestern Taiwan might emphasize how historical buildings and stories about those historical buildings should be maintained. In determining what should be included in the curriculum, elders in the villages would be consulted and their advice would be given high priority.

Curriculum designed from a Preservation Perspective might include a theme such as “family history,” in which teachers might ask students to interview their elders about such things as the day when their great-grandfather first settled in the village. They might also
ask students to report about activities they participate in with their parents or elders, such as worshiping on ancestors’ birthdays or holding family meetings.

**Consequences and implications.** Traditional values and culture passed on by elders may, indeed, preserve a heritage that is seen as highly valued and intrinsic to a group’s identity and future. Other possible consequences, however, are that unexamined ideologies are passed on to future generations without justification and, in many cases, without adequate explanation. Customs and practices that have outlived their usefulness or reasons for existing may be perpetuated simply because “we’ve always done it this way.” Furthermore, societal structures are reproduced and with them the societal roles that individuals and groups have been assigned. This produces order, but some individuals and groups may feel stifled and oppressed. Moreover, if the society faces rapid change, the old ways of living may no longer be functional and survival knowledge that has stood the test of time for many years may no longer be useful. The need to develop new ways of doing things is unlikely to be addressed if traditional ways and means are the overriding concern. Ultimately if the society is unable to bring itself to make changes in the face of a changed environment, it may not survive.

**The Improvement Perspective.** The Improvement Perspective has emerged more recently and is based on the scientific and technological movements in recent centuries in various parts of the world. It has been increasingly reflected in Taiwanese schools over recent decades and in schools in some parts of the world for much of the past century. The historical period in which the ideas and ways of life developed that have fueled the Improvement Perspective is the “modern age,” the period of scientific and industrial development in the West. The technical knowledge and ways of thinking that produced the Industrial Revolution in the West in the 19th century have spread throughout the world. “Modernism” emphasized science as the means by which rational, technical solutions could be formulated for well-defined, mean-ends problems. Eventually the rational scientific approach came to be seen as relevant to social and cultural needs and problems as well. Not surprisingly, education came to be seen as benefiting from this technical approach, as being able to be more effective and powerful in improving student learning and performance when science was applied to educational problems.

**Basic orientation and underlying values.** The Improvement Perspective emphasizes going beyond the existing condition or state to a better condition or state. Ideas about prediction and control that have their roots in physical science are applied to teaching and learning. The central value is to improve, to be better, higher, and greater, and science is perceived as the avenue through which such “progress” can be made. Curriculum that reflects this perspective is intended to lead people to a “better life,” one that is more efficient and that better meets prescribed standards.

**Some examples.** Many examples of this perspective are apparent in school settings.
in many countries, including Taiwan. For example, in health education classes, before students become teenagers, teachers might provide information about puberty to help students understand their bodily changes during that period in order to prevent, or at least minimize students’ anxiety, fear, and frustration when the changes occur. Scientific knowledge about the human body enables such teaching. It is expected that students’ behavior when puberty occurs will be “better” than it would be if students did not have this knowledge about their bodies, that health classes will successfully prevent uncontrolled emotion and other behaviors viewed as a problem. Another example of improvement-oriented curriculum is remediation. Extra hours of remedial teaching are given by some schools to poorly performing students to help them catch up with the class standard or even to raise the school’s record of academic performance. This extra-hours curriculum is improvement-oriented in that it typically seeks to improve these students’ skills and knowledge to a level that meets grade-level norms.

Other examples of improvement-driven education are the private weekend school or after-school classes in such disciplines such as English language, math, and science, as well as in dancing, drawing, strength-building, swimming, and early childhood reading. Parents enroll their children in these classes to enhance their children’s capacities to meet a standard that will give admission a high prestige college or university.

Assumptions about the world and humans. From a historical and philosophical viewpoint, the Improvement Perspective is based on an “instrumental/technical” world view, which assumes that there is a single reality in life that is independent of human uniqueness. It is believed that laws of human behavior can be discovered through scientific research and that by controlling and predicting human behavior and environments, human needs can be satisfied and human beings themselves improved (Braybrook, 1987; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Morgaine, 1992). The Improvement Perspective also assumes that humans and the world are modifiable and can be changed by human efforts. Knowledge is understood to have an instrumental function, to be a body of facts that can be discovered and applied to all human beings. It is assumed that knowledge can be acquired and accumulated and that “possessing” it will lead to action (Morgaine, 1992). When human beings encounter problems, the problems are seen as being able to be fixed by applying knowledge and developing skills in ways that will lead to a new, improved result (Humble & Morgaine, 2002). Knowledge produced by scientific research is seen as supporting the development of educational interventions that can be used to help people achieve a better life.

Human goals. This perspective reflects human beings’ needs to grow and develop beyond their current state and condition, to strive for a better life for themselves than the one they currently have. A “better life” and improved human beings are goals that have multiple aspects, including adding missing capacities, relieving or deterring suffering,
and achieving greater human potential. In Western societies, where this perspective has predominated throughout the industrial age, these human goals have came to be interpreted as “progress.” This idea of progress is reflected in Taiwan Island’s efforts to become a “Technological Island,” to upgrade its economic competitiveness internationally, and to lead its people to a better life.

Roles of educators and learners. This perspective identifies professional people who have studied the accumulated knowledge and research in an area of practice as qualified to teach others what needs to be known in order to improve. Professionals are viewed as experts who have knowledge needed by those who need improvement. Educators are viewed as people who know “more” and “better,” and who are able to guide learners to be better, more skillful, more competent people. Learners are viewed as people who lack the knowledge and skill they need to improve. Therefore, learners are expected to follow the teachings of experts in order to fix their problems and achieve a more satisfactory life.

Curriculum design. Prevention is one of the central approaches of improvement Perspective curriculum. People are helped to confront their needs and take action before a problem occurs. If a problem has already occurred, however, Improvement Perspective curriculum aims at helping people cope with that problem in order to minimize its negative effects. If people have already been substantially affected by a problem, Improvement-oriented curriculum is designed to remediate or “fix” the person, family, or group. In preventing, minimizing, and fixing problems, a target group who is perceived to be at risk for developing a problem or who already has the problem is identified and curriculum is developed that includes an intervention or treatment to address the problem. Scientific research is the basis for knowing how to design the kind of intervention or treatment that is likely to be successful. Specific goals and objectives are formulated in the curriculum so that it can be determined if they have been reached if desired change has been achieved. Measurements are typically taken along the way (especially before and after the intervention or treatment is applied) to determine if the curriculum was successful. In Taiwan, many curricula favor this approach because it appears easy to see the “outcome.” Within an improvement-oriented perspective, even people who are viewed as not at risk for having problems are encouraged to improve beyond their current state or situation. Such people are offered enrichment programs.

An example of a prevention-focused improvement-oriented intervention was used a few years ago by an organization in Taiwan that targeted groups of teens who were seen as at risk for becoming delinquent. Schools often referred these teens to a special summer camp that dealt with their misbehavior and “treated” teens’ misbehavior by giving them an opportunity to live with a group and learn behavior appropriate to group life. After the summer camp, the counselors were asked to keep track of these teens by visiting their
families and schools and recording the teens’ behavior changes to see whether the goal of preventing delinquent behavior was reached. Another example of prevention-focused improvement oriented curriculum is the efforts of schools to be sure that students have opportunities as part of their schooling to develop computer skills and other technological skills. This measure is seen as enhancing students’ futures and preventing students from being shut out of jobs and learning opportunities that are anticipated to increasingly require technological capabilities. Basic computer skills are introduced in primary schools before students face any real need to use a computer. Many efforts of schools reflect this prevention approach stemming from the Improvement Perspective.

Extending the computer and technological skills example beyond prevention, those persons who are already employed and whose work is affected by the advanced computer age are offered special classes for learning new computer programs in order to minimize the gap between their current skills and new requirements of their jobs. It is expected that workers will then be able to meet the new job requirements. A remediation-oriented improvement example is reflected in the encouragement given to generations of people who did not grow up in the computer era to remediate their lack of computer skills by learning some computer functions. These individuals are usually taught basic computer skills. Some community-based learning centers may offer computer classes for these individuals and others who have special problems and need extra help in using the computer.

Another example of improvement-oriented curriculum design concerns the teaching of English to Taiwanese children. Taiwan wants to address the problem of students who lack English communication skills. Therefore, the Department of Education has added new English classes in primary schools, since research has shown that one of the best ways to learn a new language is to use it in everyday life and use it as the medium of instruction (Geneses, 1994; Krashen, 1981; Taylor, 1983). Application of this research might include adding phrases used in daily life into the English language curriculum for beginning learners. Integrating English into an elementary school Life Course through theme-based vocabulary has been suggested (Chien, 2003). In this approach, phrases or sentences would be introduced in connection with a theme (e.g., theme: “family helper;” phrases: “washing dishes,” “cleaning up,” “sweeping the floor”). In addition, Chien suggests that English songs, games, and picture books could be used in Life Course classes. If in their everyday life students successfully use the introduced phrases and incorporate the vocabulary they learned through the songs, games, and books, then it can be said that they have gained language skills. This example illustrates the problem and target group identification, research-based intervention or treatment, and outcomes focus that are typical in improvement-oriented curriculum.

Consequences and implications. The Improvement Perspective may, indeed,
lead people to have a living standard that might represent a better life. However, what is considered to be the standard of a “good life” by many may not fit everyone. In addition, because this approach often treats symptoms rather than addressing root causes, improvements may be temporary. Students may become dependent on experts to guide them and make decisions for them. As a result, students may not learn to initiate changes that reflect their own interests or how to sustain initial changes over the long term.

In addition, significant problems are often more complex than at first assumed. Unrecognized factors are often involved, and because they are not taken into account, new problems often are created by solutions that were originally intended to resolve recognized problems. For example, trying to prevent teenagers from smoking illustrates the complexity of the real world. Research has shown that smoking increases the risk of cancer, so schools give students information to help them avoid smoking. In particular, students who are assumed not yet smoke are given a great deal of information as a preventive measure. In addition, the school may provide intervention sessions designed to help students who already smoke change their behavior and quit smoking to attain “better health.” However, some teens in these two groups begin to smoke and continue to smoke, not because they lack health information, but for other reasons such as peer pressure, media influence, their parents’ smoking habits, or the addictive nature of nicotine. Giving information and providing other interventions often fail to prevent or change students’ smoking behavior.

The Attunement Perspective. The Attunement Perspective is considered to be a more recent curriculum perspective, although examples of it can be found in prior centuries but not typically in schools. It has received considerable attention in the latter half of the twentieth century, but is still not widely reflected in school curriculum. Interest in it has been fueled by post modern thought (Ellsworth, 1989), critical science (Habermas, 1971, 1973), and by disillusionment with the capacity of the other two curricular perspectives to generate curriculum that is seen by learners as truly relevant to their lives.

Basic orientation and underlying values. The Attunement Perspective is oriented to “attuning” or “harmonizing” discrepancies, to bringing things into better alignment so that all people have opportunities to be acknowledged, recognized, and listened to. This perspective grew out of a reaction to the other two perspectives, which hold individuals and groups to an externally determined way of being. The Preservation Perspective holds traditional values and heritage as the ideal for individuals and groups to follow. When educational practitioners work from the Preservation Perspective, they are trying to help learners conform to valued ideals and ways of being that are prescribed by long standing traditions, norms, and customs. Educators working from the Preservation Perspective are trying to maintain and continue what has always been. The Improvement Perspective
uses scientifically derived premises to control human beings in much the same way as these are used to control the physical and biological world. Educators working from the Improvement Perspective are trying to change tradition, to continually improve learners in ways prescribed by scientific experts. Neither of these two perspectives considers human beings as having widely varying goals, intentions, and meanings for their experiences. In contrast, educators working from the Attunement Perspective are trying to understand learners’ perspectives, situations, and goals, and to assist them in bringing their situations and their goals into alignment. Such educators seek to help learners understand their situations, evaluate their interests and goals, consider the interests and goals of others, critique their contexts, and bring all into alignment so that not only the culture’s and the society’s interests, or those of only certain groups, predominate.

The Attunement Perspective encompasses problems that have their roots in the social, political, and economic structure of society. A basic idea underlying the Attunement Perspective is that the individual does not exist in a socio-cultural vacuum—that the individual is influenced by the larger society and culture (Brown, 1985; Walker, Martin, & Thompson, 1998). Education should not just “fix” individuals to fit into an existing cultural frame, but the cultural frame itself should be examined and changed.

Some examples. As mentioned earlier, the Attunement Perspective is not widely reflected in school curriculum. It is more prominent in other educational contexts, although some school-based efforts are mentioned below. Freire’s well known work in community settings is consistent with the Attunement Perspective. Freire pointed out that many people in educational settings see themselves as passive recipients (Freire, 1970/1992). He suggested instead that people are the makers of culture; they should be able to make their own decisions in their lives. Freire successfully helped illiterate Brazilians learn to read. Through discussing basic problems they experienced, Freire helped people who were poor, oppressed and exploited see their situations in a new light (Freire, 1970/1992). Attunement in this example is reflected in people developing more accurate understanding of their situations and in their action to change conditions in their contexts to be better aligned with their interests.

Similarly, in Scotland, Kirkwood and Kirkwood (1989) adapted Freire’s model within community education designed to help people see their social status more clearly and understand the complexity of social realities. These educators then helped community members decide what they wanted to do for their community and what actions were necessary to achieve their desired goals.

A curriculum project in Family and Consumer Sciences is an example of Attunement Perspective curriculum for public schools in the United States. This curriculum helps students think about ways in which their culture provided numerous messages about food that influenced the ways they and their families viewed, prepared, and consumed food,
and the implications of these influences for their health (Staaland & Strom, 1996).

Assumptions about the world and humans. The Attunement Perspective assumes that society is created by human beings and consequently can be changed by human beings (Hultgren, 1989; Humble & Morgaine, 2002). People interpret their world according to meanings, intentions, and interests based on their own experiences and use their own will to decide their desired ends and preferred actions. Therefore, many human actions cannot be predicted or controlled, and it is not ethical to try to predict or control other people. Because multiple life realities exist, there is no one way of living for everyone and no one solution for a problem (Morgaine, 1992). It is assumed that people have the ability to educate themselves and to decide their own desirable futures.

Human goals. Understanding is a primary goal of human beings that is reflected in the Attunement Perspective. Being heard and understood, understanding others and their situations, and becoming more self-aware and aware of one’s own situation and circumstances in society are all central in this perspective. Being accepted and valued as a person is a human goal reflected in this perspective. Reciprocity and mutuality among persons are other goals reflected in the Attunement Perspective. These are reflected in yet another goal—that of balancing interests and needs of persons with those of the group and the society. Therefore, students’ interests are seen as having equal worth with the interests of other groups, such as teachers, community members, and parents. A closely related goal is emancipation from domination and oppressive forces within oneself and in the external world (Freier, 1970/1992).

Roles of educators and learners. In the Attunement Perspective, educators and learners have both roles—each is both a teacher and a learner. Educators and learners are in a more equal situation compared to the other two perspectives; they are co-responsible for their teaching and learning. The role of the educator is a facilitator who is a partner with the learners, a fellow learner. The educator helps students consider their circumstances and status in society and how these relate to students’ social and cultural context and historical background. The educator encourages students to acknowledge that they can think deeply and, through their thinking, make their own decisions. As students come to understand their situations, a new perception of reality emerges, and they begin to see that they have choices and can act on their own behalf (Freire, 1970/1992). They see what their real problems are, and seek and choose possible ways to change their lives. Students are not seen as passive persons to be taught what they “need to” learn, but are instead viewed as able to act on their own behalf, as able to take responsibility for what they want to learn and for making decisions and assessing the consequences of their decisions for themselves and others.

In this kind of learning process, learners may find that the same problems occur in their lives repeatedly and seem to have no permanent solution. In this situation, going
back to the problem itself and examining their own thoughts regarding it helps learners to see their difficulty and formulate more adequate actions. As Brown (1978) said, some problems in the family arise from unique situations created by the values, beliefs, context, and morals of each individual within the family. Knippel’s (1998) experience is an example of learners gaining a new perception of reality. Knippel (1998) described her family’s search for a way to reduce their frustration in trying to keep a tidy household. They thought that it was highly important to maintain a tidy household despite the reality that being a working couple with children left little time for cleaning as a priority in the everyday schedule. After being unsatisfied for a long time with their limited time available for housecleaning, she and her family examined their own thoughts about their untidy household situation. Through their efforts to examine their own values in the context of their household problem, a new outlook emerged for satisfying their family life situation. Instead of seeing a messy house problem, they instead saw themselves as a family with many interests and activities whose house reflected those interests and activities. They realized that their concerns about having a tidy house were related to others’ approval rather than to their own values and interests. This example reflects that resolving a dilemma may involve clarifying what is important to the person for living a satisfying life. Learners may come to realize that people may not need to pursue other people’s standards or to agree with each other, but they do need to know what thoughts or values trigger their problems.

If the smoking behavior example discussed in the previous section were approached from an Attunement Perspective, the educator would help students seek to understand their smoking behavior and the reasons underlying that behavior. This process gives the educator an opportunity learn how students see their situations and to then find ways to work with students to address the students’ interests and goals.

Curriculum design. Curriculum design in the Attunement Perspective is a process that teachers and learners participate in together. Consequently, curriculum design is not a process of completely planning ahead of time what learners will learn and do and then implementing this plan in the classroom. Curriculum design involves thinking together with learners about their situations, working with learners to identify what areas of learning need to be addressed, and then planning with learners what actions will lead to the desired learning and who will take responsibility for the tasks involved. These areas of learning may include learning about the origins of long standing traditions and developing technical skills needed to accomplish some goal or purpose. Thus, Attunement Perspective curriculum can encompass curriculum components that reflect the other two perspectives, but when it does so, it is clear to learners why these components are present and how this learning is linked to their own interests. Attunement-oriented curriculum documents that are prepared ahead of time typically emphasize questions that will help learners think...
deeply about their lives, society, and culture and include materials that stimulate learners’ own questions and reflection on their lives and circumstances (e.g., Staaland & Strom, 1996; Wallerstein, 1987).

Taiwan is currently advancing “school-based curriculum development,” which entails a curriculum development committee composed of teachers, parents, and community members meeting to determine what the school curriculum should include. Although this kind of joint decision making is valuable in implementing all three curriculum alternatives, it is especially conducive to use of the Attunement Perspective. In designing curriculum from the Attunement Perspective, a group identifies problems they face and for which they are willing to create action to bring about change and what learning is needed to better understand the problems and develop action-related skills and understandings. This collaborative process of curriculum development can be enacted by the school curriculum committee or by teachers working with their students, or both. It is ideal if the process can be enacted at both of these levels.

An example of using the Attunement Perspective for curriculum development across both levels and that illustrates the connectedness of Attunement Perspective curriculum with learners’ real lives, concerns a problem that everyone in both groups understands—the lack of places for children to be active on weekends or after school. The school curriculum committee knows that their community parks are often occupied by many people who use the public park as private space; e.g., peddlers use the park to sell their wares, homeless people use park benches for sleeping, and some families use trees and park equipment to create a clothesline to dry their clothes. The curriculum development committee may think that this situation provides a good opportunity to connect the curriculum with students’ real lives and to invite community members to participate with the school in addressing this issue. Curriculum focused on this issue could help students learn the nature of complex community problems and processes through which they might be addressed.

Once the school curriculum committee has identified a problem or issue such as this, curriculum plans might be developed for engaging students in understanding the problem and its complexities, and what meanings it has for them and for the others affected by it. For example, students might conduct interviews with the various groups involved and learn that the reason peddlers are using the park to sell their wares even though there is a city regulation forbidding it is because the park is the place where they have customers. Students may learn that if the community clamps down on the peddlers in the park without taking any other action to help them find a location where they are allowed to sell their wares, the peddlers may not be able to support their families. Students may also learn that even though policemen prohibit peddlers from selling their wares in certain places, some of them will still intrude on the restricted area because the fine they pay for
being caught using public places is less than what they can earn from peddling. Based on their learning about these complexities, students may determine that the solution to peddlers appropriating the park space for the purpose of selling their wares may need to include helping the peddlers find a place for their sales activities that will be legal and will not interfere with the intended use of public park space.

Homeless people have the right to use the public space as well as other people. However, sometimes they place their possessions on public benches and may disturb or scare playing children. Thus, homeless people are another group that affects the playground environment. In investigating this aspect of the park issue, students may learn that homeless people have no other places to go. Students may decide to inform the city of what they have learned and petition the city to consider providing shelters for homeless people to stay in or develop other plans to solve their difficulties.

In investigating the aspect of the park issue that concerns families who dry their clothes on the park’s equipment or trees, students may learn about their culture. The Chinese principle of having a harmonious relationship with neighbors requires that one not be rude and point out one’s neighbors’ mistakes. Students may come to realize that whatever action is taken regarding these families, allowing them to save face--so important in getting along with others--will need to be part of the solution. Students might also work with community members to address some issues that are easier to cope with, such as garbage in the community park. In the process, community members may decide to hire a person to clean up the garbage more often, or they may ask for volunteers to check the environment every day.

In addition to the skills (e.g., communication skills, problem analysis skills, solution formulation skills, capacities for working with others, information search skills) and understandings (policy development processes, Chinese culture, implications of economics for peoples lives and societal status) students will learn in their work with the park issue, students will also gain insight into approaching complex problems. In seeing that this situation and others like it are not simply a matter of “correcting some people’s mistakes” or “making people stop unpopular behaviors,” students will learn to avoid simplistic and naïve solutions. Students will learn what it means to consider the perspectives of all those affected, not just the perspective of those who want to reclaim the community park for children.

Other problems that students may work with might be centered in the classroom rather than the community outside the school. For example, a class may feel that their reading materials are limited. In a class meeting, the teacher might engage students in thinking about ways to address their desire to get more reading material into the classroom. They may develop an idea that creating a “classroom library” will provide more immediate access to reading material. Students will then need to decide how they
can establish their classroom library, including finding and acquiring books, making classroom library rules, and so forth. The class members would also need to consider ways to achieve their ideas. In this process, a student may propose that each student donate a few books to the classroom library. The meeting facilitator (a student or the teacher) may then help the group to critically evaluate this proposal and see the reality that some families may not have the ability to donate books or that relying on donated books may not be the best way to get books that are useful for their classroom. In the process of working on the classroom library issue, students would learn about planning processes, resource development, existing resources in their communities, literature, working as a team to accomplish their goals, and they could develop their communication and problem solving skills.

Consequences and implications. This way of designing curriculum is challenging for educators to implement because it is time consuming and some of the most significant outcomes are sometimes difficult to see in the short term. In addition, teacher training has prepared teachers to direct learning, provide information, be a source of knowledge, and to be the decision maker in the classroom, not to assume roles as partners with students in the learning process. Consequently, teachers may feel uncomfortable taking roles that are unfamiliar to them and guiding learning processes for which they have not been prepared.

Approaches for creating attunement-oriented curriculum exist (Fedje, 1998; Sirotnik, 1991; Wallerstein, 1987), but because these are not formulaic processes, some teachers will be challenged by not having the security of following a step-by-step process. Furthermore, there is not likely to be only one “result” or “end” that is the achievement that has been accomplished. There will be many ends, achievements, and accomplishments, and different students will accomplish different things. Some of the achievements will be changes in the community.

Curriculum design from an Attunement Perspective provides a “space” for students to take the initiative to participate in both community and classroom settings. By participating in multiple settings, students’ views are widened and multiple avenues of learning are created. When educators, students, parents, and community members form “action teams” to discuss and share the action they need to take, school-community relationships are strengthened.

The process orientation reflected in this perspective helps participants see things in different ways and reflect on how their own thoughts influence their actions. Understanding situations and taking rational and justified action is likely to help people reach a more satisfying life. For example, in Taiwan, a very high portion of population has an undergraduate degree. Therefore, some people worry about being noticed in the job market and seek to get into graduate schools without thinking of other possible alternatives. Having a Master’s degree has become a necessity in many careers. Students
who do not choose to pursue a higher degree may be seen as lacking ambition. A person who follows popular culture and doesn’t ask what really matters to them personally may feel forced to study a particular area and feel negatively about that decision throughout their life. An educator who takes the Attunement Perspective may help such a student see what is important for him or her, what values are included in this situation, and what alternatives might be explored or created. Students may come to realize that their dream job does not require an advanced degree, or that getting a university education is not what they really want to do, or they may understand the value society places on the “degree” that people have and decide to get into a graduate school. Thus, consequences may be different, depending on the student’s own viewpoint. Experiencing the Attunement Perspective may help people live in a more sensitive way, one in which they pursue understanding and reflect on their thoughts. The process used in this perspective challenges people to think and to act so that the results of their efforts will fit their desired ends.

Finally, it is likely that life will be dynamic and continually changing. Problems resolved at one point in time are likely to need to be re-examined at a later time as contextual and personal changes occur. Consequently, the need for reexamining one’s interpretations of one’s situation is likely to be ongoing.

Discussion

In the previous sections, three curriculum perspectives have been discussed along several dimensions. Examples of curriculum reflecting each perspective have been provided and consequences and implications of each have been outlined. In this final section, uses of the curriculum perspectives by teachers and school curriculum committees and by teacher educators are discussed. Conditions that facilitate and hinder adoption of new practices and perspectives are discussed in terms of this particular time of educational change in Taiwan.

Use of the Curriculum Perspectives by Teachers and School Curriculum Committees

A question that sometimes arises regarding the three curriculum perspectives is whether or not they must be used in isolation from each other or if they can be combined. Since their underlying philosophical positions and assumptions reflect different, and in some instances contradictory world views, some would argue that each can only be used in isolation from the other two. This is certainly one possible way of using the curriculum perspectives. The authors, however, assert that the Attunement Perspective provides an overarching framework within which the Preservation and Improvement Perspectives
can be used where and when they are relevant. Using the Attunement Perspective as an overarching curriculum frame infuses the benefits of this perspective into students’ learning without excluding the other two perspectives. The Attunement Perspective engages learners as participants in curriculum decision making along with teachers, community members, and other interested persons. The Attunement Perspective provides a way for the interests of learners to be represented in the goals of the curriculum along with those of others. Consequently, the Attunement Perspective engages learners’ motivation and makes clear why certain learning is needed. For example, the classroom library situation discussed earlier engaged learners in identifying a goal they cared about, that had meaning to them, and that affected their every day lives. But in order to pursue the goal of establishing a classroom library, learners needed certain knowledge and skills. They needed to be able to develop and present a compelling and articulate proposal. This required clear and logical thinking; excellent written and oral communication skills; knowledge about books and media; and the capacity to plan space, a budget, and the operation of the library. The Improvement Curriculum Perspective is appropriate for helping learners learn this needed knowledge and develop these specific skills. In selecting specific materials for the library, learners might consider some classic materials that reflect Taiwanese heritage and culture. The Preservation Perspective would help learners gain appreciation for such works and sufficient knowledge about them to be able to make competent selection decisions. In determining how responsibilities for running and maintaining the library will be distributed, use of the Attunement Perspective would help students assure that all affected by these decisions have a voice and that responsibilities are fairly distributed. Finally, when students evaluate their library initiative, they might have questions that reflect more than one perspective. Ted Aoki (1986) outlines several curriculum evaluation approaches, including some that are appropriate for each of the curriculum perspectives. For example, students may wish to know what the circulation rates of library materials are and whether these rates justify the cost of the library in money, time, and effort (Improvement Perspective). Students might also wish to know the meaning the library has had for students who use it, what it has meant for them in their lives and school experience (Attunement Perspective). Finally, students might be interested in knowing if students using the library have become more familiar with Taiwan’s great literature and have come to appreciate it and value it (Preservation Perspective).

This article has focused on the curriculum perspectives as orientations that influence and are useful for curriculum development. Evaluation of existing curriculum is another use for which the curriculum perspectives are valuable. An understanding of the perspectives makes it possible to more deeply understand a curriculum in current use or one that has been developed by others and that is being considered for possible use.
Similarly, educational materials can also be examined and evaluated with the perspectives in mind.

*Use of the Curriculum Perspectives in Inservice and Preservice Teacher Training*

Before the recent educational reform in Taiwan, teachers had little need for reflecting on their own curriculum perspectives because they did not design curriculum or make curriculum selection decisions. It was possible for teacher inservice to focus on upgrading teachers’ knowledge and skills for the school curriculum that was in place. Now, teachers are faced with the challenge of making decisions about selecting and designing curriculum for their students. Consequently, inservice training for teachers needs to help them with a new level of professional practice that demands more than just knowledge and skills. The kind of inservice that is needed to support teachers’ capacities for making curriculum decisions includes examination of values and beliefs and how these affect curriculum decision making.

The curriculum perspectives discussed here provide a useful framework for helping teachers to clarify their own beliefs and perspectives regarding curriculum. Engaging inservice and preservice teachers in examining the three perspectives and considering how their own beliefs are similar to and different from each of the perspectives helps teachers become more deeply aware of their own ways of thinking about curriculum and how these affect their teaching. By considering the three curriculum perspectives and how they relate to their personal beliefs, teachers become more aware of possibilities for their roles in curriculum development.

The importance in inservice training of giving teachers this kind of opportunity for reflection is supported by Huang’s (2004) argument that inservice training for teachers should help them reflect on their professional practice and examine how they think about their teaching rather than focus only on upgrading teaching knowledge and skills. Likewise, Yager (1992) points out that teachers’ thoughts and values play a central role in making education successful.

Compared to developing curriculum from the Attunement Perspective, developing curriculum from the Preservation and Improvement Perspectives is typically done with less input from those affected by the resulting curriculum. Because Taiwanese teachers are now encouraged to involve parents, community members, and other experts in the curriculum development process, there are rich opportunities for use of the Attunement Perspective.

*Conditions that Facilitate and Hinder Adoption of New Perspectives and Practices*
The process of adopting new ways of thinking and new ways of doing things can take a long time. When change is rapid and it becomes readily apparent to people that old ways of thinking and doing things are no longer functional, they are more open to change. When people are comfortable and have no pressing reasons to change, it is often easier for them to maintain what is familiar than to venture into something new that exposes them to the risks of the unknown. In Taiwan, the changed policy regarding school curriculum has set the stage for change and has produced a high need among educators to learn and implement new curriculum practices. At such a time, there is a pressing need for support and assistance in learning new perspectives and practices. Without such support, teachers are left with a mandate to change, but lack guidance, knowledge, and help in developing the capacities they need in order to respond. The framework of the three curriculum perspectives presented in this article can be used by teacher educators in their efforts to help inservice and preservice teachers develop perspectives as well as skills and knowledge that are needed for the curriculum roles they now have.

This time of school curriculum change is an ideal time for school personnel and communities throughout Taiwan to consciously consider their views regarding the purposes of schooling and the kinds of curriculum that will address the purposes they identify as worthy and justified. The curriculum perspectives described here can be helpful to teachers and other school curriculum committee members as they work together to create curriculum for Taiwan’s schools. Each curriculum perspective represents a cluster of values and ways of thinking about society, and teaching and learning that provides a lens through which to see oneself, one’s own values, priorities, orientations and practices and those of one’s school and community. By noting one’s own response to each of these perspectives, it is possible to gain a sense of one’s own deep-seated world view and to then consider how this plays out in one’s professional practice. An understanding of the perspectives can not only help educators and curriculum committees become aware of their own current curricular orientations, but can also help them make conscious choices about whether those orientations are justified and whether other orientations deserve exploration.

References


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**Footnotes**

1 The English term for 九年一貫課程 is adopted from the English version of the revised Ministry of Education publication, *General Guidelines of Grade 1-9 curriculum of Elementary and Junior High School Education* in 2004.
Alternative Curriculum Perspectives: Implications for Teachers' Curriculum Development in Taiwan