The importance of the policy education essay

Education, Importance of Education

In a growing economy like UAE, there is a vital need for numerous numbers of policies to regulate this growth and cope with it. The direct effect of this growth is increase in the number of expatriates compared to nationals; those expatriates are from diverse cultural backgrounds that have their impact on the educational system in UAE and the increase in demand for new educational policies to deal with the problem of cultural diversities in schools. The NSBA (National School Boards Association) defines policy this way:

" When we speak about School Board policy we speak about ideas with the power to set directions for the school system to bring about prudent action by the administration, the staff, and the board itself. A soundly constructed policy will...tell the administration enough so that it can get working on the task in accordance with the board's wishes..." " Another definition is that a policy approved by the board describes what should be done while implementation procedures designed and carried out by administrators describe how things will be done". (VSBA, 2010)

The goals of new educational policies are to provide all children with an equal educational opportunity under the increasing pressure of diversities within classrooms. The ideal policy in general, as Bennett (2010) said, " must include the responsibility are required changes in our methods of thinking and approaching education in such a way that all people are respected. More intercultural understanding and an awareness of social and global knowledge will need to be actively incorporated into our educational curriculums. Not only is knowledge of other cultures required but also creative and critical thinking will be developed to create new policies involving equalities in

multicultural education" . In UAE, we can't say that there is one single policy to deal with the problem of increasing in diversities at schools in UAE, and each school has its own policy to deal with this problem.

The importance of the policy

Tharp (1994) states that " The increasing diversity of cultural and ethnic groups in schools has led to a parallel increase in concern for the implications of this demographic shift for education" . Most of the schools in UAE are focusing on culture in their policies; they are discussing how to create suitable educational culture in the classrooms and friendly atmosphere outside the classrooms to increase levels of interactions between the students. Cultural diversity is considered a major concern for many schools and it differs from school to another based on the types of students they have, and from what cultural backgrounds they come. Cultural diversity and Multicultural education is an idea, an approach to school reform, and a movement for equity between students, social justice, and diverse cultural recognition that is needed in order to adapt with the globalization movement. " Specialists within diverse cultural education emphasize different components and cultural groups. However, a significant degree of consensus exists within the field regarding its major principles, concepts, and goals. A major goal of multicultural education is to restructure schools so that all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse nation and world" (Multicultural Education, 2010). Good and idealistic policy will increase the focus on cultural diversity will help schools in maintaining educational equity for members of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups,

and to facilitate their participation as critical and reflective citizens in an inclusive national civic culture, but is there an existence of such policies at schools in UAE?

The awareness of cultural diversity concept in education tries to provide students with educational experiences that enable them to maintain commitments to their community cultures as well as acquire the knowledge, skills, and cultural capital needed to function in the national civic culture and community.

Policies at private schools in Dubai

There are many policies related to cultural diversities at private schools in Dubai, but the focus will be on the policy at x- School that is dealing with the issue of cultural diversity in and outside the classrooms. " Social development culminates in its expansion to a global magnitude, where students place themselves and their culture in an international perspective, understands and accepts cultural specifics and differences, and assume the individual and national responsibilities towards international cooperation" (x-school policy, 2010). This quotation is an example of how private schools in Dubai are referring to cultural awareness in their policies, but questions on the factors interfering in policy formation, like rules and believes of the surrounding environment, implementation and the relevant instruments rise immediately into discussion. This quotation is the policy of how to deal with cultural diversity at x- School, but it is considered short to express everything related to its values, too general, it lacks of implementation techniques, and it is considered implicit. Who sets the policy and who will

implement it, are considered major issue for the success of the policy; I will represent a sample of Institutional perspective on educational policy and practice (figure 1, Scott and Meyer 1994), and what are the major parties involved is any policy from settings, implementation, monitoring and responsible for giving feedback. Institutional theory offers a more nuanced lens for examining the organizational and institutional conditions that mediate these reforms, and how they do or do not make their ways into classrooms. Namely, as represented in Figure 1, " institutional theory draws attention to the broader cultural forces that help define the major parties involved in every policy" (Burch, 2007). The major concern here is that the schools which refer to cultural diversity and awareness in their policies are not aware of it, and if they are aware; there is no clear methods of implementations and evaluating. Each policy is affected by the surroundings (stakeholders), that may interfere directly or indirectly in setting the policy, schools in Dubai are facing a problem of cultural diversity, but what are the solutions of going over this problem. Mentioning it in the policy is a part and solving is another part (words vs. action), and it is allowed for single school to take its own action in solving the problem without governmental interference. The policy is set by people in charge who may interact by either involving others in implementing it, or force others to implement it. Those people in charge are responsible for any change in the policy.

Figure 1, Scott and Meyer 1994

How does the Policy view Culture?

" You can feel it within minutes of entering a school: the behavior of the students, the attitude of the teachers, the care for the physical plant, the artifacts of discovery, learning, curiosity, community, expression and intellection that adorn the walls of the place, it is obvious that this is a place where young people and teachers learn" (Schubert, 2010). Good policy must include the characteristics of good and learning culture that is aware to students from diverse culture and give them equal chances of learning, and increase their sense of awareness towards each others.

" Good educational and learning culture is not driven by high property taxes, escalating school budgets, federal or state legislation, national testing, good buildings, nice classes or teachers' unions. It is a modeled behavior set by leadership in the school, followed by a critical mass of the teaching body, all of whom are accountable for the culture and spread it by their own example and experience, their commitment to a community of learning, removing cultural diversities and barriers between students, their respect for one another and for their students" (Schubert, 2008).

What is the teacher's role in implementing and adopting the policy?

The diversity in classrooms presents unique opportunities and significant challenges for teaching. Students in UAE schools are with a wide variety of skills, abilities, and interests and with varying potentials in various areas. The wider the variation of the student population in each classroom, the more complex the teacher's role becomes in, teaching, organizing, motivating and controlling students to ensure that each student has access

to high-quality learning . The ultimate goal of any teacher is to find suitable approach for every student in the classroom, and try to motivate him in a way to get the best from him. To reach that goal, teachers need assistance, training and well designed curriculum that must fit the needs of all students. Many schools have prepared their teachers to deal with diversity cases in their classrooms and leave it for the teacher to evaluate the situation and find the suitable solution to eliminate those diversities in order to get the best from students, and increase their sense of belonging. The policy at x-school doesn't mention any point related to the teacher role in the implementation of the policy, how it will be applied, what other parties to be involved (supervisors and parents), and the changes in curriculums to facilitate the implementation process. This implicit policy is considered too short to discuss every single aspect related to the problem and put pressure on teachers to figure out personal solutions to deal with diversities in their classrooms. Those solutions are not standard; they vary from teacher to teacher and from class to class. A good policy doesn't give a margin for such variations; it must have clear values, well articulated, the action required from this policy must be stated, and the methods of implementation must has to included in the policy.

Where are the errors of implementation? (Implementation Gap)

The policies in general are clear, written in a good professional language, and are considered as part of school's mission. The problems do not lie in the policy or its values only, but in the implementation of those policies, and the lack of communication between various parts responsible for applying the

policy. There could be implementation gap as a result of many factors, which could arise from the policy itself, the policy maker, or the environment in which the policy has been made. Implementation gap can arise from the policy itself when such a policy emanates from government rather than from the target groups. " By this, it means that planning is top-down. And, by implication, the target beneficiaries are not allowed to contribute to the formulation of the policies that affect their lives, the target groups could be the teachers, students, and families" (Makinde, 2005). Another cause of implementation gap is the failure of the policy makers to take into consideration the social, political, economic and administrative variables when analyzing for policy formulation, as I referred in the beginning of this paper there is gap between private and public schools polices concerning cultural policies, public schools that are only attained by nationals with unified curriculum all over the country, put less pressures on those schools to realize cultural diversities between their students.

Conclusion

Schools in UAE are considered melting pot of students from diverse cultural backgrounds that need a suitable policies to achieve equal educational opportunities that will help them realize other cultures, and increase students' openness to diverse cultures. Policies alone without the suitable instruments of implementation are considered useless, good implementation is considered key success for any policy that put policy in action. Considering targeted group in setting the policy and involving them will increase its credibility and make the implantation easier to a certain extent. The policies must be clear, written in a good professional language, and they are

considered part of school's mission. The problems are not in the policy or its values only, but in the formulation and implementation of those policies, and the lack of communication between various parts responsible for implementing the policy.