

A Critical Analysis of my School's Educational Philosophy and Best Practices

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Executive Summary

In this assignment I present the educational philosophy and best practices of Yuwapat Elementary School Nakhon Sawan. Apparent in the school's vision-mission statement, elaborated on their homepage and reflected in their curriculum, the school adheres to constructivism, a student-centered educational philosophy. It aims to prepare the students to be successful individuals in an ever-changing world. This is why there is great emphasis on self-learning and independent studying. Learners are the creators of meaning and knowledge, and I bring up some examples to support that. I believe that by the end of this assignment the reader can see that Yuwapat Elementary School is a real twenty-first century school.

Vision-mission statement of Yuwapat Elementary School, Nakhon Sawan:

Ready for the World

"New choice in education For the new world "

We believe that every child has potential. Has its own characteristics

Can develop to the highest success in his individual life

Our aim is to create a learning environment.

And facilitate the development of the child according to the aptitudes of

each person, creating powerful learning from himself

With a continuous process step

(Taken and translated from the school's website.)

Yuwapat Elementary School Nakhon Sawan applies **constructivism** as its educational philosophy. It aims to prepare the students to be successful individuals in an ever-changing world. Constructivism posits that students can not be taught at their desks from the front of the classroom. Knowledge can not be given to them. Instead, students develop personal meaning through hands-on, activity-based teaching and learning. Learners are the creators of meaning and knowledge. Learning involves inventing ideas rather than mechanically accumulating facts. With learner-centered instructions the teacher provides the students with experiences that allow them to pose questions, research, investigate, imagine and invent. The teacher's role is only to facilitate this process by creating effective learning situations rather than lecturing students.

Personal meaning is the best way for students to connect with the material. Critical thinking and the understanding of bigger ideas are essential.

In Yuwapat Elementary school the classrooms are decorated with the students' names, photos and birthdays, colourful diary pages and works and crafts. These are all attributes of a constructivist, student-centered, democratic environment in which students can reflect and reach new understandings. It is also a sign of a clear sense of ownership of the classroom.

In the school the focus is on students setting and dictating the pace. Thus it is clear that it is not a test-based curriculum. Self-learning and independent studying are emphasized. Self-discovery is essential in the learning process. „Who is the best teacher you will ever have? – Yourself!”

In Prathom 1 one of the first dialogues students have to learn concerns their date of birth. It is not simply an English lesson, because the vast majority of the kids at this age does not know when they were born. So with this dialogue they don't just learn new English sentences, but they memorise their date of birth too.

In a similar fashion, they have a list of daily questions. (These are actually colourful cards with pictures on them.) Every day at the end of the class we go through some cards and the students have to answer questions. For example: What is your name? Where do you come from? Where do you live? What is the name of your school? What is the name of your class? (Classes in Yuwapat Elementary School don't have numbers, but are named after the planets and then are colour coded, thus the students learn the names of the planets effortlessly throughout the years. I for example teach Mercury Green, Mercury Yellow and Mercury Blue.) How do you come to school? What is your favourite subject? What is your favourite food? What fruit do you like? What animals do you like? What is the weather like today? What day is it today? Who is your friend? What sports do you like? What do you want to be? Etc...

As another example, in Prathom 3 already they are made familiar with reading the time. It is a great thing because at this age their cognitive abilities are mature enough to understand the concept of time. (Two- and three-years-olds' understanding of time is mainly limited to „now and not now”. Five- and six-year-olds can grasp the ideas of past, present, and future. Seven- to ten-year-olds can use clocks and calendars.)

In Prathom 5 and 6 students are given topics, and they have to prepare themselves for the next lesson. In class, it is the students who lead the lesson, the teacher only facilitates the process. It is called topic-based learning that takes place in discussion classes. Given topics are expanded upon.

Extracurricular activities in Yuwapat Elementary School include sports day, sports leagues, cooking club, dance club. Students are prepared for important festivals, and they can also learn Chinese dance performances for Chinese New Year that they perform for the city's spectators. They also learn about social responsibility, because there are community projects every year. They usually raise money or collect donations for poor temple schools, orphanages or hospitals. Sometimes the parents buy the crafts that their kids made for the school, thus supporting these projects.

Each year has a theme too, in the frame of which students of the school focus on particular aspects of life. Last year the theme was „Our planet”, and the students were made aware of the importance of environmental protection. How to collect, reuse and recycle garbage, making sure to close the tap and use only as much water as necessary, turning down the air-conditioning, and switching off the lights.

I believe Yuwapat Elementary School Nakhon Sawan does a great job at developing independent, self-reliant learners, who can keep developing their skills through their entire

lifetime, because they learn self-learning and independent studying. Self-discovery can make the entire process thrilling and energizing, and learners absorb democratic values and critical thinking. A true mission for a twenty-first century school.