PRINCIPALS’ LEADING ROLE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES IN THE NEW NATIONAL CURRICULUM IN VIETNAM

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Abstract

Summarized from the theories on experiential learning by progressive educators such as Kurt Lewin, John Dewey and Piaget, David Kolb, etc., experiential learning is the process of learners’ gaining the sense of initiatives and active participation to acquire new knowledge and create new experiences. Vietnam in the current trend of educational reform has adopted the policy of redesigning the general education program in the direction of developing learners’ capacities and ensuring the all-round development of learners’ personality. In the new general education program which was officially launched in August 2017 by Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training, experimental activities were incorporated into to serve as a compulsory educational activity from the primary to high school levels with the goal of helping learners to form and develop competencies such as the capacities to adapt to life, to design and organize activities, to effectively carry out career orientation through the theme of activities associated with contents about their own lives, homelands, country and people. As a result, Vietnam schools in the dawn of the 21st century need to face a great number of fundamental and comprehensive innovations from the way they manage teaching and learning activities, content and teaching methodology and the assessment of learners’ learning process. In the face of these challenges, principals play a number of new roles such as initiation, implementation, and support for specific typical changes in the current period (Fullan, 2001, Bush & Glover, 2014). The paper will clarify the leading role perceived by the school principal in order to ensure the implementation of experiential activities and its effectiveness in the process of Vietnam education reform.

Keywords: leadership, school-based management, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, new education curriculum in Vietnam, experiential learning activities, extracurricular activities

INTRODUCTION

Education of the 21st century is challenged by the 4th technology revolution and globalization. A fusion of technology breakthroughs such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, robotics, etc., significantly alter the way people live, work and relate to one another. The need for building knowledge society calls a comprehensive approach in educational process and fundamental qualitative transformation of education in terms of content, methods of teaching and learning and outcomes. On the threshold of the 21st century, there is a wide range of education reforms all over the world such as decentralization of authority from the central government to the school level (school-based management)3, development of standard-based curricula, shift from teacher-centered to student-centered pedagogies. In cope with excesses of the mounting and sometimes contradictory external pressure of change, it is imperative to

reconsider issues such as roles, responsibility and impact of school leaders on teachers and school effectiveness.

DEFINITIONS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND LEADERS

Management and leadership theories when applied to practice have formed the basis for the formation of the theories of leadership from about 20 years to the end of the nineteenth century so far. The study by Ali Algahtani (2014) and the OECD (2008) report redefines of the leadership and management definitions of researchers in the 1950s lasting to today such as Northhouse, J.Kotter, Bass, Katz, Bennis and Nannus, Peter Drucker, Kotterman, Gosling and Mintzberg, Bush and Glover, Dimmock, Leithwood et al., etc.

According to Bush and Glover (2003), Leadership involves steering organization by shaping other people’s attitudes, motivations and behaviours; management is more closely associated with maintenance of current operations. Despite the attempt to distinguish between leadership and management, when those concepts are applied in the context of educational institutions, it is proved that a successful school needs effective leadership and management.

The most definitions of leadership refer to the process of influence. As Yulk said it, “most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person [or group] over other people [or groups] to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organization.” (OECD, 2008, p.18). Leaders lead the process of influence through articulated goals and outcomes.

Schools are concerned with learning organization or learning community where all members of the school are learners. Yulk used “person” or “group” in his definition to emphasize that leadership tasks are charged by individuals or teams. Therefore, the concept of leadership can be broadened as where the school leader is not only the person taking the prime responsibility for the entire organization, but the authority power to lead is distributed among different people within and beyond the school. School leadership can encompass principals, vice principals, members of school boards, school-level staff involving in leadership tasks. Although there exits a narrow or broader concept of leadership within school, principals still remains the central source of leadership influence which is characterized on two key responsibilities, which are directing the school improvement through clear visions and changing school members’ thought and actions around the core values and meaningful purposes. Vision is a specific feature which can distinguish successful from unsuccessful leaders and effective from ineffective leadership. A successful school leader must be a person who can develop and articulate the shared vision of a school and can implant the vision in the structure and processes of the whole school through strategic plans. Teachers seemed to agree that one of the primary roles of principals is shaping the future image of the schools based on high expectation of raising overall academic achievements for all students. It is a common point of researches in about two decades from the end of 20th century on effective principals in elementary or secondary schools that principals are responsible for establishment of a schoolwide vision around standards which motivates the high commitment of teachers and students on the better teaching and learning quality (Bush & Glover, 2003; NASSP & NAESP, 2013; The Wallace Perspective, 2013). In view of the second responsibility, Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001) concluded that “good leaders are informed by and communicate clear sets of personal and educational values which their moral purposes for the school” (cited in Bush & Glover, 2003, p.5). Personal and educational values are listed mainly as respect for individuals, fairness and equality, caring for the well being and whole development of students.
and staff, integrity and honesty. All values when are accepted by all school members can create the organizational culture.

**THE PRINCIPAL AS A LEADER OF CHANGE**

In knowledge based society, school principals attempt to implement sustained innovations in student achievements. To encourage teachers to change, principals must possess characteristics which can create transformations in academic culture of the entire school, starting from teachers. For instance, moral purpose (vision), an understanding of change process, the ability to improve relationship within and outside the school, knowledge creation and sharing and making coherence. (Fullan, 2002)

The series of *Perspective of leadership (SL17v1 & SL03v1)* developed by the Teacher Education through School-based Support in India[^4^] related to the processes of planning, employing and leading change in schools, provides what principals have to pay attention or should follow if they want to improve the quality of teaching and learning of their school in today's context. In order to implement a new educational program, there are three things which should be put into consideration as new or reused teaching and learning resource, teaching approaches or activities, alteration of beliefs of teachers about pedagogical assumptions and theories). Regardless of the nature of drivers of change, school leaders need to identify key factors when planning a change as rationale for the need for a change, what is intended to do and the expected outcomes (vision), how school resources can respond to requirements of change, how to impose plans for a change, structural challenging issues and methods to overcome, psychological barriers, and evaluation methods of impacts of a change.

Change process should start from small-scale changes (one classroom practices) and then be broadened to wideschool changes. Leaders need to have the ability to make professional staff clearly understand the ideas of changes and what the future of school looks like, find the collective meaning and commitment from those members through reachable goals and practical plans of action to reach the future goals. There would be emotional impacts because when any change happens, it will affects people in different ways and people also react them in different ways (Fullan, 2002; TESS-India SL03v1). As Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) stated, “School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working condition (cited in NASSP, 2013, p.4). The word “staff” is used to indicate the teachers and as in expanded meaning as *professional learning communities (PLCs)* within school. Some of the researches affirm that school leaders and leadership styles have positive influence partly on creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006; Pang & Wang, 2016). Professional learning community is where teachers and leaders share learning and actions on learning with the aims to enhance knowledge base and improve pedagogical practices of individual teachers in order to enhancing students’ learning and academic performance. Therefore, to upgrade the professional capacity for teachers, their willingness and readiness in design and put revised curriculum into real-life practices, principals rebuild academic culture based on their right realizations and efforts to implant shared standards

[^4^]: TESS-India is led by The Open University and Save The Children India, funded by UK Aid it is a multilingual teacher professional development programme whose aim is to support India’s national educational policy by enhancing the classroom practice of primary and secondary school teacher. Besides, a separate set of text and video based OER is designed to enhance the professional development of school leaders. (http://www.tess-india.edu.in/about-tess-india)
and procedures in which safe and comfortable environment for teachers and students’ learning are prospered. Principals also provide time, space and systems of incentives to teachers so that they can immerse themselves in job-embedded and formal training activities for the continuous improvement, as long as these conditions should be pertinent to the current context of school. Depending on the complexity of change and drivers of change, leaders can call for the supports and increase the collective responsibility by distributing and cultivating the leadership abilities in other teachers (teaching leadership). “We will only get quality principals when we have quality teachers.”, as Fullan mentioned (2002).

Nowadays, reports on effective leaders and impacts of leadership on student achievement confirm that school leaders of the 21st century have such key practices as shaping a vision of academic success for all students; creating a climate hospitable to education; cultivating leadership in others; improving instruction; managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement, building strong partnership within and outside of schools (Wallace Foundation, 2013; NASSP & NAESP, 2013). Key effective practices are summarized from the result of studies on leadership styles in variety of context of culture and society, especially instructional leadership and transformation leadership.

**TYPES OF LEADERSHIP PROMOTING BETTER STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Principals’ influence on student learning outcomes serves as an intermediary through other people or organizational factors such as teachers, classroom practices and school climate (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, 2003). This assertion is related to the trend of studies on principals’ behaviors, which is in the instructional leadership style. In this form, principals act as a pillar of expertise, have the capacity and authority strong enough to build a professional community geared towards improving teachers’ teaching activities and students’ learning activities (Bush & Glover, 2014). School principals are thought to be able to influence teachers' thinking and practices to meet the needs of innovation because principals can make decisions that affect a range of issues such as time teaching, teaching materials, assessing and developing pedagogical capacity of teachers. Principals as teaching leaders will do things like set goals, allocate resources and facilities for teaching, curriculum management, lesson plan supervising, and teacher testing. Principals are active participants in curriculum development, lesson planning, content instructions and teaching methodology. They are not hesitant to work directly with teachers and to be in the classroom to observe; Principals are active observers of classroom situation with prompt feedback and adjustments to each teacher's teaching methodology (Bush & Glover, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Lanier, 2009; Jenkins, 2009). In addition, principals must personally learn the knowledge related to curriculum, teaching methodology and methods of assessing the competencies of teachers and students. However, the teaching leadership model has also some drawbacks, which makes it difficult to be implemented in large-scale schools with complicated structures such as high schools.

Transformational leadership is a value-oriented and relationship-oriented process. Transformational leadership can create changes in the structure and culture of the school, affecting student achievements. Bass defines “a transformational leader” is the one who can motivate his fellows to change their way of thinking and can do things beyond their everyday ability. Bass stated that the four components of the transformational leadership model are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1990). Principals of the form of transformational leadership are those who are capable of setting the vision of the organization; sharing the goals of actions; setting examples for changes by expressing one’s own attitudes and behaviors; developing an open, friendly...
communication mechanism; fostering supportive working principles that help each other so that teachers can communicate freely and discuss issues related to the improvement of their teaching; thus, forming ethical values of the school (freedom, fairness, equality, humanity, peace, etc.) (Abu-Hussain & Essawi, 2014). However, the validity of the transformational leadership model when applied to educational management practices needs to be taken into account as the education process of some developing countries such as Vietnam is a top-down impact. For the education system which is still highly centralized with top-down orders and controls from the central level in developing countries, transformation is like the political realization of policies and guidelines of the government and of higher education administrators through school leaders – those who are executives on behalf of the government. Therefore, the capacity, authority and flexibility of principals are somehow eliminated in renovation. In addition, the culture of a country impedes the implementation of changes in perceptions and behaviors of each individual teacher and of the school. External influences reduce the role and influence of leaders in the building of the culture (value) of the organization where they belong to. Despite hinders of transformational leadership in the different contexts of culture, society and politic, the key principles when applying the transformational leadership model are collaboration in decision making, sharing of the organization’s future visions, high expectations from leaders for actual performance of each member of the organization, which will have effects on enhancing followers’ motivation, moral and job performance.

Main ideas from instructional leadership and transformational leadership emphasize that the principal of a school must possess qualities and competence as a learning leader to provide short-term and long-term vision, goals, action plans, criteria and forms of monitoring and evaluating which are appropriate to the conditions and needs of the school in order to guide the process of renovation of teaching activities and educational activities of the school over time. Fullan (2002) asserts that principals are the driving force for sustainable education innovations (Hardman, 2011). As a leader in the innovation process, principals need to determine that the development of the teaching staff is critical and that good practice can have a major impact on the learning process and student outcomes. To be a leader in the innovation process, in addition to capacity, principals need to effectively use archived data sources and information collected from inside and outside in the school management process to provide a scientific basis for setting vision, goals and innovation strategy for the school.

THE ROLE OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS OVER THE WORLD AND IN VIETNAM

Role of extracurricular activities
Extracurricular activities\(^5\) refer to a wide range of activities that take place outside the regular (compulsory) school curriculum. Results of studies on the effects of extracurricular programs conducted in United States primary and secondary schools confirm that they play an important role in students’ lives, and by participation in school activities, students can reap positive benefits in academic achievements, social and emotional development, prevention of risky behaviours, and health and wellness (Annu & Sunita, 2015; Huang, Cho, Mostafavi, Nam, Rudo, Jordan & Caverly, 2008; SEDL Letter, 2008, p.6). Students have opportunities to engage in diverse, fun and structured out-of-school activities that promote their development in a real-world context. Through hands-on and collaborative learning activities, students can develop good personalities,

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\(^5\) Also called as out of school activities or afterschool activities
obtain a deep understanding of what is taught in subjects, and master skills necessary for their success in school, career and adult life.

From the end of the 20th century, the growing trend of education reforms in a number of countries is reflected through the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogies and efforts to develop competency-based curricula that will more effectively prepare young people to meet the demands of contemporary and future society at both primary and secondary levels (IBE-UNESCO, 2000, pp. 58-61). A competency-based curriculum emphasizes the complex outcomes of a learning process including a stated number of defined knowledge, skills and attitudes which are applied by students rather than mainly focusing on what to be expected to learn about in terms of subject content (IBE-UNESCO, 2013). In principle, such a curriculum is learner-centered and adaptive to the changing needs of students and society. Students are given more autonomy in their own learning in classroom, and are more motivated to engage in self-directed learning outside the classroom as well as being provided with safe and friendly environments in which they can share information and practice new skills in cooperation with others. The application of competency-based approach in curriculum development also leads to the significant changes of teaching and assessment methods in order to ensure the continuous progress of each student. In light of the above-mentioned reforms, schools of many developed and developing countries are provided with more authority and accountability for the translation of the requirements of national education curriculum into effective practices adapting the local context and school condition. In order to maximize their capacity in increasing student achievement, schools have to identify internal and external factors which can effect the quality of instruction and assessment of both academic and extracurricular programs. Extracurricular programs are proved to get the most positive results unless they are structured, focused and well-organized by high-qualified teaching staff and supported in terms of finance and human resources by school leaders, families, and local communities (SEDL Letter, 2008, pp.7&8)

**Extracurricular activities in the current education curriculum of Vietnam**

In case of Vietnam, the current general education curriculum comprises of compulsory and optional subjects, and collective and out-of-school educational activities. The total time of collective and out-of-school educational activities is 3 periods per week (96 periods per year). During 3 months of summer holiday, students have the chance to participate in extracurricular programs. The content of those activities covers 6 main topics listed as extending understanding of traditional cultures and moral practices; shaping learning awareness and forming learning habit; nurturing knowledge and affection for the Country, Vietnam Communist Party, Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union and Ho Chi Minh Young Pioneer Organization; nurturing friendship, love and respect for family; promoting awareness of peace, cooperation and friendship among countries; fun and healthy summer holidays. Depending on the school condition and local supports, every year students can take part in 8 themes within the 6 main topics. Collective and extra-curricular activities aim to help students to consolidating content knowledge; enriching the awareness of society and environment; improving interpersonal skills and collective learning experiences; practicing basic skills appropriate to psychological development of students at each grade such as communication skills, organization skills and self-evaluating skills; developing good behaviours, positive attitudes and self-disciple in learning and working; nurturing the affection to hometown and respect for natural environment, etc. Teachers play the roles as guides, facilitators and companions of students during their learning process. Students are encouraged to actively plan, organize and self-evaluate the results of the activities. In addition to self-evaluation by individual students, teachers will observe all the learning process and assess students’expression, willingness, creativeness and attitude changing in order to provide more
evidence for the final evaluation of students’ conducts at the end of each grade. However, the drawback of the program of extracurricular activities in current general education curriculum is that school managers and teachers do not emphasize the effects of these activities because of the lack of detailed criteria for assessment and the nature of extracurricular activities being voluntary educational activities.

EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES IN THE NEW EDUCATION CURRICULUM OF VIETNAM

The National Assembly of Vietnam issued a directive to revise the general education curriculum and textbook on November 28th, 2014 (Directive No.88/2014/QH13) with an aim to creating fundamental and comprehensive change in quality and effectiveness of general education, to combining teaching knowledge and teaching how to be a good citizen, and to doing career orientation; all contributing to transform the education system providing heavy loads of knowledge into an education system of comprehensive development in terms of good quality and competence, of harmonizing morals-intellect-physical strength-aesthetics, and of enhancing the potential of each student to the fullest.

The viewpoints for the development of the reformed general education curriculum were officially promulgated by the Ministry of Education and Training on websites on July 28th, 2017 including: building based on the orientation of development of learners’ quality and capacity (5 qualities and 10 capacities) through educating contents of basic, practical, modern knowledge, harmonizing morals, intellect, physical strength and aesthetics; focusing on practice and knowledge application to solve problems in learning and life; highly integrating in lower classes, gradually differentiating in upper classes; through the methods and forms of educational organization to promote the initiative, activeness, positiveness and potential of each student. The methods of assessment are consistent with the educational objective and educational approach. The open-ended program enhances the initiative and responsibility of local and state governments to ensure the design of educational plans that are appropriate to the target audience and the local educational environment and education establishments, enhancing the connectivity of school activities with family, local governments and the society.

Compared with the current program, the new program has remarkable changes such as reducing class time and some difficult and complicated contents of certain subjects, reducing the number of required courses based on the integration of individual subjects having the same content areas, increasing time spent on education, career and elective subjects (foreign languages and ethnic dialects). One to-be-remembered point is experiential activities, originally overtime education which was voluntary and did not have specific requirements for standards and methods for evaluating student progress in the current program. In the new curriculum, experiential activities are compulsory throughout the 12 years of schooling, having more explicit

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6 5 qualities include patriotism, humanity, hard-working, honesty and responsibility; 3 core competencies of self-reliant capacity and self-learning communication and collaboration capacity, creative problem-solving capacity; and 7 subject competencies include language ability, computing power, social learning capacity, technological capability, computer skills, aesthetics and physical abilities (part III of the new education curriculum officially issued by Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training on July 28th, 2017, retrieved from the World Wide Web from https://www.moet.gov.vn/tintuc/Pages/CT-GDPT-Tong-The.aspx)
requirements for standards in quality and capacity, assessment methods, organizational forms and conditions to implement the program.

Experiential learning constructed based on the assumption that each person is an active and creative learner who can engage himself in hands-on and experimental activities which helps to transform their experience and create new knowledge and skills. Based on models of experiential learning collected and suggested by Kurt Lewin, John Dewey và Piaget, David Kolb, models of experiential learning include 4 main stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experiemntation (Kolb, 1981 & 2015). Different from the common models of learning known as “learning by doing” which emphasize the technical practices, experiential learning focuses on the stages of reflection which give rise to a new idea, or a need to modification of an existing abstract concepts to develop new ways of thinking and new attitudes. Experiential learning is characterized as 1) it is a continuous process grounded in each learner’ s experience; 2) within this process, many positive emotions will be formed through interaction between learners and environment and other learners when they try to solve problems and those emotions lay foundation for the construction of their beliefs, attitudes, values, motivation and interest in learning and working; 3) during this process each student has a different level of experience depending on their psychological characteristics. In summary, the most common definition of experiential activities is an educational activity in which the content and manner of organizing facilitates each individual student's direct participation and ownership of the activity, enabling the students actively develop the strategy of action for themselves and for the group to form and enhance the qualities, ideals, emotions, values, life skills and abilities required of citizens in a modern society. Through activities, the students foster their creativity to adapt and create new and worthwhile values for individuals and communities (Bui,Ngoc D., 2015; Nguyen, Thi L. et al, 2016; Đinh, Thi Kim T., 2015).

The general education curriculum in 2017 affirmed that experiential activities combined with the teaching and learning activities of the subjects provide an opportunity for students to mobilize the knowledge and skills of the subjects and different fields of education to experience real family, school and society life; to engage in community service activities and career orientation under the direction and organization of the educator; thereby, forming the core qualities and common capabilities. The program of experiential activities ensures the balance between individual and collective activities, between classroom and non-classroom activities, between in-school and out-of-school activities. As experiential activities towards the whole person development of the personality of the learner, basic characteristics in terms of psycho-physiology and educational environment are the premise and important factors for the organization and planning. Experiential activities are organized into themes through the integration of knowledge and skills of many subjects surrounding the content of education activities: Individual development, labor activities, social activities and community service, vocational education. These four experiential activities are conducted through four main types of activities: Saluting the Flag, Classroom Activities, Thematic Education Activities and Club Activities. Some action contents of the Children's Day, Ho Chi Minh Young Pioneers, Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, Vietnam Youth Union are integrated into the above-mentioned activities. At lower secondary level, the program focuses more on social activities, community service, and promotes career development. The organization forms are very diverse and divided into groups: exploratory groups (sightseeing, field trips, camping), long-term participation groups (clubs, scientific research projects), experimental/ interactive types (forums, exchanges, seminars, on-stage activities), and dedicated groups (housework, school work, volunteer work, community service activities). The educational methodology in experiential activities must meet the following requirements: Making the learner ready for a positive experience; Helping the learner to think
about the experiences undergone; Helping the learner develop analytical skills and generalizing skills of experiences gained; Providing learners with problem-solving and decision-making skills based on newly acquired knowledge and ideas. Evaluating the outcome of students’ experience is based on the information collected through observing students during the course of activities, through student product research, especially the product of practice and application; through student self-evaluation, student group assessments; and through other educational institutions’ assessments. Then, the outcome is compared with the goal that the experiential activities have identified. Evaluation results will be an important basis for teachers to adjust their activities accordingly, in particular, evaluation creates motivation for each student’s effort, striving and self-improvement. In addition to the learning outcomes of the subjects, the results of the experiential activities are recorded in the student’s academic record (equivalent to a subject).

**ROLES OF PRINCIPALS IN ADAPTATION TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES**

*The supposed roles of principals in adaption to changes in curriculum of experiential activities*

In order to effectively organize the program of experiential activities, viewed from the perspective of a school leader, principals with the roles as change leaders, as instructional and transformational leaders must perform the following functions:

- Principals should equip themselves with knowledge related to the new general education curriculum and the curriculum for the study subjects and educational activities to form a proper understanding of the nature and role of experiential learning associated with other subjects. Then, principals understand why changes are required in the experiential learning program from content, organizational approach to evaluation.
- From the right perspective, principals must be the ones who can communicate the meaning of changes to teachers and persuade them about their possibility of success.
- Principals have ability to analyze their school context and the capacity of the teaching staff in order to list out the advantages and disadvantages of the school in the process of implementing changes. From the thoughtful and reliable evaluation of the school’s status and staff capacity, principals define the vision, set goals and work out action plans.
- Changes in educational activities involve an overall educational plan of a school, individual and collective professional capacities of teaching staff, learning environment of teachers and students. Principals must pay attention to two main issues: the way of working among teachers and the attitude and motivation of teaching staff. The principal utilize many ways of impacting teachers such as effects from the principal's charisma (abilities, qualities and behaviors), mental and physical stimuli to upgrade the motivation and willingness of teachers, and reconstruct the manner of working and learning in order to promote the reflection of each teacher, the cooperation and mutual support among teachers with the aim to better teaching and learning for all and a whole development for students. In addition, principals and all school members should involve in refresher courses organized by educational administrators at all levels to enhance the professional capacity and skills to respond to innovation.
- Regarding the information system for the planning, organization, evaluation and improvement process throughout the renovation process, principals apply a number of modern technologies (software) to help analyze and store teacher record data and student portfolios. In addition, modern technologies and the internet help create a rich learning base that increases the attractiveness of the activities.
In order to effectively organize the experiential learning activities in accordance with the objectives and requirements set forth, the school needs participation, coordination and linkage from many educational and social forces in and outside the school. Depending on the content and form of each activity, the involvement of the forces may be direct or indirect and each force has its own strengths. Principals need to pay attention to delegating authority and responsibility to a group of people in a school that is knowledgeable and competent to support principals in managerial tasks and in the establishment and extension of relationship with external forces. In addition, principals need to prepare themselves with communication skills to develop close rapport with local authorities to keep up with the information and guidelines associated with the reform of the educational program.

**Perspectives of a principal on changes in curriculum of experiential learning activities**

In order to carry out any innovative initiatives in the school, principals are asserted to play the central role. The principals’ perspective on the nature, content and way of making changes contributes to the direction of the behaviors and attitudes of all school members, primarily of teachers and students.

In Vietnam, the reformed general curriculum of basic education comprising of the academic syllabi and educational activities which are planned to be implemented in the school year 2019-2020 to the following itinerary:

- grade 1 (school year 2019-2020); grades 2 and 6 (school year 2020-2021); grades 3 and 7 (school year 2021-2022); grades 4, 8 and 11 (school year 2022-2023), grades 5, 9 and 12 (school year 2023-2024).

The author conducted an in-depth individual interview with a principal of a secondary school located in the central of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The school has a over-20-year history of establishment and development with reputation for the best quality of teaching and learning in Ho Chi Minh City. The school invests a room with well-equipped technologies and tools which supports STEAM activities (one of after-school activities) for students in grades 6 through 10. The interview focuses on understanding the principals’ views through three questions, including the experiential learning activities in the reformed new program of experiential activities, advantages and disadvantages of implementing the new program of experiential activities in the proposed time, and the principal’s role in the implementation of those activities. The results harvested from the interview can be summarized in four main areas.

a. The nature and role of experiential learning activities: The principal affirmed that this is an important activity which helps to attain the goal of whole person education, and contributes to the continuous process of teaching and learning within the school. The experiential learning is designed in a more informative program, and focuses on new topics in comparison with the current extracurriculum. Experiential activities "are the further development of a wide range of educational activities in the school such as activities organized by the Youth Union and Young Pioneer Organization, school trips to the city’s zoo and local traditional craft villages, community service and voluntary activities known as “Hoa Phuong Do movement”, tradition and history education activities known a “Red addresses” etc.". At present, extracurricular activities are out-of-school or out-of-class activities that enable students to develop life skills and personalities; within those activities’ topics, career-oriented content is also intergrated. The career-oriented career education helps students to be aware of their own interests and abilities,

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to understand traditional and professional occupations. The school also tries to introduce to the students a variety of occupations and local human needs through integrated content in other academic subjects such as technology, geography, fine art, music and citizen education. However, the principal noted that the extracurricular program has not yet "completed" in terms of assessment method.

b. The advantages and disadvantages of organizing the experiential activities: The principal said that the school faces difficulties due to lack of finance, time and human resources. Since 2008 the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training has started the Movement of Building friendly school environments and self-learning and self-motivated students and until now gains success in mobilizing many social forces in order to promote the teaching and learning within schools (Vu, Do, Nguyen, Huynh & Bui, 2012). Despite the efforts of upper-level education authorities, the principal noted that funding is limited, mainly supported from parents and partly from social organizations. For instance, the school invited an arts and cultural performance group to give a show to students in order to let students access traditional instruments, and enhance the awareness of their own interests. The cost for this performance was reduced by a half from the delegates of performance group. Regarding the human resource matter, homeroom teachers are now the main staff in charge of organizing such extracurricular activities under the direction and guidance of the school board. In the future, when the new education curriculum is officially put into effect, the principal hopes that the specific program of experiential activities, currently known as extracurricular activities, will demonstrate the more detailed and updated ideas of content and clear procedures and methods for accomplishing and and evaluating its effect on students’s whole person development. Moreover, the school is putting efforts in implementing STEAM activities (as another type of collective educational activities) by utilizing the modern technologies of the STEAM practicing room. Themes of STEAM program are designed and organized by teachers of technology and chemistry-biology-physics department. Students showed interests and created many useful products for making life better from recycled materials such as water purifier machine. STEAM program will help to diversify experiential activities in terms of working, individual wellbeing and community services. But at the present time, the principal and teachers of the school are waiting for the formal training programs for the content and requirements of new education curriculum, as well as new teaching methods responding the goal of education and objectives of reviewed academic program.

c. Teaching methodology and assessment methods: The school requires and disseminates training materials to teachers about how to apply integrated teaching methods, but its effect stops in the way that teachers attempt to integrate some of the relevant content of another subject into their own subjects. There is still no form of teacher meeting and real discussion in order to develop academic themes in a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary manner. This means that teachers are not adequately trained and well-equipped with pedagogical skills and professional knowledge which can respond to the requirements for learner-centered teaching strategies. Moreover, in Vietnam schools, there still exist superficial cooperation activities among teachers which cannot create working environment for continuous improvement for all. About the assessment process, the principal emphasizes that the current education curriculum doesn’t mention the obligation to evaluate the effectiveness of extracurricular activities. The new curriculum will promote the effectiveness of experiential learning activities by indicating the criteria and attainment levels of attitudes and core skills of students, and methods of self-evaluation and evaluation of students, educators and other external forces through which the progress of student learning can be assessed easily and systematically.
d. The principal's role in implementing the experiential learning program: The principal affirms that it is essential to raise the awareness of school leaders and teachers about the nature and role of experiential learning. In addition, an effective-change principal has to be dynamic, creative, and be able to build relationships to find cooperation from external forces in diversifying the forms and enhancing the quality of experiential activities. Principals should think about the establishment of consultation team for experiential learning program. The team will consist of an assistant vice principal, delegates of the Communist Youth Union and Young Pioneer organization, delegates of parents association and even outstanding students who can play a role of advisors for the decision-making of the principal and planning practical program for each school year. Moreover, the principal emphasizes the tendency of the interest of school managers because it can exert great influence on the content and extent of implementing educational activities within schools.

In conclusion, from the theories of school leadership and the principal's points of view on reform initiatives in education curriculum and specifically in educational activities, the paper asserts that the Vietnamese school leaders play important role in envisioning the development path of organizations and setting action plans preparing for the planning and implementing the changes of the revised curriculum of basic education, especially in the present period when autonomy and accountability matters are taken more consideration in society. However, in reality, school leaders still put increasing focus on managerial tasks, which results in fails to meet the demand in creating comfortable conditions for collaborative activities that facilitate the teachers' learning and studying on educational methods. Quality teachers are believed to directly impact on students' learning through which students will become self-motivated, proactive and creative learners equipped with analytical and synthetic skills and critical thinking ability. In addition, because of the larger size of a school, the increasing numbers of subjects and the diversified population of students, principals of secondary and high schools has a tendency to empower school members of all levels of within a school during the whole process of planning, organizing, monitoring, evaluating and improving the effectiveness of educational activities. Finally, other features such as interest, rapport building ability, creativity and flexibility are essential for the success of principals in the role as change leaders.
References


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