

# **Karen pre-serviced Teachers' Understandings about Educational Philosophy, Learning Theory and Curriculum and the Impacts of these Understandings on Their Teaching**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Karen Teacher Training College (KTTC) has prepared pre service teachers for many years. The pre-service teachers have been trained as part of two year program before they go back to their communities. In their training, a variety set of experiences and key teachers' competencies have been provided for the pre service teachers. However, the two year training program lacked some key knowledge and competencies which are very important for teachers such as educational philosophy, learning theory, curriculum, and teaching methods that directly relate to teachers' teaching. The purposes of this study were to examine the Karen pre service teachers' conceptual understandings about educational philosophy, learning theory and curriculum and also to investigate the impacts of these understandings on their teaching. The three day intensive course on educational philosophy, learning theory, curriculum and teaching methods was developed and this course was run with 65 Karen pre service teachers from the North KTTC. In the intensive course, lecturing, class discussions, group works and teaching demonstration activities were employed. For data collection, the conceptual understanding test was administered to all 65 participating Karen pre service teachers after finishing the intensive course. In addition, the lesson plans developed by the Karen pre service teachers during the intensive course were used for content analysis and the observation form was also used during the teaching demonstrations. For data analysis, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used for the test scores from the conceptual understanding test as quantitative data analysis whereas content analysis technique was used for the data from the developed lesson plans and observation form as qualitative data analysis. The results show that Karen pre service teachers have conceptual understandings at middle to high level, ranging from 55 % to 76 %, and, 64 % on average. In addition, the results of content analysis from the developed lesson plans and their teaching show that their teaching was driven by the pragmatism philosophy which focus on learning by doing and the most referred learning theory was constructivism which teaching always started with stimulating students' prior knowledge.

**Keywords:** Karen pre-serviced teachers, understandings, educational philosophy, learning theory, curriculum, teaching

## INTRODUCTION

The Karen Teacher Working Group (KTWG) is a community-based organization working to improve access to and quality of basic education for ethnic Karen children in Karen areas of Eastern Burma since 1997. The work focuses on training teachers and school management committees, working with parents and communities, providing education assistance funds and materials for schools and working to help strengthen education administration structures in Karen areas (KTWG, 2014: online). Karen Teachers Working Group (KTWG) now primarily works in Karen State, and EBCS partners with ethnic education organizations from eastern and northern Burma to provide teacher training and community support to education programs in those areas. KTWG has assumed progressively greater responsibility for the TPC Mae Sot, started by World Education in 2011, and supports a network of pre-serviced and in-serviced teacher trainings for community schools throughout Burma. With PLE support, KTWG conducts several core activities to support their goal of increasing the number of qualified teachers in Karen State schools. The organization implements three teacher preparatory courses that train pre-serviced teachers and teacher trainers. PLE supports the running costs of the Karen Teacher Training College (KTTC) in Ho Kay, Karen

State, and provides technical advising for the KTTC in Nupo refugee camp. TPC in Mae Sot is increasingly implemented directly by KTWG/EBCS. The three form a network of pre-service teacher training using the same curriculum. In addition, PLE KTWG also supports the mobile teacher training (MTT) program, which employs teacher trainers to travel in Karen, Kayah, and Mon States to provide skills training to teachers and parents at ethnic Karen community schools. EBCS expands this reach to Kayah, Shan, and Kachin States.

### *Pre-serviced Teacher Training at Karen Teacher Training Colleges (KTTC)*

The first Karen Teacher Training College opened in June 2004 as a training center for Karen youth interested in becoming teachers in schools in Karen State, Burma. A second campus opened in 2007. The colleges provide a two-year pre service teacher training program for aspiring teachers from Karen areas who commit to return to teach in their local communities after completing the program. First year students focus on subject upgrade while second year students hone their teaching skills, studying teaching methodology subjects. The course also touches on education management and leadership skills, community based curriculum development and critical thinking. The colleges maintain links with Karen state schools and communities to ensure that the

curriculum remains responsive to the needs of local communities.

In the training, a variety set of experiences and key teachers' competencies have been provided for the pre-serviced teachers. However, the two year training program lacked some key knowledge and competencies which are very important for teachers such as educational philosophy, learning theory, curriculum, and teaching methods that directly relate to teachers' teaching. As a result, there are strong needs for the study about providing the pre-serviced teachers with key fundamental knowledge which could lead them to success in their future teaching career.

## **EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY, LEARNING THEORY AND CURRICULUM**

### *Teachers and Educational philosophy*

Teacher's teaching style is directly related to their philosophy of what it means to know and learn. The rationale for making particular teaching choices becomes more apparent when teachers reflect on what they believe about teaching and learning. Much of what teachers believe comes from their own experiences as a student, the images of teaching they hold, and their experiences as a teacher (McNergney, F. & Herbert, M., 1998). Numerous philosophers have studied what it means to teach and learn, and have come up with various explanations of the process of becoming educated. In order to get clearer views about their teaching, teachers have to refine their own beliefs and understandings of what it means to know

through examining numerous learning theories and making sense of the processes of teaching and learning in their own minds. Consequently, teachers come to better understand their own philosophy through thinking about what they believe about teaching and learning. In term of educational foundation, educational philosophy is teachers' beliefs about why, what and how you teach, whom you teach, and about the nature of learning. It is a set of principles that guides professional action through the events and issues teachers face daily. Sources for teachers' educational philosophy are their life experiences, values, the environment in which they live, interactions with others and awareness of philosophical approaches. Learning about the branches of philosophy, philosophical world views, and different educational philosophies and theories will help teachers to determine and shape their own educational philosophy, combined with these other aspects.

### *Teachers and Learning theory*

Related to both the metaphysical worldview philosophies and the educational philosophies are theories of learning that focus on how learning occurs, the psychological orientations. They provide structures for the instructional aspects of teaching, suggesting methods that are related to their perspective on learning. These theoretical beliefs about learning are also at the epistemic level of philosophy, as they are concerned with the nature of learning. Each psychological orientation is most directly related to a particular educational philosophy, but may have other influences as well.

### *Teachers and Curriculum*

The term curriculum refers to the lessons and academic content taught in a school or in a specific course or program. In dictionaries, curriculum is often defined as the courses offered by a school, but it is rarely used in such a general sense in schools. Depending on how broadly educators

define or employ the term, curriculum typically refers to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which includes the learning standards or learning objectives they are expected to meet; the units and lessons that teachers teach; the assignments and projects given to students; the books, materials, videos, presentations, and readings used in a course; and the tests, assessments, and other methods used to evaluate student learning (Oliva, 1997). An individual teacher's curriculum, for example, would be the specific learning standards, lessons, assignments, and materials used to organize and teach a particular course.

When the terms curriculum or curricula are used in educational contexts without qualification, specific examples, or additional explanation, it may be difficult to determine precisely what the terms are referring to—mainly because they could be applied to either all or only some of the component parts of a school's academic program or courses.

In many cases, teachers develop their own curricula, often refining and improving them over years, although it is also common for teachers to adapt lessons and syllabi created by other teachers, use curriculum templates and guides to structure their lessons and courses, or purchase prepackaged curricula from individuals and companies. In some cases, schools purchase comprehensive, multigrade curriculum packages—often in a particular subject area, such as mathematics—that teachers are required to use or follow. Curriculum may also encompass a school's academic requirements for graduation, such as the courses students have to take and pass, the number of credits students must complete, and other requirements, such as completing a capstone project or a certain number of community-service hours. Generally speaking, curriculum takes many different forms in schools—too many to comprehensively catalog here.

It is important to note that while curriculum encompasses a wide variety of potential

educational and instructional practices, educators often have a very precise, technical meaning in mind when they use the term. Most teachers spend a lot of time thinking about and analyzing curriculum, and many educators have acquired a specialist's expertise in curriculum development—i.e., they know how to structure, organize, and deliver courses in ways that facilitate or accelerate student learning. To non-educators, some curriculum materials may seem simple or straightforward (such as a list of required reading, for example), but they may reflect a deep and sophisticated understanding of an academic discipline and of the most effective strategies for learning acquisition and classroom management.

## **PURPOSES OF THE STUDY**

The purposes of this study were:

- 1) to examine the Karen pre service teachers' conceptual understandings about educational philosophy, learning theory and curriculum, and also
- 2) to investigate the impacts of these understandings on their teaching.

## **METHODS**

The present study employed qualitative research as the research framework.

The three day intensive courses on educational philosophy, learning theory, curriculum and teaching methods were developed and this course was run with 65 Karen pre service teachers from the North KTTC. In the intensive course, lecturing, class discussions, group works and teaching demonstration activities were employed. For data collection, the conceptual understanding test was administered to all 65 participating Karen pre service teachers after finishing the intensive course. In addition, the lesson plans

developed by the Karen pre service teachers during the intensive course were used for content analysis and the observation form was also used during the teaching demonstrations. For data analysis, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used for the test scores from the conceptual understanding test as quantitative data analysis whereas content analysis technique (Philipp M., 2000) was used for the data from the developed lesson plans and observation form as qualitative data analysis.

## RESULTS

The results shown below are presented in two parts as follows:

Part 1 Karen pre service teachers' conceptual understandings about educational philosophy, learning theory and curriculum

TABLE 1 Karen pre service teachers' conceptual understandings about educational philosophy, learning theory and curriculum

Test Score	True score (/40)	(%)
Highest	30.5	76
Average	25.5	64
Lowest	22.0	55

## Part 2 Karen pre service teachers' teaching



Fig. 1 Lesson design and planning



Fig. 2 Teaching demonstration

## CONCLUSIONS

The results show that Karen pre service teachers have conceptual understandings at middle to high level, ranging from 55 % to 76 %, and, 64 % on average. In addition, the results of content analysis from the developed lesson plans and their teaching show that their teaching was driven by the pragmatism philosophy which focus on learning by doing and the most referred learning theory was constructivism which teaching always started with stimulating students' prior knowledge. As such, this can suggest that training and providing Karen pre service teachers with key fundamental understandings about

educational philosophy, learning theory and curriculum is very important. The training programs should be adjusted by taking the results into consideration.

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