



## Development of locally responsive curriculum on Mekong studies: Theorizing Mekong as method for curriculum inquiry and praxis

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### Abstract

The article aimed to develop locally responsive curriculum on Mekong studies based on research and development (R & D) methodology. The objectives aimed to (1) study local knowledge required for developing locally responsive curriculum on Mekong studies and the concept of curriculum development and pedagogical practices of local knowledge at the secondary education level; and (2) develop locally responsive curriculum on Mekong studies and conduct pilot implementation in authentic contexts. The findings indicated that: (1) local knowledge consisted of narratives and local history of the regional Mekong community and interrelationship with narratives, tales, legends, folklores, topography, ecological nature-culture and community's way of being of local people and relationship between humans and non-human and more-than-human worlds. The scope and sequence were designed through theme-based approach emphasizing community funds of knowledge related to self, family and community to broader regional, national and global dimensions; and (2) The curriculum consisted of the importance and necessity, principle, goals, course details, content structure, guidelines for instructional method, assessment frameworks, instructional materials and resources and supplementary documents. The curriculum and supplementary documents were validated for appropriateness and feasibility at high level ( $\bar{x} = 4.45$ ) and the highest level ( $\bar{x} = 4.52$ ) respectively. The curriculum was then piloted in authentic contexts both in terms of thematic knowledge and pedagogical practices, employing Mekong as method as foundations for curriculum inquiry. The result of pilot process was at high level in terms of feasibility and appropriation and was sufficient for pedagogical practices in secondary schools in the Mekong area.

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## Introduction

Since the promulgation of the basic education curriculum in 1990, locally responsive curriculum has been the intention of Thailand in reforming education from its core principle, providing an arena for local practitioners to participate in curriculum development to be in line with local context-specific regarding social capitals, knowledge, culture, wisdom and ways of being as well as socio-cultural, economic and practical aspects of community. It also became evident when the National Education Act (NEA) in 1999 was promulgated, requiring individuals, families, communities, local governments, private organizations, professional coalitions, establishments and other social and educational institutions to engage in curriculum development addressing the problems and needs of the community and society. This is provisional and promising change for schools to respond to community funds of knowledge while encouraging schools to connect and negotiate global western modern knowledge with local wisdom as a form of glocalization (Jungck & Kajornsin, 2003).

Locally responsive curriculum is consistent with the context of each locality. It becomes more apparent especially in border areas where transnational territorial boundaries and diversities of people, flows of capitals, economic exchanges and socio-cultural contestation exist (Sapphasuk et al., 2021). In the case of Amphoe Chiang Khong, Chiang Rai in Thai-Lao border area, it consists of at least 9 different ethnic groups, such as Khon Muang (local people), Lue, Hmong, Mien, Akha, Lahu, Khmu, Lao and Chinese Yunnan, etc., scattered in various locales. Ethnic communities are more increasingly diverse in the areas adjacent to Laos, including Rim Khong and Wiang Subdistrict. In addition, such diversity will increase in the future due to the state policies determining Chiang Khong as a border special economic development zone.

Having realized the importance of such issues, the researcher aims to study the locally responsive curriculum development of a secondary school in Chiang Rai province. The researcher's positionalities are both researcher and co-developer of the curriculum, collecting local knowledge required for curriculum development including local history and community capitals regarding culture, language, people, place and narrative along the Mekong River and presenting it as a pilot case study for implementation that can be employed as curriculum framework and guideline for developing learning units and pedagogical practices for praxis-oriented teachers

who will be connecting community funds of knowledge for enhancing civic literacy in students in regional secondary schools in the Mekong area (Ross, 2018).

Regarding the organization of learning units and pedagogical practices in each local context-specific in secondary schools, teachers will be curriculum-decision makers and gatekeepers based upon their reflective decision-making of what knowledge is of most worth to their students by designing their own learning units, instructional approaches and selecting community funds of knowledge and utilizing them as additional details in addition to common knowledge prescribed in the official curriculum standards.

This work was conducted to develop locally responsive curriculum on Mekong studies (hereafter referred as *Mekong curriculum*). The curriculum emerged from mutual partnership between the social studies, religion and culture department, together with Rak Chiang Khong NGOs, drafting curriculum framework in early 2017 at Ban Mekong school (fictitious name). The objective was to provide youth residing in Chiang Khong District and the Mekong region with knowledge, understanding, and consciousness of local history, community funds of knowledge and community ways of being of the Mekong. Students will be taught respect for nature and faith in the equality of humans and natural ecosystems in the Mekong, which is an essential foundation for socio-cultural, economic and political changes taking place in this region. Based on the concept of Mekong as Method, which places emphasis upon context-specific and local-global dimensions of situated practices, this kind of knowledge production and its implication for school curriculum development lies in significance of positionality of local people as this is the determinant that makes people's worldview different. The production of Mekong knowledge and culturally relevant issues are more subjective and involve partial perspectives taking rather than mainstream official knowledge, implying that local knowledge tends to emphasizes locally and socio-culturally situated knowledge (Bowers, 2009; Gruenewald & Smith, 2010).

In this light, local knowledge as the foundation for Mekong curriculum contains three main principles: (1) the relationship between humans and natural as well as ecological world; (2) the interconnection between humans and other humans; and (3) the interrelationship between humans and non-human and more-than-human worlds. Local knowledge also implies local ways of being and living as indicated in school the principle that values respect for nature and faith in the equality of humans and natural ecosystems in the Mekong (Kincheloe,

2006). It also presents a reconceptualist perspective on citizenship and challenges the nation-centric and patriotic citizenship conception that places emphasis on territorial and geographical boundaries for defining citizenship (Brehm & Kitamura, 2022; Kennedy, 2021; Lim & Apple, 2019). Rather, the curriculum focuses on cultural citizenship based on equal membership of diverse socio-cultural communities and equality in everyday life, emphasizing the dynamic interactions of people in the regional Mekong River in Thai-Lao border area.

The Mekong curriculum will be instrumental in cultivating a sense of place, place conscious and civic literacy in students that is fundamental to the development of local, regional, national and global citizenship and identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. More importantly, the curriculum will be a democratic and transformative space for local people mobilizing grassroot social movements through collective solidarity by sharing community funds of knowledge, capitals, memories and narratives (Gruenewald & Smith, 2010). By doing so, the school as a site for knowledge production and curriculum-decision making will be a strong and healthy foundation for the local community to cultivate a sense of pride as well as embracing diverse human and nature-culture homeland, committing to a strong sense of active citizenship and paving concrete efforts for building sustainable communities in the contemporary and future moment.

### **Objectives**

This study aimed to develop locally responsive curriculum on Mekong studies, which contained specific objectives as follows:

1. To study local knowledge required for developing locally responsive curriculum on Mekong studies and the concept of curriculum development and pedagogical practices of local knowledge at the secondary education level.
2. To develop locally responsive curriculum on Mekong studies and conduct pilot implementation in authentic contexts.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this section, the notion of place-based education and its relationship to locally responsive curriculum is briefly explained to shed light on how these concepts provide practical implications for the curriculum development. The details are illustrated below.

*Place-based education:* place-based education (PBE) aims to practice against the divided categorization of

theories and real practices from the lived world outside the increasing disconnected schooling. The utilization of PBE in schooling practices has been rationalized on several aspects. First, it aims to create opportunities for young people and teachers with a sense of agency to hands-on experience about real life outside schools and recognize the interdependency among human and nature-culture environment and socio-ecological wellbeing of the communities in which they reside. Second, it empowers their learning through place-oriented pedagogy and cultivates them through culturally relevant knowledge and practices to participate in deliberative democratic actions. Third, it aims to reconnect schooling with communities as part of a solidarity effort to empower students' civic participation (McInerney et al., 2011).

*Locally responsive curriculum:* locally responsive curriculum and diverse forms of culturally responsive and culturally relevant curriculum, knowledge and pedagogy provides various pedagogical contributions to young citizens. First, it provides place and community-based learning that focuses on social-cultural, historical and environmental contexts surrounding one's own place, which subsequently extends to a broader scope of knowledge relevant not only to individual but also to community, region, nation and world. Second, students will be cultivated to a sense of place, recognize place consciousness, take part in civic responsibility as active citizens and utilize knowledge, disposition and skills acquired through curriculum to solve problems arising in their local community. Third, it advocates for curriculum and pedagogical practices that include constructivist activities allowing students to conduct in-depth interview, field visit, and project-based learning for deep intellectual inquiry. What is more important is students getting to know more about themselves, which leads to building critical and loving consciousness of the local community (Gaudelli & Wylie, 2012; Gruenewald & Smith, 2010; Turner & Donnelly, 2013).

Locally responsive curriculum should be context-specific, locally-led organized and able to be adjusted consistent with local contexts, especially by legitimizing selections of community funds of knowledge and the integration of the community's ways of knowing into the classroom (Steinberg, 2010). It is also a theory-praxis space to develop active citizens who are conscious of critical and challenging contexts of the Mekong river. Thus, by employing Mekong as Method in curriculum and teaching, it is a promising approach to address complex problems related to knowledge production in a sustainable and equitable way.

## Methodology

This study was designed based on research and development (R&D) methodology. There were two principal processes starting from documentary and field research by placing emphasis upon qualitative approach to curriculum as indicated in step 1 and then utilizing some elements of action research to design and develop curriculum with co-teachers and local practitioners as shown in step 2 (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The details in each step are described in depth as follows.

*Step 1: Study of Local Knowledge Required for Developing Locally Responsive Curriculum on Mekong Studies and The Concept of Curriculum Development and Pedagogical Practices of Local Knowledge at The Secondary Education Level*

1. Study of local knowledge required for curriculum development, local history and community capitals regarding culture, language, people, place and narrative along the Mekong River, Chiang Rai Province.

1) Academic texts, research works and archives from the office of non-formal education, Chiang Rai provincial cultural council related to local history of communities along the Mekong river, seminar reports on local history, culture and society of Chiang Rai and the local curriculum framework of Chiang Rai ESAO, and documents related to locally responsive curriculum development as well as specific local contexts of the Mekong River community were scrutinized and synthesized. The obtained study results were synthesized in order to design a curriculum framework for Mekong curriculum. Thus, a semi-structured interview protocol was formulated, consisting of the following queries: (1) What were the backgrounds of local knowledge of communities along the Mekong river and what would be important aspects of such knowledge? (2) How was the local knowledge of communities relevant to local history and community capitals regarding culture, language, people, place and narrative along the Mekong River? (3) How did local knowledge of communities along the Mekong River relate to more-than-human resources, ecological environment, landscape, climate, transportation routes, rivers and canals, and rainfall? How were these factors related to human and more-than-human society at different levels, and how did they determine the community ways of being? and (4) In what ways was the local knowledge of communities along the Mekong River as context-specific

community, conducive to the development of Mekong curriculum?

2) Data were collected by interviews conducted with local knowledge experts living in the communities along the Mekong River and local practitioners about local history of the community and contexts concerning ways of life, wisdom, language and literature, legends, tales, beliefs and stories. In addition, data were collected from related documents on local history and regional development in the Mekong region. Grounding upon the process from interviews and document analysis, conclusions to determine the scope and sequence of contents for Mekong curriculum development for the next step were made.

2. A study of the concept of curriculum development and pedagogical practices of local knowledge at the secondary education level.

1) Examine documents, academic textbooks, and research works related to local community studies and pedagogical practices of local community studies published in academic journals, textbooks and research reports. The obtained study results were used to synthesize contents in order to design Mekong curriculum framework, scope and sequence and pedagogical practices in local community studies. From that, semi-structured interview protocol was formulated consisting of the following queries: (1) What would be the main principles of local community studies at the secondary education level? (2) What would be the scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum? and (3) What would be the approach for enacting pedagogical practices such as instructional and learning activities according to Mekong curriculum?

2) Data were collected by interviews conducted with specialists in curriculum theory, social studies and citizenship education and professional praxis-oriented secondary teachers specializing in curriculum development and teaching through local community contexts and place-based learning. From the interviews, conclusions to determine the framework for Mekong curriculum development in the next step were made.

*Step 2: Development of Locally Responsive Curriculum on Mekong Studies and Conducting Pilot Implementation in Authentic Contexts*

1. The process of curriculum design is illustrated below.

1) The researcher summarized information obtained from document analysis and semi-structured interview carried out in step 1 including the study of

local knowledge required for curriculum development, local history and community capitals regarding culture, language, people, place and narrative along the Mekong River and the study of the concept of curriculum development and pedagogical practices of local knowledge at the secondary education level. The researcher analyzed data by drawing conclusions from content analysis, the results of which were used to determine the curriculum framework, scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum, and guidelines for pedagogical practices. The social studies substance indicated in the national core curriculum 2008, scope and sequence of history, economics, citizenship and sciences from learning standards of the national curriculum, textbooks and research works related to school curriculum through key issues and knowledge of local community studies to determine curriculum framework, scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum, and guidelines for

pedagogical practices in local community studies were scrutinized.

2) The scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum, and guidelines for pedagogical practices in local community studies from a combination of two curriculum approaches, namely, chronological approach and theme-based approach are constructed. Then, the scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum, and guidelines for pedagogical practices in local community studies are considered for determining the content and guidelines for teaching and learning in each level from secondary grades 1–6. Details are demonstrated in **Table 1**. The scope and sequence and guidelines for pedagogical practices were in line with the principle of vertical and horizontal organization, students' prior experiences and the balance between the breadth, depth, complexity and feasibility of subject matter (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009).

**Table 1** Scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum from secondary grades 1–6

Secondary grades 1–6	Thematic ideas	Scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum
1	individual development, socio-cultural identities	Daily life events related to chronological learning of local history in the Mekong area, personal history, family and important achievements of ancestors, a study of historical evidence from family objects such as ancestor photos, family photos, and antiques bestowed from ancestors, etc. school history, a comparative study of the evolution and changes from the past to present during a period of not more than 10–15 years, important local historical events in the lower Mekong, and community relations with Thai state.
2	development, movement, socio-cultural interactions	Biographies and works of important local figures both in the past and present, such as religious leaders, community leaders, and local government officials, etc. The study of moral and ethical behavior as a good example, local history focusing on comparative study of changes in environment, such as residential features, religious structures, schools, hospitals, roads and recreation resources, etc. The period of development of historical period in the Mekong River area, the North and neighboring territories from the past to present. Changes in the way of life of communities in the regional Mekong in terms of settlement, religion, education, politics, administration and economy.
3	time, continuity & change	Ways of telling history from contemporary local figures (simplified) about minority history, ethnic groups, local wisdom woven in legends, folktales, folk literature, rituals, beliefs to make sense of local history and develop a sense of pride and consciousness. Important events related to the living of people in the Mekong River area, various types of historical evidence, and related resources. Settlement and community way of life in the Mekong. Factors influencing the settlement and development of important local communities, cultural traditions with ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in the area.

**Table 1** Continued

Secondary grades 1–6	Thematic ideas	Scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum
4	development, socio-cultural & structural changes  power, authority & nation-states	Historical approaches and different periods in the Mekong area, northern region as well as adjacent territories. Human development in the Mekong, northern region and adjacent territories in the prehistory and history. The founding of major kingdoms in the past. Types of local evidence of the Mekong River for understanding current social changes. The settlement and development of prehistoric and historic humans as shown in historical and archeological evidence in the Mekong River area, northern region and adjacent territories 
5	citizenship, civic & practical aspects  	Written and non-written local evidence of the Mekong area, local knowledge from local historical writings regarding Mekong River and northern local history unveiling the coexistence of local people with cultural diversity. Influences of Chinese and Burmese civilizations, and ethnic cultures in the historical period of the Mekong River area. Developments of important communities in ancient times and pre-modern period appearing in historical and archaeological evidence in the Mekong area, northern region and adjacent territories. Important events related to the lives of people in the Mekong and the community-culture movements. 
6	construction, expansion, and exchange of economic-driven issues  science, technology, invention & innovation 	Historical approaches to local studies in the Mekong area, northern region and neighboring territories. Social, economic and political relations in the area. The Mekong, northern region as well as adjacent territories with different regions of Thailand; the development of the history of the Mekong, northern region, and neighboring territories in the Rattanakosin period. Biographies and works of important people in local development in the Rattanakosin period that helps understanding the concept of change and continuity. Understanding time; from the past, present, to the future. Important events related to the lives of people in the Mekong River area and community/regional-culture movements. 
	global interconnections and exchange 	

2 The process of curriculum development and implementation was illustrated from the initial to final process. Thus, the researcher proceeded as follows:

1) The scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum, and guidelines for pedagogical practices in local community studies constructed by the researcher were used as input for developing Mekong curriculum, together with 3 experts on local knowledge of communities along the Mekong River, 3 secondary teachers who teach history, social studies, citizenship and sciences, and 5 student leaders, using group discussion process, in which the researcher and co-social studies

teachers mutually led the process. The result of the discussion process made possible the theme-based curriculum in the form of Mekong curriculum, which is the construction of additional subject as part of school-based curriculum. Then, preparation of curriculum documents took the following components into account: the importance and necessity, principle, goals, course details, content structure, guidelines for instructional method, assessment frameworks, instructional materials and resources and supplementary documents. This process was the preparation of various documents to demonstrate the developed curriculum so that teachers

and relevant local practitioners could employ the components of practical pedagogical activities in authentic settings. Supplementary documents include course manual, outlining an explanation of teaching and learning approaches, and learning units and lesson plans.

2) The quality of Mekong curriculum and supplementary documents were verified by 3 curriculum specialists including university professor, educational supervisor and senior master teacher for its feasibility and appropriation. It was found that the curriculum and supplementary documents had overall quality at higher level or above. Moreover, the curriculum was conduct pilot implementation to consider the practical possibility in authentic contexts. By doing so, the curriculum was implemented with 26 secondary grade 5<sup>th</sup> students of Ban Mekong school (fictitious name) in the academic year 2022. The results indicated that the curriculum had feasible, appropriate and possible components for pedagogical practices. At the final process, the researcher and co-social studies teachers analyzed the results of pilot implementation. The results from pedagogical practices based on the curriculum implementation, and suggestions to the curriculum were examined and summarized. This process finally provided constructive feedback to curriculum decision-making at the school-based and practical classroom levels.

## Results and Discussion

Based upon the methodology aforementioned, the research findings and discussion would be accordingly demonstrated in depth as follows.

### *Local Knowledge Required for Developing Locally Responsive Curriculum on Mekong Studies and the Concept of Curriculum Development and Pedagogical Practices of Local Knowledge at The Secondary Education Level*

1. After examining local knowledge required for curriculum development, local history and community capitals regarding culture, language, people, place and narrative along the Mekong River, the researcher found local knowledge consisted of narratives and local history of the regional Mekong community and interrelationship with narratives, tales, legends, folklores, topography, ecological nature-culture and community's way of being of local people and relationship between humans (local people who depend on the Mekong River, women, ethnic groups, government authorities and state capitals who

perceive the Mekong River as inputs, etc.) and non-human and more-than-human worlds (dams, irrigation technology, ecosystems, fishing tools, rivers, plants, aquatic animals, fish, rapids, soil, color of water, fishing caves, fisherman's quarters, documents, records, as well as social media and Facebook, etc.), all of which are locally situated in Mekong bioregional sphere.

2. Regarding the concept of curriculum development and pedagogical practices of local knowledge, it was found that the main principles of local community studies supported students to inquire into community funds of knowledge and socio-cultural, historical and environmental contexts surrounding themselves, based on place-based evidence. This will be constructed through curriculum and place-oriented pedagogical practices allowing students to conduct in-depth interview, observation, field visit, and project-based learning. In this light, the Mekong curriculum could be organized by two approaches: chronological approach and theme-based approach. In organizing the scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum, the researcher employed a theme-based approach, emphasizing knowledge construction related to the self, family, community, and the locality the students live in as core principle. The local community studies began with the study of community funds of knowledge and then expanded to broader regional, national and global, aiming to cultivate students with mediated essential characteristics of local-global nexus concept of global citizenship. This approach corresponded to principal concepts in educating junior and senior high school students to have democratic and global citizenship competence grounded in myriad diverse socio-cultural, historical and geo-spatial locations of identities (Gaudelli, 2009; Kennedy, 2021; Turner & Donnelly, 2013). **Table 1**, as indicated above, demonstrates ten unifying thematic ideas. These ten unifying thematic ideas represented different approaches that could be utilized to the pedagogical practices of key ideas and conceptual understandings across all secondary grades 1-6.

Based on the scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum aforementioned, they were consistent with ten unifying thematic ideas of (1) individual development, socio-cultural identities; (2) development, movement, socio-cultural interactions; (3) time, continuity & change, geographical locations; (4) people & environmental ecosystem, development; (5) socio-cultural & structural changes; (6) power, authority & nation-states; (7) citizenship, civic & practical aspects; (8) construction, expansion, and exchange of economic-driven issues; (9) science, technology, invention & innovation;

and (10) global interconnections and exchange. These thematic ideas were the foundation for scope and sequence of Mekong curriculum and would be an important focus for curriculum development by teachers. As students expand their learning of these topics and relate them not only with individual but also to broader regional, national and global dimensions, they will understand more of the changes, continuity and trajectories of people, groups, events, situations and narratives occurring in their lives, families, schools, communities and the socio-cultural, economic and political contexts at the community, regional, national and global interconnections (Gaudelli & Wylie, 2012; National Council for the Social Studies, 2008).

After constructing appropriated guidelines in pedagogical practices of local community studies, students would be encouraged to practice place-conscious learning by exploring community funds of knowledge and relevant narratives to their social-cultural, historical and environmental contexts, which subsequently extends to a broader scope of knowledge relevant not only to the individual but also to the community, region, nation and the world. The step for organizing teaching and learning activities should include the identification of issues contextualized from both within and outside the local community based on in-depth inquiries, use of historical methods for data collection, inquiry-based approach for historical evidence, selection and correlation of evidence, and presentation of narratives being researched.

The findings of local knowledge required for curriculum development, local history and community capitals regarding culture, language, people, place and narrative along the Mekong River indicated that community funds of knowledge and local knowledge were consistent with the concept of doing local history. By doing so, it provided a deliberative and democratic space for historical narratives of local and ordinary people and community funds of knowledge in small-scale locations to be recognized by the public and empowered for the common good (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Marino & Crocco, 2012). Due to the history of internal colonization and uneven power relations between the modern state development and local grassroots cultural revitalization, local history will help reveal and empower the voices and identities of marginalized people who share nuanced identities regarding language, ethnicity, religion and culture with the general public in Thailand and the Mekong region (Jatuporn, 2023).

In addition, the aim of local community studies is to understand the diversity of community's way of being, capitals and narratives of diverse communities locally

and globally. Therefore, the scope of "local" in local community studies is not static and rigid as that depends on what nuanced dimensions teachers and students aim to use as unit of analysis. By doing so, teachers as praxis-oriented curriculum developer will be working in mutual partnership and in solidarity with other colleagues, students, local practitioners, and educators to search for their community funds of knowledge and commit to community revitalization, resembled to the source of vital spirit and capitals of the community inherited from their previous and elder generations (Au, 2012; Plá & Ross, 2022). It is a challenging task for educators and students to study such narratives and analyze them critically. Such corresponds to the curiosity of students since primary to secondary grade levels. The knowledge gained from locally responsive curriculum becomes the fabric of collective heritages and solidarity woven together by local and ordinary people in order to mobilize grassroot social movements, building sustainable communities in the contemporary and future moment.

#### *Development of Locally Responsive Curriculum on Mekong Studies and Conducting Pilot Implementation in Authentic Contexts*

1. The results of Mekong curriculum development concerned with certain elements including the importance and necessity, principle, goals, course details, content structure, guidelines for instructional method, assessment frameworks, instructional materials and resources and supplementary curricula documents. The supplementary documents consisted of 2 parts: (1) locally responsive curriculum on Mekong studies for secondary grades 1–6 students, and (2) course manual, consisting of descriptions of teaching and learning methods, learning units, and lesson plans, in which details regarding teaching, contents and evaluation were prescribed.

2. The results of curriculum and supplementary documents were verified by 3 curriculum specialists including university professor, educational supervisor and senior master teacher. The developed curriculum was generally appropriate at high level ( $\bar{x} = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ), and supplementary documents were generally appropriate at the highest level ( $\bar{x} = 4.52$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ). In addition, the results of pilot implementation indicated that the curriculum was at high level in terms of feasibility and appropriation and was sufficient in pedagogical practices in secondary schools in the Mekong area.

After the Mekong curriculum was finalized, the researcher and co-curriculum teachers mutually drafted the Mekong curriculum for secondary grade 5,

as an example for pilot curriculum implementation. The drafted curriculum contained elements such as the importance and necessity, principle, goals, course details, content structure, guidelines for instructional method, assessment guidelines, instructional material and resources and supplementary documents. The results of the synthesis were combined with the concepts used in this research, including the guideline for locally responsive curriculum development, organizing place-conscious learning, and local youth-led activism learning, to define details in each component of the curriculum and to prepare relevant supplementary documents.

In addition, the results of the curriculum validation examined by curriculum specialists indicated that the curriculum was appropriate at high to highest levels, and could be utilized as pilot implementation to achieve curriculum objectives. This is the result of the developed curriculum according to research and development (R&D) approach emanating from the synthesis of mainstream curriculum model and integrating with interpretative, deliberative and critical-oriented approaches to curriculum reconceptualization (Pinar, 2006; Schubert, 2009) as well as its implication for curriculum development based on community funds of knowledge and community ways of being of the Mekong. By employing Mekong as Method as frame of reference and methodological conceptualization of curriculum, this method provided educators a reconceptualist lens to interpret the relationship between humans and nature, interconnection between humans and humans, and relationship between humans and non-human and more-than-human worlds. This also attempts to legitimize and position ontological critique and local ways of being and co-production in curriculum-decision making that respect nature and aim towards revitalizing the cultural commons for the equality of humans and natural ecosystems (Bowers, 2009; Kincheloe, 2006; Ng-A-Fook, 2010).

After conducting pilot curriculum implementation, the results demonstrated that the curriculum had feasibility and appropriation and was sufficient in pedagogical practices in secondary schools in the Mekong area. One of the critical points that the researcher discerned from actual classroom observation of co-teachers, who utilized and taught based on the Mekong curriculum, revealed that co-teachers conducted instructional methods based on thematic concepts, while to some degree recontextualizing those concepts through how knowledge was selectively appropriated, how it was logically sequenced and how it was appropriately paced

in classroom instruction via discussion of critical issues, case studies and using authentic places in the community by connecting Mekong as Method that valued Mekong community funds of knowledge, marginalized narratives and community-culture movement of local people. The pedagogical practices of teachers emphasizing the study of community-culture movement is grounded upon place-based approach that community is a foundation for development and educational provision that does not imitate an Anglo-western development model. It proposes alternative possibilities for development and education that does not destroy or disintegrate the local community. Rather, it turns back to revitalize, respect values and dignity of traditional culture of the local community. Therefore, the contemporary community-culture movement is rather critical than just providing space for community funds of knowledge and local culture. From an epistemological standpoint, the community-culture movement is considered an influential social movement as it is a movement that changes the mainstream knowledge, from the point of views of academics, intellectuals and technocratic leaders mostly from the center to local citizens. In this sense, community funds of knowledge and local knowledge are essential foundations of legitimate knowledge. Mekong as Method is thus both theoretical conceptualization and pedagogical praxis that open up new languages and other possibilities for critical inquiry in curriculum, co-creation of knowledge in schooling, and a framework for education provision in the regional Mekong area. Mekong as Method is a means of gaining respect and acceptance in diverse cultures and ways of being and living of local worlds as equally important to the mainstream culture in the modernized urban society.

The Mekong River, as source of community funds of knowledge, plays an instrumental position in illuminating the relationship among humans and non-human/more-than-human subjects, societies, cultures and natural ecosystems. Humans should no longer be at the center of the analysis of interrelationship between human, culture, society and natural environments. Rather, the center should be shifted to nature-culture because within the network of actors on the Mekong, all beings involved and co-existing within the social world determine roles, powers, positions and responsibilities based on nuanced interests and values for the Mekong. From the past to the present and coming future, all these active actors, whether human or non-human and more-than-human subjects, to some degree, reconstitute one another for legitimated knowledge and meaning-making of the Mekong. This concept is consistent with the embedded foundations

of locally responsive curriculum as well as diverse forms of culturally responsive/relevant curriculum and pedagogy, referring to the integration of community funds of knowledge, capitals and narratives traditionally marginalized into the mainstream public schooling as demonstrated in a call for revitalizing the commons and returning healthy and democratic education to the local community in Thailand, Southeast and East Asia, the United States, Canada and globally (Anui & Arphattananon, 2021; Bowers, 2009; Brehm & Kitamura, 2022; Gruenewald & Smith, 2010; Ng-A-Fook, 2010).

## Recommendation

Through the space for locally responsive curriculum, the knowledge was conventionally reproduced through pedagogical methods to construct localized capitals. Although this type of curriculum and teaching was useful to help preserve precious local traditions and also turned those products into monetary values, it was part of locally responsive curriculum that explicitly valued market-based oriented achievements for serving educational policy initiatives driven by neoliberalism (Torres, 2002), with less consideration on democratic and deliberative aspects of community funds of knowledge. In addition, critics argue that PBE is often under-theorized regarding suppositions about the definitions of place, identification and divergence, lacking a critical lens due to the limitations of curricula and teaching under the pressure of state-mandated standards and accountability reform, and fails to interconnect between globalization and localization issues that are very important in recognizing the roots and outcomes of socio-political, economic and environmental dilemmas; especially, the limitations to grassroot local activism for transforming communities are seriously raised by PBE educators. By creating a more democratic justice space in education and curriculum, praxis-oriented teachers who will be connecting community funds of knowledge for enhancing civic literacy in students are relatively legitimized to provide nuanced theme-based concepts about their own community based on their critical reflectivity and decision-making (Plá & Ross, 2022; Ross, 2018).

## Conclusion

Grounded upon the local knowledge consisting of narratives and local history of the regional Mekong community and interrelationship with narratives, tales,

legends, folklores, topography, ecological nature-culture and community's way of being of local people and relationship between humans and non-human and more-than-human worlds, the Mekong curriculum was constructed through a theme-based approach emphasizing community funds of knowledge related to the self, family and community to broader regional, national and global dimensions. By doing so, developing locally responsive curriculum in situated community contexts is a key instrumental for reconnecting community's ways of knowing and funds of knowledge into meaningful literacy in schools. Locally responsive curriculum is thus defined as praxis space in socio-spatial localities which are context-specific and globally-locally situated. This is considered potential strengths derived from the Mekong curriculum and by theorizing Mekong as Method for curriculum inquiry. This kind of knowledge production can be a third space for curriculum making where knowledge is constructed somehow in between and not fully determined by any status quo and hegemonic set of traditions, which is the ultimate goal of locally responsive curriculum and grassroot democratic educational reforms at local, regional, national and global dimensions.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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