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A Gross National Happiness Infused Curriculum: The Promise of a More Meaningful Education in Bhutan

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A GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS INFUSED CURRICULUM : THE PROMISE OF
A MORE MEANINGFUL EDUCATION IN BHUTAN

by

Sonam Zangmo

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A GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS INFUSED CURRICULUM: THE PROMISE OF A MORE MEANINGFUL EDUCATION IN BHUTAN

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Western Michigan University, 2014

Schooling in our modern society is aimed primarily to secure a career so that individuals will find their places in the political and economic systems. However, many believe that education should be reconceived so that student skills and attributes are understood more fully in relation to their impact on the local as well as the global community. The Gross National Happiness infused curriculum aspires to facilitate the holistic education that would address some of the humanistic values we need in this era. In this paper I study the concepts of Gross National Happiness and how the Gross National Happiness infused curriculum promises a meaningful education to the Bhutanese children as perceived by the participants participating in the anonymous survey conducted in a high school in Bhutan. I will also discuss and explore the global philosophical theories of education on similar concepts like Gross National Happiness infused curriculum of Bhutan.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is an era of overwhelming technological advances, globalization, and non-sustainable consumption of both renewable as well as non renewable resources. In the midst of all these socio-economic, environmental, and political considerations, people look at education as a means to find solutions and realize meaningful purposes in their lives as well as to bridge the gap between individual and collective needs, which enables holistic growth. In recent years, there is an emerging global trend where education is focused on market-driven forces which promotes the mission of teaching to individual success and personal achievement rather than the common good and human flourishing.

Therefore the sustenance of our planet will depend on the type of education we introduce our children to, for the children of today are our future citizens. In order to preserve our planet, we need to unite together as one global nation so as to find a common solution to such global concerns. These demands require a different kind of education focused more on the growth of the child as a happy human being able not only to care for him or herself, but also be aware of other's needs, share, collaborate in finding solutions collectively. Therefore, the current trend of teaching on the basis of standardized testing will fail to fulfill this important mission of our time. This research will focus on how infusion of the Gross National Happiness in the curriculum promises to

answer or solve the current situations of concern to Bhutan as well advance awareness of the global crisis.

The thesis will proceed with chapters categorized under the following areas: (1) Introduction (2) Feature of Gross National Happiness as an Educational Philosophy of Bhutan; (3) Qualitative Study of the Perception of GNH Infused Curriculum; (4) Conclusions, and Recommendations; References and Appendices.

Purpose of the Study

The concept of Gross National Happiness is the social construct attributed to the Fourth King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk. It is generally understood as a concept different from Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Unlike GDP, which is materialistic and consumer-oriented, as Karma Ura (2013) argues, GNH strives to strike a balance between materialistic acquisition and the spiritual well-being of a person (p. 2). Therefore, this unique developmental philosophy places importance on social welfare which will result not from material aspects of consumption and production. Instead, the nation views the need to equally consider the growth of both spiritual and emotional well-being as a major measurement index of the country's social and economic development success.

A unique feature of modern Bhutan is the country's development paradigm popularly known as Gross National Happiness (GNH). The concept, which the Bhutanese fondly treasure, is the foundation of the nation's governmental policies, at the same time, it also aligns with the culture and spiritual values of Bhutan. The roots of GNH go to the country's Buddhist practices and as such, almost all the features of the concept are either directly or indirectly in parallel with Buddhist principles.

The GNH seeks to strike a balance between the materialistic gains and spiritual well being of its population. It recognizes that economic development is a precondition to safeguard the country's sovereignty, help and guide people to live meaningful lives, which also leads Bhutan to reflect on wiser and better tomorrows without compromising on the present. The Bhutanese government in 2009 infused the country's school curriculum with GNH the expectation that the future citizens of Bhutan would understand that in order to live a meaningful and happy life, one has to protect both living as well as non-living beings, and that everything on the globe is interrelated or interdependent. The unsustainable use of resources will impact how we live now and severely impact future generations.

With the changing times and conflicting values, the purposes of formal education have to be reviewed. An interesting example of curriculum geared towards collective values and human flourishing is the Bhutanese educational philosophy based on the methodology of Gross National Happiness.. This theme is significant for global education for a number of reasons.

First, it is geared towards human flourishing and takes the stance that a child needs to grow holistically; second, with this particular curriculum the child is inspired to become a happy human being who cares for him/herself, for others and for the environment; third, despite being an interesting and attractive global phenomenon, there is nothing to very little known or published about its essence from an educational perspective. Among the scholarly studies published on Bhutan, researchers mainly considered the issues associated with the socio-economic development of the country.

Historically Bhutan has been disengaged from the global community, and, as such, it did not substantially appreciate educational research. The result has been a lack of well trained, skilled educational researchers and adequate funding for educational research. The same applies to the teachers and administrators, although professional developments are provided by the Ministry of Education, teacher researchers and administrators are not so many. The culture of Bhutan dramatically hindered research in the educational field.

The Bhutanese education system with the GNH infused curriculum aspires to address the problems of the present as well as prepare children for the future to live in peace and harmony with the environment as well as our global neighbors. This curriculum also creates awareness and encourages the learners to protect and conserve the environment and safeguard the country's very crucial biodiversity. This is reflected in the National Education Framework (2012) with the GNH curriculum:

Bhutan also envisions a System of Whole Education that will nurture and encourage its citizens to be mindful, reflective, creative, skilful, successful, confident, active and informed, capable of contributing effectively to the realization of GNH and the values therein, and building a peaceful, democratic, sovereign, secure, stable and self-reliant full of creativity and vitality (p. 25).

Therefore this research will focus on three key questions which will provide exploratory insight into how the GNH infused curriculum is understood and functions in the school chosen for the research. The main research questions are (1) How is GNH perceived in the school? (2) In what ways is the GNH infused curriculum fulfilling the goals and objectives of making learning and teaching meaningful? (3) What factors affect the ongoing development and implementation of the GNH curriculum? This study offers

the global attempt to look at Bhutanese education through the lenses of the GNH infused curriculum to show the perspectives of Bhutanese students, teachers, administrators and parents, the effectiveness of the curriculum and the problems the curriculum poses. The goal of this paper is to explore the educational community's views of the GNH infused curriculum in an effort to identify an effective methodology of teaching for human flourishing and the collective good. More specifically, the author will explore the analysis of how GNH infused curriculum is an ongoing guiding principle of the Bhutanese schools based on a qualitative study method with the use of an anonymous survey.

CHAPTER II

FEATURES OF GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS-INFUSED CURRICULUM AS AN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF BHUTAN

Political and Educational History of Bhutan

Bhutan is a small landlocked kingdom hidden in the younger Himalayas, with an area of 38,394 sq.km, with China to the north and India towards the south. The population of Bhutan is 720,679 (Female -345125, Male-375554). (National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan, 2012, p. xiii). It was never colonized although it was only in the 17th century that Bhutan was unified as a nation. (Prior to the unification, people of different districts/ counties lived on their own without much governance or political stance). With the coronation of the present fifth King, Jigme Kheser Namgyel Wangchuk in 2008, Bhutan declared itself a constitutional monarchy against many citizens' appeal for the country to continue with the hereditary monarchs. In spite of the many hardships Bhutanese faced since the 17th century, the country had always embraced education.

The country got a glimpse of modernization in the 1960s with the launch of the Five Year Development Plans (1961-1965), (the Five Year Development plans are the country's economic development goals set specifically for a period of five years) and, thereafter, the number of modern schools in Bhutan also increased. Deki C. Jamtsho and Namgyal Drukpa (1998) reports that many Bhutanese children in the beginning of 1960s also left for India to get their education and Bhutanese children in the 1960s and 1970s

were also taught mostly by foreign teachers up until the late 1990(s) (p. 71). The foreign teachers were primarily from India and Bhutanese students were also taught with the Indian curriculum. From the Annual Educational Statistic of Bhutan (2013) there were 165 Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), 348 Primary, 92 lower secondary, 61 middle secondary and 53 higher secondary schools. 111 extended classrooms, eight special institutes, nine tertiary institutes under the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) and also two teacher training institutes, there are also eight vocational institutes, one Sanskrit school followed by 338 monastic education, 11 continuing education centers and 885 non-formal centers. (p. 9).

Government's Policies and Developmental Plans

Bhutan instituted the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) which took over the country's long term Planning Division on January 24, 2008 .(Gross National Happiness Commission [GNHC], 2008).After the GNHC was instituted, its mandates were "to ensure that GNH is embedded firmly into policies and that proper coordination is undertaken to ensure proper implementation of plans and programs" (GNHC, 2008). The GNHC is the central planning agency of the government that identifies and recommends priorities, allocates resources, sets targets, and coordinates, monitors, and evaluates policies and programs. The Commission is responsible for operationalizing GNH by mainstreaming its elements into the plans and programs. GNHC uses GNH Index and the survey results published by Center for Bhutan Studies in the country to evaluate the progress of the GNH domains. (FAQs on GNH, 2013, p. 4).

In general, across the globe, one role of the government is providing quality education for its citizens. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (1993) are also of the

opinion that “a person’s ability to achieve various forms of valuable functioning may be enhanced by public action and policy” (p. 44). All citizens know what they want for themselves as individuals, but quite often they will not have the potential to achieve whatever they desire.

This is why it is important for the government to step in and enact laws that will provide the satisfactory implementation and success of GNH for all citizens. Ura (2013) explains the role of government involvement in citizens’ welfare:

In the Bhutanese cultural context, the original meaning of the development of the state, and the individuals within it, meant observance largely of enlightenment education with respect to ethics, intellect and wisdom by its population in order to reach happiness (*dewa*). And the functions of a GNH state are to remove conditions and constraints, both physical and mental, to achieving it. (p. 2).

GNH, on the other hand, strives to be an appropriate measure for the overall development of the country as it takes into consideration both spiritual and material well-being of the citizens as well as the socio-economic developmental aspects of the nation. Nussbaum and Sen (1993) also agree that since the 1950s, the per capita GNP has been found to be insufficient for measuring the well being of citizens (p. 67). Measuring what really matters to people and framing policies in accordance with the needs of people would help realize the goals of GNH. (Center for Bhutan Studies (CBS), 2008, as cited in Wangmo & Valk, 2012, p. 54). Although individual material acquisition and spiritual wellbeing are achievable, for Bhutan the pursuit of collective happiness is the main goal.

As Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, (2012) report “happiness is itself multidimensional, not measured only by subjective well-being and not focused narrowly on happiness that begins and ends with oneself and is concerned for and with oneself” (p. 1). It is therefore very important for the government to focus more on the humanistic and

making life meaningful, but when education is focused more on the materialistic aspects of our societies, the value of humanity is minimized. Raymond B. Williams, Ken Brien & Janelle LeBlanc (2012) also observed that the current educational system will not be able to sustain its goals if it continues with the structure based on the materialistic values it has had for centuries as current needs of the students and the environment are different (p. 2).

The current educational needs are different because there is pressure on the environment due to the exploitation of both renewable and non-renewable resources. The needs of the current youth too are different as they have more need for spiritual guidance because they have so many things to choose from, for instance between basic needs and the luxurious good and services etc. As a response to all these issues, the Bhutanese Ministry of Education enacted a milestone project in 2009 to officially incorporate GNH values in the curriculum. The infusion of GNH in the curriculum is primarily to restore the holistic values of the educational system of Bhutan.

A GNH Infused Curriculum

A curriculum is a master plan that will regulate teaching and learning in the educational institutions. Educating for GNH (2012) outlines that “the school curriculum shall guide all the learning activities that are offered and enacted throughout the country” (p. 16). It also highlighted that all the professional teachers with expertise should have the platform and the freedom to develop the curriculum according to their best judgment as in using learner centered strategies which will create an environment for students to develop critical thinking and analysis skills, which will lead to the enhancement of learning. The curriculum of the Bhutanese schools will be based on certain guidelines set

by the ministry for ensuring relevant and meaningful learning experiences through the understanding of concepts, development of skills, values and attitudes in different learning areas according to the learning abilities of the child and other skills the child possesses. (Educating for GNH, 2012, p. 17).

Within the GNH curriculum, there is diversification in the curriculum at different grade levels so that the graduates from different educational levels would address the different skills needed by the country and also in order to cultivate a GNH community. The curriculum of one nation will differ from another as each nation would have its own specifications for the choice of certain teaching and learning materials. However, According to Thomas Misco (2010), “Social capital, moral education and citizen education are three big ideas fundamental to the health of any democratic state” (p. 1) which indicates that education should address these three areas reflected for the functioning of the state.

Therefore GNH infused curriculum is the preferred curricula by the Ministry of Education of Bhutan for their schools because it has the features needed for providing a holistic education whereas, the present traditional curricula have significant shortcomings. For example as Ken Robinson (2012) posits:

First, they promote standardization and a narrow view of intelligence, when human talents are diverse and personal. Second, they promote rigidity /generalization/ undermining of the skills when cultural progress and achievement depends on the cultivation of imagination and creativity. Third, they are linear and rigid when the course of each human life, is organic and largely unpredictable. (para. 5)

Most educational systems all over the world believe in and adopt the dominant financial and economic ideology. As a consequence, individual competition is more valued than collaboration; academic intelligence is more appreciated and rewarded than

social, emotional and spiritual skills. Thakur Singh Powdyel (2010), the first, minister of education of Bhutan, reasoned “it’s not education, but education of a certain kind that will serve us” (p. 9). The present model of western, urban-centered school-based education is focused and successful in turning children into efficient corporate human resources rather than curious and open-minded adults.

The Bhutanese Ministry of Education believes that without the GNH infused curricula, the general curricula will only lead children further down the wrong paths in the years to come. According to Sarvanan Gopinathan & Zongyi Deng (2006) the purpose of the curriculum is to nurture students who would be able to handle the social problems of the present by analyzing and evaluating them in order to act in ways that are solution-oriented and responsible. (pp. 94-95). Thus one component of teaching and learning with a GNH curriculum is that, children should be able to reflect on and evaluate their actions.

Why GNH Infused Curriculum for Bhutan?

One of the very crucial features of a GNH infused curricula is that the country is in need of citizens who are able to be mindful of present and anticipate future social problems. There is emphasis on this GNH curriculum to make the Bhutanese students understand the concept that increase in GDP and GNP alone does not reflect a nation’s development. According to Catherine Broom (2011) “The formulas for both profit and GDP thus illustrate their limited nature as they do not consider environmental damage, laid off employees, and insecurity, among other results” (p. 3).

However, in order for the features of a GNH school to be implemented successfully, teachers alone cannot be responsible to nurture the GNH principles; the

entire society is responsible for creating a more conducive environment for the GNH infused curriculum to thrive. The GNH schools endeavor to address the socio-emotional needs of their students so that students will be more prepared to face the challenges of the ever growing social and economic crises. With the GNH infused curricula, students learn how a GNH society calls for the inclusion of indicators of well-being at par with economic ones. In addition, any activity with the GNH infused curricula plans for reducing stress, increasing life satisfaction and happiness throughout the students' lives.

GNH is a development evaluation standard which places secondary emphasis on economic growth, a move away from the ordinary GDP/GNP models of development, a shift based on strong sustainability principles. This new paradigm argues that the continual pursuit of economic growth (with ever higher GNP/GDP) is not really the suitable indicator of success for a country like Bhutan to follow. Such behaviors can result in the collapse of the ecosystems, social and cultural systems needed for sustaining life. Simon Teoh (2012) also supports this idea that “the inequality of GDP measure does not take into account environmental health, poverty levels, health and educational services, or unpaid labor such as in kind services like child rearing or caring for the sick and elderly at home” (p. 9).

In contrast to GDP/GNP models, the GNH concept implies that sustainable development should be holistic towards notions of progress and give importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing. (Tim Bedford, 2012). Global Education and Education for GNH have emerged as important priorities in the Bhutanese education system as the Bhutanese government believes that individuals will contribute to the community and likewise the community would contribute to the global neighbours. Building

administration skills and strategies of schools is essential to meeting the local and global challenges of sustainable living.

The goals of GNH infused curriculum are to produce Bhutanese graduates who will not join the world in the march for acquisition of more and more consumer goods; instead they will deeply care for nature and for each other, uphold their culture and traditions, be conscious of the use of resources, and live in harmony with nature. The educators are instructed to integrate these principles of GNH into their daily plan.

Holistic Education

Currently there is a shift in how children are being educated. The traditional system emphasizes the abstract content of the curriculum and students are evaluated with their individual performance on standardized tests. Therefore, numerous scholars are also of the view that “children learn biology in schools, but not bio diversity. They don’t learn what is in their neighborhood” (Shiva, 2009, as cited in Hayward & Coleman, 2009, p. 30). There is the need to focus more on the need to teach students about what is happening at the moment, like excess consumption habits and social problems, but we do not teach how to use these skills and strategies in our classes.

Often times there is no relation between why children need to learn the different disciplines so teaching naturally becomes mundane therefore, the very purpose of the need for a GNH infused curriculum is to make teaching and learning more meaningful. Traditionally the Bhutanese society has been more focused on what we should produce and how we can increase the profits of our businesses. Children should be taught how to stand and evaluate their actions, rather than always being taught non- realistic concepts of life like the idea that pursuing careers just for social and economic status and that

resources will never be exhausted. But they should instead focus on what is happening in our present situations. We need to teach our children more practical themes of education which will address the purposes and meanings of their lives.

Research studies done on sustainable development demonstrate that the first obligation of the schools is to teach children how to care for each other, and to let the value of caring value be represented in the curricula, so that everyone will have an opportunity to learn about caring. Nel Noddings (2002) is an American feminist, educator, and philosopher best known for her work in philosophy of education, education theory, and ethics of care. She claims that emphasis on adopting curricula which will produce “caring, competent, lovable people need not reduce the intellectual dimensions of the curriculum” (p. 38).

According to the GNH index developed by Ura, Alkire, Zangmo and Wangdi (2012) “The concept of GNH includes the social capital of the country, which refers to those resources which will enhance the efficiency of human resources, which is sustained through co-operative relationships and social networks within the community” (p. 28). The GNH schools focus on the concept of community vitality as students are made to participate in interactions in the community where they are exposed to support and interact positively with their friends and neighbors, which also esteem the values and Bhutanese moral beliefs. All these activities are emphasized in the GNH schools so that students would be nurtured with such values.

Students will best learn a lesson on anything that is heard, thought and talked about, issues that are critical to their present situation instead of those curricula which would teach about the future. But with the current curricula, teaching is not just abstract,

but it is also more focused on the individual. The goals of education call for a serious evaluation, as what we measure and value will affect what we do. If our measurements and evaluations are flawed, decisions and outcomes may become flawed too (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2010, p. xxvii). If the qualities of education are put at par with the standardized tests, which considers a large portion of the abstract knowledge children will not be able to distinguish between the consequences and benefits of their actions as they would not be able to comprehend the real life situations , such as without critical thinking, children will not be able to understand the need to live by the principles of the GNH pillars which is the aspiring guiding principle of the Bhutanese community for a meaningful living.

Preservation and Promotion of Bhutanese Culture

Due to modernization, the country's culture and tradition are at risk. So there is a strong and immediate need for the Bhutanese to uphold their culture and traditions, because this is a key way how the Bhutanese can sustain their unique identity. Ura (2009) emphasizes that “for the education systems to pay attention to values is central to our cultural perspective that is influenced by Buddhism” (p. 9). According to Petros Gougoulakis & Michael Christie (2012) “culture refers to the collective heritage of ideas, knowledge, beliefs and ideas, and the patterns we use to communicate this with others”(p. 242). The culture of the country makes it stand out from the rest of the neighboring countries. Culture for the Bhutanese embodies their pride in being able to remain a sovereign nation in between the two most populous countries in the world, China and India.

Ura (2009) also posits that “the values promoted in the cultural domain are identity, non-alienation, diversity and dignity. Why? Because a culture gives its members diversity, dignity and identity”(p. 49). Therefore culture and tradition of the country remains a priority for the Bhutanese as it is primarily one way the Bhutanese have access to local wisdom, knowledge, and a much greater sense of belongingness which can be related only through a common culture and tradition. According to Sangay Chophel (2013):

Culture and tradition are sources of identity. In some countries such as Bhutan it exerts a pervasive influence on identity. ‘Bhutanese traditions’ is a broad term that includes rituals, customs, dress, code of etiquette, religious ceremonies, and customs, among others. It is considered very important by a majority of respondents in Bhutan to maintain Bhutanese traditions. (p. 83).

The 2010 nation-wide survey done on GNH reflected that 91.34% of the population in Bhutan have expressed that culture is very important, while 8.12% expressed that it is important which indicated that culture does not necessarily play a vital role in the lives of the 8.12% in contrast to 91.34% who mentioned that culture is very important, the minority believed that culture does not have a very important role in the societal norms of the country . (2010 Gross National Happiness survey data, as cited in Chophel, 2013, p. 84). It is therefore worthwhile to note that Bhutan’s unique culture and traditions play an important role in the economic and social well-being of the citizens for many years to come.

The population of the country practicing Buddhism is about: 80.97%, Hinduism: 17.83% and, Christianity: 1.20% (GNH Survey Findings, 2010, p. 7). Bhutan’s unique culture since the beginning of the country’s existence has always been influenced by Buddhism. Therefore the Bhutanese culture is strongly rooted in the Buddhist

principles. The inception of GNH for his country by the fourth King, Jigme Singey Wangchuk was also a result of Buddhist beliefs that there should be a balanced or “middle path” to anything, which in reference to GNH implies that although material well being is important, one must also note that the very purpose of development should be to provide internal peace or spirituality as well. “Well-being arises when sustainable and equitable economic development is balanced with environmental and cultural preservation and good governance (Rinzin 2006 and Thinley, 2005, as cited in Wangmo & Valk, 2013, p. 55).

In the GNH schools, one of the main focuses on the GNH cultural practices are on the promotion and preservation of their ancient traditional cultures: “cultural dimension is an educative asset as it contributes to the development of students’ creativity, cultural identities and intercultural understanding” (Sharp & Le Metais, 2000, as cited in Cote, 2009, p. 2). Similarly, with the ‘*dri glam namzha*’ policy of Bhutan for instance, the government enforces a national cultural dress code, architectural design uniformity and public social codes of conduct which brings about consistency/relatedness in the way culture is understood and practiced in the country. Cultural uniqueness is seen as a very important intrinsic value as well for the preservation of the sovereignty of the nation faced with political risks from the neighboring countries (Ura, 2013, p. 3). Therefore all the schools in Bhutan provide a platform so their students will have better opportunities to enrich their knowledge about their culture and tradition through numerous cultural activities in the form of musicals, games and sports throughout the academic year.

Focus on Immediate Needs and Realistic Values

Even in Bhutan, students who demonstrate mastery over math, science and literature are considered the best students the schools are not optimally able to take into consideration the immediate issues of a society like the social and economic problems of their communities. This is because the former curriculum was more focused on the academic content of the curriculum. In contrast, the current GNH infused curriculum is designed to cater to holistic learning and teaching which will address socio-economic problems and also encourage learners to acquire necessary life skills to face up to different socio economic problems in any form. However, the GNH curriculum still has to wait for its full development to be used in the schools. The Ministry of Education is still working on formalizing the GNH infused curriculum.

In the meantime, schools should be choosing and applying reflective learning as a primary pedagogy. Reflective learning for students is a better strategy than abstract learning strategies because students would always be able to evaluate the pros and cons of their actions. With abstract strategies, students will be learning directly from the text book contents and the meaning conveyed most often will be very vague, and in such a learning environment, children would lose their passion in learning, at the same time, teaching too would become very robotic without any emotions and realistic values. But lessons taught with the consideration of the current ecological, economic, social and political problems will make learning and teaching more productive and will address the needs of the moment. . Schools in the current scenarios are diverting away from humane values when they are focusing more on the academic performance of the child than on the reflective learning process which facilitates holistic growth. The ultimate vision of

holistic growth mainly refers to graduates who would be able to think for themselves and their environment, taking into consideration the values and beliefs of their communities, in addition to which they would also be able to think about the global problems like socio-economic, political and environmental issues. Without the GNH infused curriculum in the Bhutanese schools, there are limited platforms for students to understand and reflect on these issues.

A Curriculum with a Meaningful Purpose

Integration of different policies with the ecosystem today has become very crucial as well as a very popular topic for discussion. Maria del Carmen Conde & J. Samuel Sanchez (2010) report that “The United Nations has declared 2005-2014 to be the “Decade of Education for Sustainable Development”(p. 1). Current education systems have in many ways failed to nurture the creativity of children due to more focus on the immediate economic needs. Schools are one place where the focus on economic needs can be minimized/monitored so that the desired outcome of education can be achieved. Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi (2010) states that “some of the most relevant indicators for assessing the effect of education on quality of life are measures of people’s competencies” (p. 72).

People’s competencies here refers not simply to the academic knowledge alone, it mainly refers to the life skills and more mindful behaviors. Green schools were introduced in Bhutan to promote inclusive education through nature. Green schools have started adopting the philosophy that education does not just mean getting good grades, it should also consider preparing students to be responsible citizens who would look forward to their future sustenance as well as passing the concepts and values onto the

next generation. Therefore with the GNH infused curriculum, schools in Bhutan are looking forward to the daunting task of standing against the common belief that GDP is a much better way of measuring a nation's development. Instead the schools look forward to introducing the "dramatic behavioral change to address the environmental damage we have caused" (Mckibben, 2010, as cited in Broom, 2011, p. 128).

Powdyel (2010) regards a green school to be naturally green in sight, followed by intellectual, academic, spiritual, social cultural, spiritual, aesthetic and moral greenery (pp. 1-5). Moral greenery here refers to the fundamental principal which sets human beings apart from animals, and gives them the authority to make judgments about values (Green School for Green Bhutan, p. 7).Green school is the theme the Bhutanese schools are adopting; greenery as the color of life is expressed in many aspects that acknowledge and address a mindful, selfless, education which is not something beyond our reach, but it is a curriculum which is about waking up to the sacredness of everyday learning (Brown, 1999).

Schools in Bhutan place key emphasis on cultural activities as one of the key factors of GNH practices in schools so that children become accustomed and learn to value their culture. Bhutan is empowered to enact educational policies that envision a better society, not just for Bhutan, but also beyond borders of Bhutan (Schuelka, 2012, p. 147). For such a noble initiative the Ministry of Education of Bhutan needs to have a new design of their schools because the traditional administration of schooling "is intellectually and morally inadequate for contemporary society" (Noddings, 2002, p. 99). With the Bhutanese green schools in action, they will facilitate the development of youth

who are capable and contribute to a developing economy with creativity and enterprise (VanBalkom, et.al., 2009, p. 33).

Academic Performance and GNH Infused Curricula

Academic failure today cannot be blamed simply on either teachers or students alone. Research done in disciplines like psychology, education and sociology indicates that “multiple factors including students, classroom, teacher, school, family, community, cultural factors” all impact how students perform in their academics. (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001 and Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001, as cited in Kozlowski, 2013, p. 4). In order for students to perform well in their academics, collaboration with teachers, parents and other stakeholders of the schools play a vital role. With the GNH infused curriculum and the introduction of meditation and learning how to be mindful, students’ emotional needs are also equally considered although there is a priority on the academic performance of the Bhutanese students.

The GNH perspective of learning follows the principle that children should be learning lessons which are more realistic and meaningful however many schools in Bhutan also do not agree with the GNH way of teaching. In a GNH classroom, children learn to enjoy the lesson and get a peek at the reality of their lessons and pass judgment when they like it, provided it is in line with the lessons according to the curriculum. On the other hand, schools which do not follow the GNH philosophies could teach well, but then such schools foster and motivate more and more competition between students instead of collaboration and more holistic growth of the child.

Parental Participation and Overall School Accomplishment

Parents in Bhutan have a vital role in who their children will grow up to be. The values and lessons on wholesome education are also received from parents . One of the key factors for the success of schools specifically in Bhutan is due to the GNH School's administration in sustaining and nurturing relationships between the parents and the school. Schools and principals who communicate with their external communities in some organized and responsible way enhance their chances of “getting better public support, minimizing criticism, learning the values and priorities of a community, and receiving many functional ideas and resources that will help educate students better” (Kladifko, 2013, p. 54).

However the Bhutanese schools have a long way to go before the schools and the parent involvement in the bringing up of their children can become successful. Therefore, we will be looking at the benefits of how parent's involvement in the education of their children could contribute to providing more successful wholesome education.

The schools in Bhutan play an important role in determining the levels of parental involvement in school, where some parents are involved as School Management Board (SMB) while some attend the school meetings and other school activities a couple of times a year, there are also parents who do not care about the school activities and hold on to the belief that teachers and the administration will take good care of their children. But “A high-performing school requires broad-based community support and support that will come from communities that are well informed and well engaged in the

educative processes that go on in the school” (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2011, as cited in Kladifko, 2013, p. 54).

In 2011, researchers found that there are countless benefits for both parents and students from getting involved in school activities; there are direct “positive and significant effects of parent involvement on both academic and behavioral outcomes” (Fan & Chen, 2001 and Jeynes, 2003, 2007, as cited in Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011, p. 72). Research also found out that parents’ involvement in their children’s education contributes highly to the academic as well as non academic performance of the students . In addition parents are also seen to be benefitting from the involvement in their children’s education. Although, there are challenges in building a relationship between parents and the schools, “studies utilizing large databases have shown positive and significant effects of parent involvement on both academic and behavioral outcomes” (Fan & Chen, 2001 and Jeynes, 2003, 2007, as cited in Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011, p. 55).

Schools in Bhutan with their GNH infused curriculum have involved parents in preparing the whole child which is the main purpose of the GNH infused curriculum. Parents participate and encourage their children to be more aware of values of GNH like the social needs, the need for volunteerism, emphasis on the preservation of the culture and tradition in different forms like motivating their children to play the national game, wear the national dress, teach how to prepare Bhutanese dishes, show respect for elders and younger children. All these values are sometimes nurtured by parents at home.

School and community partnerships are built on relationships of trust and effective interpersonal communication. A review of the research reveals that successful

school and community partnerships were created through leadership, trust, stability, readiness and sustained outreach (Auerbach, 2011 and Epstein, Sanders, Sheldon, & Simon, 2005, as cited in Kladifko, 2013, p. 55). The ultimate responsibility of the principal is to be proactive in knowing the community and establishing sustainable relationships. The principal will find means and ways to collaborate with the community and other stakeholders of the region by including parents and civil servants of the region in all the school activities so that these parents and civil servants will be responsible for and contribute to the school.

Parents need to be connected to the school that their children attend. They should be involved in the schools with their children mostly in reference to their cultural values. Unlike many students across the globe, Bhutanese children take pride and pleasure in helping their parents in their fields during their short summer breaks and long winter breaks. According to Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, and De Pedro (2011) “In addition to academic outcomes, parent involvement appears to have positive effects on students’ behavior” and parenting practices are also seen as contributing to the ability of the student’s self-regulated behavior. Although most parents do not take time to discuss what kind of day their children had at schools, it has been observed that those parents who get involved in their children’s daily activities are observed to decrease aggressiveness and other disruptive activities either in school or beyond the schools.

More specifically, if parents are involved in planning their children’s school program, children are seen to have strong academic achievement impacts for now and many years to come. Although all the schools in Bhutan felt the need to involve every parent in the education of their children, the most general concern of parents in the

Bhutanese schools in the education of their child is seen as keeping their children safe physically. They are not aware of the need to be involved in the academic performance of their children. On the other hand, teachers and administrators of the schools wish that parents would become involved more consistently in the school activities so that their goals can be achieved without many hurdles.

But the discrepancy between what the parents feel and what the schools expect are some of the issues to which the GNH administration aspires to find a solution. One of the reasons that could have caused the difference in what is expected and what has been put in action in the Bhutanese schools is that, although parents are expected to participate, due to the lack of literacy, they could not comprehend the benefits of participating in the education of their children, in addition parents also do not get the better views and say in how their children are learning and help them with moral support. To them schools are places where teachers take the entire responsibility for the education of their children.

Parents play a key role in the education of their children more than what children learn at school or how the education system governs their children: “They have the ability to shape, nurture, and develop them as pupils who are active, interested, diligent, creative, and tolerant by showing positive involvement in their children’s studies ” (Zedan, 2012). At the same time, there could also be situations where parents’ ignorance of their own children could lessen the motivation and the learning potential by not being able to provide the necessary attention towards their children’s education.

CHAPTER III

QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE GNH INFUSED CURRICULUM

Research Methods and Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study is to find out how the GNH infused curriculum impacts teaching, learning, and educational administration in a high school in the central part of Bhutan. This is the only high school in the region and also one of the oldest schools in the country established in 1960, when Bhutan just started opening its door to the rest of the world. The author collected data from a variety of sources to construct an analytical framework for the study. For literature review, the author was using literature and documents published in Bhutan and across the world that reflected themes similar to the GNH infused curriculum. The primary data source consists of surveys which were conducted with four groups of participants. The major data gathering tool used in the anonymous survey questionnaires of this research was designed and developed by the researcher. The anonymous survey questionnaires were sent by electronic mail to the co-researcher in the high school. The co-researcher received the survey questionnaires and announced the study in the morning assembly. This is a mixed method study based on qualitative and quantitative methods. The author collected data from a variety of sources to construct an analytical framework for the study.

The theoretical underpinnings of the research is based on the Cultural Historical Activity Theory with the focus on the Zone of Promixal Development of Lev Vygotsky

(1978). In addition, the study is also based on the theoretical framework discussed by Koshmanova, Carter and Hapon (2003) Crisis-response discourse of prospective teachers. The study is also analyzed through Nel Noddings (2005) work on the philosophy of care and care pedagogy as exemplified in *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education, Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education* (2002).

Participants

The participants were representatives of Bhutanese educational community Jakar Higher Secondary School (1) high school teachers [N=4]; (2) principals [N=3]; (3) parents [N=4], and (4) high school students [N=12] in their junior through senior classes.

High School Principals: The participants were all males [N=3], middle class representatives, with a median age of 39 years old. One is the main school principal and the other two were vice principals. They all worked in the same school having different responsibilities. The main principal looks into the overall administration of the school. One of the vice principal manages the academic responsibilities of the school; the other vice principal is responsible for the non-academic responsibilities of the school. Since the administrators were all from the same geographic area, with the same ethnic roots and experiences, there was little to no diversity represented since all the administrators also came from the same educational, cultural and traditional background.

All the participants are regularly attending the GNH professional development sessions conducted by the Ministry of Education of Bhutan.

Teachers: The participants included both male [N=2] and female teachers [N=2]. Their median age was 35 years old. Two participants were novice teachers with two years

of GNH infused curriculum teaching experience, and the other two, who had 10 years of experience without employing the GNH curriculum. Three teachers are from the eastern part of the country, where most of the regions are semi-urban . One teacher was from the western part of the country which is urban and mostly industrial. All the four participants came from almost the same lower-middle socio-economic background except for a slight difference in their income due to their seniority in their careers .

Students: The student participants are represented by girls [N=6] and boys [N=6], from grades 9 through 12. Their median age is 16.5 years old. The selection of the participants was based on those who had been taught with the GNH infused curriculum in its inception in 2010. Since students were from different grades, each of them has accumulated different years of GNH learning experiences. The participants were selected based on those who had been taught with the GNH infused curriculum in its inception in 2010, when these students were in their 5th grade. These students were currently studying in their 9th grade. While the other voluntary criteria were based on those students who did not learn with the GNH infused curriculum in their primary schools 5th grade. The students of this school were oriented on the GNH infused curriculum individually with individual responsibilities assigned since their primary school (5th grade) when they were then, 11 years old with the GNH ethics based on the four pillars and nine domains with special emphasis on meditation and mind training. While the other set of students were introduced with the same values, these students were introduced to the GNH curriculum in their 9th grade only at the age of 15 years. Four students were day scholars, while eight students were residents since the school provides residence.

Parents: Among this group of participants, there were male parents [N=2], and females [N=2], representing middle class, with a median age of 50 years old. All the parents were literate, civil servants or government employees and are aware of the GNH curriculum. These parents were also consistently involved in the education of their children. Three parents are from the eastern part of the country. One was from the southern part of the country, representing the urban region. All the parents were from the same middle socio-economic background, although they worked in different departments in the public sector.

The involvement of all the participants was strictly voluntary and anonymous. Since the survey was anonymous, all the names in the findings are pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities. The methodology of the study is approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) at Western Michigan University, as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair.

Survey

The date of the survey was announced by the assistant researcher during the school's morning assembly and those students, faculty, and administrators who were interested in participating in the study came to the classrooms according to their schedule over two weeks. The survey for the participants (students, faculty and principals) consisted of seven open-ended questions; though the questions were worded slightly differently based on their roles in the school they were all united by the same five GNH themes and provided the basis for four codes used for further analysis. After data was collected electronically (e-mail) from the research assistant, the author identified common themes across all the data received. Five common themes emerged from

analyzing the narratives, including (1) General Definitions of Gross National Happiness (2) The Impact of the Learning Environment for GNH Curriculum (3) Skills of Learning with GNH Infused Curriculum (4) Dispositions and values (5) Challenges of Learning and Teaching with GNH infused Curriculum. The author then put together (2) The Impact of the Learning Environment for GNH Curriculum and (3) Skills required to Learn with GNH infused Curriculum, thereby making the final codes to analyze the research by four common codes. The narratives were analyzed based on the questions which focused on the similar key concepts the author is interested in exploring. The author was interested in finding out the general perception of what it meant by Gross National Happiness to the four different types of participants, that is the principals, teachers, students and parents. This was based on the reason that in order for the GNH infused curriculum to successfully achieve its goals, it was found necessary for the author to establish their knowledge about GNH in general since the GNH curriculum derived its values from Gross National Happiness. Similarly, the three other codes were developed on the same objective, i.e to get an insight of the functioning of the GNH curriculum, which claims to be a better educational pedagogy for the Bhutanese students, and on the other hand, these codes are constructed in order to seek a platform for future studies by anyone interested in this study.

Students were the first group of the surveyed participants; they were followed by teachers and administrators. Interested student participants came forward to participate in the survey. The assistant researcher instructed them on the directions for the survey. All three groups of subjects actively participated in the study filled in their questionnaires and returned them to a place identified by the research assistant and the participants only.

Parents were invited to participate in the survey during a parent conference in the school. After the parents filled out the survey questionnaires, they handed over the completed surveys to the research assistant.

It should be noted that several teachers [N=4] and principals [N=3] also left several questions unanswered. This situation of unanswered questions reflected the fact that participants did not have enough knowledge on the questions being asked about the GNH infused curriculum. The analysis and discussion of all the participants' responses was conducted on the basis of the following four codes: (1) GNH definition; (2) The Impact of Learning Environment and Skills of Learning with GNH curriculum (3) Dispositions and Values of Learning with GNH infused curriculum (4) Challenges of Learning and Teaching with GNH infused curriculum. All survey responses represented Bhutanese public school demographics. The author also obtained a site consent letter from the principal of the school before the survey was conducted.

Findings

Students

The Definition of GNH. Despite the variety in responses from students, there was consistency in the responses to the definition of GNH. This is because some of these students were exposed to the GNH curriculum since their fifth grade.

Here are some of the most typical answers:

"I believe that it is, first of all, happiness of the whole population.....when applied to curriculum and teaching, it leads to a holistic learning. It also takes in consideration the culture and bio-diversity of the country as a key focus for proper and sustainable development" (Dechen, 17years old).

Yet another respondent expressed his admiration for the GNH concept as a developmental theory:

“...due to the GNH development philosophy, there is a shared belief in common good, reasonable equality in wealth and power, equal laws, active and knowledgeable citizens, as well as personal development activities (reading, professional development, public speaking, democratic citizenship values)”(Phuntsho, 19 years old).

Four participants defined GNH concept as one’s “feeling content with what he/she has.”

Based on the author’s analyses of the student responses, all 12 students reported that they understood the meaning of GNH and its influence on the society. Participants also identified a number of positive aspects of GNH infused curriculum, such as, holistic learning, learner centered curriculum, and emotional well-being. GNH infused curriculum results in holistic education which introduces the need to balance between spiritual and material well-being. Culture is also reflected as an important aspect of the definition of GNH. Students also expressed the importance of the need to pursue GNH over GNP/GDP as the country’s guiding development paradigm for now as well as for many years to come. According to the students, GNH meant the consideration of both physical and emotional well being with sustainable development strategies.

The Impacts of Learning Environment and the Skills of Learning with the GNH infused Curriculum. Since learning environment has a direct impact on both teaching and learning. The study showed that learning environments have to be monitored not just by the management, but by both the learners as well as teachers.

Here is one typical answer as given by a respondent:

“Relationship between std. & teachers made more open and efficient learning environment created with focus on the emotional needs of the students as compared to the traditional curriculum. Eg. Focus on life skills. Social skills, focus on reading, health and introduction to life skills (e.g. Students share and seek advice with their personal problems), nurtures emphatic skills and compassion” (Tashi, 17 years old).

Correspondingly, another respondent has provided his opinion on how the learning environment has impacted the skills they have learned from the GNH infused curriculum:

“.....meditation, instill values of volunteerism, awareness on natural disaster because of which we have developed awareness on social services like volunteerism and life skills, our school also adopts polices of supporting financially disadvantaged students which is a result of the values discussed in the culture and tradition, where we learn how important it is to help each other in times of need”(Chhimi, 16 years old).

Yet another respondent mentioned how the environment naturally nurtures the GNH values in them while the traditional curriculum ignores such values:

“...life skills lessons, cultural days and social services are adopted by the school, as a result of which the social skills, green school policy adoption, environmental sustainable awareness is present in the school, which also contributes to better performance in both academics as well as social skills” (Rigden, 20 years old).

According to another respondent, the school provides realistic learning environments where the skills learned from such exposures to the values of GNH are highly valued and adopted by the community and the students of the school:

“Practice of care for nature, culture and life skills are addressed as a part of the daily lessons because of which the school recognizes environmental preservation as very important, reinforces the need to play games and sports for a healthy living, value given to literature works like reading and writing as an skill of an academic feature. Social services are encouraged and equally adopted” (Yangdey, 18 years old).

From the answers gathered, students expressed that the school provides the learning environment based on the GNH values and domains, which are supported by the teachers and the school administration. Students also reflected that the GNH values such as environmental preservation, culture promotion and life skills, social- volunteer services are some of the skills that they have learned with the GNH infused curriculum. Students believe that due to the GNH learning and teaching environment, they are able to discuss their personal problems and seek necessary help at the right time. Holistic learning and teaching was seen as the most common mentioned skill across 12 subjects in this study.

Dispositions and Values of Learning with GNH infused Curriculum. From the survey, the respondent's dispositions and values of learning with GNH infused curriculum are all derived from the domains and pillars of GNH. The dispositions of learning with GNH curriculum are numerous like the emphasis on critical and creative thinking, ecological awareness, being able to understand the world and its socio-economic problems, caring for humans and nature alike, preparing for the right livelihood and being able to be true democratic citizens.

Some of the typical opinions students have mentioned are as follows :

"...teaching has become more meaningful with the shift from pure academics to also the emotional needs of students, which is making the both the teachers and students experience serenity" (Pema, 17 years old).

Another respondent expressed that GNH curriculum:

"...nurtures holistic learning and teaching: comfortable learning encourages exploration learning than restricted learning. Also constructive and effective administrative policies, which are solely focused on welfare of students" (Lhaden, 19 years old).

Another respondent has mentioned that the values from the GNH curriculum are :

"Preservation and promotion of culture and tradition are mentioned which is not seriously addressed in the regular curriculum. Students are also made aware of their responsibilities as future citizens"(Kezang, 17 years old).

All the answers have been observed to have originated from the same values. All these values are as a result of the GNH infused curriculum however, they are mentioned differently. Another student also mentioned that teaching and learning have become

more meaningful with the GNH infused curriculum because of which children are doing well both academically as well as learning humane values.

Challenges of Learning and Teaching with GNH Infused Curriculum. The launch of GNH infused curriculum in the Bhutanese schools is viewed and talked of as being able to address numerous social problems since the curriculum fosters holistic education which focuses on the development of life skills, critical thinking, and addressing values such as respect for others, self and the environment. Teaching with the GNH infused pedagogy is not a panacea, but it does have some basic solutions to the societal problems that are consuming our communities and our lives.

Here are some examples of typical answers given by the students about their views:

“More focus required on conveying the benefits of the practices and skills of GNH” (Choden, 18 years old).

Another respondent also expresses that:

“...Tradition and culture promotion and preservation have to be observed more frequently” (Dorji, 17 years old)

Yet another respondent believes that:

“Four pillars may have to be altered with change in time without losing the essence of the pillars, with special reference to good governance” (Choden, 19 years old).

One more respondent feels that challenges of the GNH infused are as follows:

“More respect and preservation of the national dress required. Public property must be taken care of properly. Teachers must be respected appropriately for their profession” (Pooja, 16 years old).

This respondent is of the view that, in order to let the GNH infused curriculum achieve its goals, there are challenges that need to be addressed:

“Time and attention on students’ learning needs to re-consider. Biases have to be checked. Supervisors have to consider the welfare of his staff. Strategies and skills on harmonizing relationships in the school environment amongst students, staffs and supervisors have to be reconsidered” (Palden, 20 years old).

From the observations made on the surveys, it looks like appropriate platforms and reinforcements are needed for the consistent preservation and promotion of the culture and tradition in the school. The Benefits of GNH infused curriculum have to be shared and stated clearly. Staff and students have to adopt skills and strategies which will bring forth better understanding of each other which will create an environment of serenity.

Teachers

GNH Definition. The definition of GNH by the teachers is not any different from what some students have reflected, however teachers have not elaborated as much as the students. Teachers have reflected that the approach to GNH is to create the best possible conditions for happiness and well-being by accepting what is needed and rejecting what is not sustainable and is harmful for people.

One teacher respondent described GNH as:

“ the consideration of both physical and emotional needs of the mass population when development is taking place in the country. It also makes sure that there is a balanced growth in all the domains and pillars of the GNH” (Lodey, 38 years old).

Another respondent has stated his opinion as :

“Human beings are given more value over materialist goods. GNH also refers to thinking and taking care not just about ourselves, but all the sentient beings, environment and living in harmony with nature so that there is proper balanced economic growth” (Tshering, 40 years old).

Yet another respondent described GNH as:

“...multidimensional approach which takes care of both emotional/spiritual and the economic or the social growth of the population. GNH also takes into consideration the promotion and preservation of our unique culture and tradition” (Rigzin, 37 years).

The final respondent defined GNH as:

“...being wise in the consumption (sustainable) so that one has a good life in the present as well as a better future for the next generation. GNH also means being content and understanding that happiness cannot simply result from the consumption or owning lots of properties, name or fame, it is a state of mind which can be trained and achieved in the way desired” (Tsepyel, 34 years old).

Teachers and students share the same concept of GNH as a multidimensional approach which takes into consideration the emotional and physical needs of the citizens, and these measures are derived from the four pillars and nine domains of GNH.

According to the teachers, citizens are placed at the center of development, in addition to which, sustainable use of resources and respect and care for all life on earth are also “equally considered” important to live in harmony. Culture and tradition are also given importance to be preserved and promoted for both political as well as spiritual reasons.

The Impacts of Learning Environment and the Skills of Learning with GNH infused Curriculum. Of the many values that teachers observed, the moral values of the students, such as being kind, compassionate, and considerate to each other, have been observed in children as they were displayed in their interactions with friends. It is also seen that the students appreciate and practice the GNH values, which are the desired goals of the GNH infused curriculum.

One respondent states his views on how the GNH infused curriculum has imparted values that are observed in their students:

“.....School provides platforms where certain GNH values are focused in both teaching and co-curricular activities, however academically, there is not much difference with the traditional curriculum, but students have come to uphold being honest and sincere. Social skills have improved and, in addition, they have become more considerate of other people and their environment” (Choden, 38 years old).

Although responses are slightly different, they share the same themes. One more respondent expressed his belief in the learning environment and skills of learning with the GNH curriculum as:

“..Lessons are related according to the applicability in real life and so the skills of learning with GNH curriculum will differ from lesson to lesson” (Karma, 29 years old).

Another respondent reflected on what the school is providing the students so that the GNH values are understood by the students:

“Instructions for the lessons to be planned based on GNH values. Social services are initiated and the cultural and traditional days are also observed. As a result of a lot of the GNH infused curriculum, children are observed as being more keen in the social service, the students themselves, and those the school initiates for the community and where there is an opportunity for the volunteer works “(Sangay, 37 years old).

From the survey questionnaires, most teachers viewed GNH curriculum as a preferred curriculum to teach and learn in comparison to the traditional curriculum. Teachers also stated that the benefits of learning with GNH infused curriculum is more realistic and in line with what Bhutan needs as a developing nation grappling with socio-economic problems. Teachers also mentioned that while there are many social skills that students have become acquainted with the GNH infused curriculum, the curriculum does not help the academic performance of students.

Dispositions and Values of Learning with GNH Infused Curriculum. The survey questionnaires brought out the values and dispositions that teachers have observed in their students. Teachers have noticed that GNH infused curriculum is better than the traditional curriculum, which displays more of an abstract knowledge:

“...Underlying messages of the lessons are exposed and they have learned to value the social skills and values” (Ugyen, 36 years old).

Almost all the respondents believe that the GNH infused curriculum is a better curriculum for learning and teaching

“Children learn better since the lessons are integrated with values of the daily life activities and life skills” (Singye, 43 years old).

Teachers have observed that students who have been learning with the GNH infused curriculum have displayed varied positive behaviors, both personally as well as academically. Therefore, some teachers shared their opinions on the dispositions and values of learning with GNH infused curriculum. Learning, according to the teachers, has become more learner-centered, and the purpose of learning has been diverted to achieve happiness with mindful living rather than being an economic activity-focused or driven individual.

Challenges of Learning and Teaching with GNH Infused Curriculum.

Teachers have expressed their disappointment over the absence of a proper guideline from the Ministry of Education on how to teach and plan lessons with the GNH infused curriculum. The participant is of the view that such a situation is the most challenging aspect of teaching with this GNH infused curriculum:

“...It is challenging due to the reason there are no specific directions in the curriculum as how to teach with the GNH values/domains” (Namgay, 37 years old).

One more respondent also agreed with what was stated by his colleague, that there is a disconnection between the Ministry of Education's expectation and the unavailability of an outline on which values to use across the same grades:

“Specific/clear directions required for the GNH curriculum. Bhutanese texts are recommended instead of the Indian texts, which the ministry still has not been able to change into the Bhutanese context” (Kuenga, 41 years old).

From the survey analysis, it seems there is a major challenge that teachers are facing due to the absence of proper and clear formalized directions on how the GNH values can be applied to the lessons taught. There is also a discomfort reflected since some of the text books are still in the Indian context, which makes it difficult to teach, relate, and convey the appropriate meaning of the concepts taught.

Principals

GNH Definition. GNH is defined with different phrases , but they all seem to be based on the same concept. Respondents believe that GNH is a philosophy of economic growth, which considers individuals and the nation as a whole, responsible for better development of the country and more consideration about the humanistic values, which was expressed as being able to cater to holistic education.

Principals defined GNH based on the values and themes of GNH. Here are some of the typical definitions:

“...An aspect of the country's social and cultural, values, ecological knowledge, personal health and better quality of human resource development” (Sangay, 44 years old).

Another respondent provides the definition of GNH as:

“The concept which caters to holistic education and well-balanced in terms of spiritual as well as economic development of the country. GNH also means being mindful or the consumption and belief that being content and adopting a sustainable living style will be the best for now as well as the future generation” (Soenam, 49 years old).

The final respondent believes that GNH is:

“...A philosophy of growth, which considers individuals, and the nation as a whole responsible for a better development, more consideration on the humanistic values” (Tsokye, 46 years).

From the principals’ responses, GNH refers to the country’s social, cultural values, ecological knowledge, personal health, and better quality of human resource development, with sustainable practices in the use of resources. GNH places the individual at the center of development and nurtures the humanistic values. They also stated that in terms of education, the application of GNH fosters holistic education.

The Impacts of Learning Environment and Skills of Learning with GNH Infused Curriculum. According to the first principal respondent, the learning environment and skills of learning with the GNH curriculum are very important in order for the curriculum to successfully reach its target audience. He states that:

“Lessons are integrated with the GNH values creating the appropriate environment for the curriculum to be sustained and applied efficiently. More emphasis on GNH values, which results in the development of altruistic, social, and intellectual skills are observed” (Wangdi, 49 years old).

Another principal expressed his opinion as:

“All the activities in the schools are created in line with the pillars and domains of GNH, as a result of which are positive thinking and mindfulness are observed, and students also have become calmer, as an individual, later in their lives, as a family, love, care for friends, and the environment are expected. At work, the GNH values are to promote integrity, accountability, responsibility and ultimately holistic growth of an individual” (Tashi, 42 years old).

Yet another respondent said that:

“Lessons are planned around the GNH values and good governance, social and environmental awareness for preservation, cultural promotion and preservation are becoming aware amongst the children” (Dendup, 40 years old).

Principals are of the belief that the school provides the proper and needed learning environment for both their teachers as well as the students. The skills principals observed in their students are of better intrapersonal skills and care for themselves and their environment including those nonliving beings as well.

Dispositions and Values of Learning with GNH Infused Curriculum.

Principals have expressed their views from their perceptions and expectations of the dispositions and values of learning with the GNH infused curriculum. Students as well as the teachers and the principals all have the same themes, that learning with a GNH infused curriculum is better and that it introduces and nurtures more humanistic values for the students to be better human beings who can practice mindful living successfully.

One respondent mentioned that:

“Collaboration and coordination in any activity is observed amongst the students as well as with the staff. Wholesome development of intellectual, spiritual, physical and social values are highly regarded positive outlook of life”
(Ngawang, 47 Years old).

Another respondent shares his observation on the dispositions and values with the GNH infused curriculum as:

“...positive outlook of life and dynamic leadership roles adopted by the administrators and other stakeholders” (Jamba, 39 years old).

The participants have articulated that a GNH infused curriculum would prepare a student better than the traditional method, as the curriculum inculcates meaningful values of life to live and help living. Wholesome growth intellectually, as well as disciplinary issues are observed to have minimized in the students. The leadership role with this curriculum has led to a more dynamic administration.

Challenges of Learning and Teaching with GNH Infused Curriculum. From the study, it can be seen that teaching with the GNH infused pedagogy is not a panacea, but it does have some basic solutions to the societal problems that are in some ways disrupting our communities and lives.

Of the three principals interviewed, only one responded to the challenges of a GNH infused curriculum.

“High expectation from the ministry without any clear direction for both teachers and students”(Tsencho, 34 years old).

Although there is are lots of expectations from the schools to perform well both in academics as well as an individual, the school still is expecting the ministry of

education of Bhutan to help and provide them with directions and guidelines to teach with GNH values.

Parents

Definition of GNH. From findings of parents' survey, parents have expressed their knowledge about GNH and its benefit as the guiding developing philosophy of the country, which places the citizens as the primary focus of the development goals.

GNH, according to the first respondent, is:

“Development philosophy which places emphasis on the happiness of the people, efficient use of resources, preservation and promotion of our culture, to be able to think not just about one’s self, but for the community, regional, national and to strive to be a good global citizen all together. Preservation of the Himalayan ecology is also a very strong representation of what GNH is” (Tandi, 56 years old).

One respondent explains GNH as:

“Happiness of the masses. It is a development path that judiciously balances sustainable and equitable growth with conservation of our unique culture, environment” (Dawa, 49 years old).

One of the parent respondents expresses his views on the definition of GNH as:

“...It is a subjective feeling which will result from not wanting more, instead being able to focus on the needs rather than desiring wants as well as need” (Cheten, 46 years old).

This group of participants reflected a rich knowledge of what GNH is and how it works. Parents were also aware of the values of a GNH infused curriculum where they are applied. Environmental preservation and cultural promotion are also mentioned as an important component of GNH, along with a feeling of contentment with one's practice of sustainable consumption, and focusing more on the needs, rather than the wants., .

The Impacts of Learning Environment and the Skills from Learning with GNH Infused Curriculum. Although parents do not have much influence in the school to monitor the school administration, parents do play key roles by being the school board members known as School Management Board (SMB).

One parent respondent commented on the learning environment that:

"...Certain GNH values are introduced in the school which assisted in the holistic approach to teaching and learning, emphasis given on values and skills. The curriculum not only teaches, it also inspires" (Tshomo, 46 years old).

Another respondent articulated on the learning environment and skills of GNH curriculum as:

"Students are exposed to the GNH values as much as possible through school activities both academic as well as non-academic activities" (Eden, 56 years old.)

A parent also believes and has mentioned that:

"...Social skills and life skills are made aware to children, because of which holistic education— equal rights and equal opportunities—are known and practiced by the students where applicable" (Thinley, 55 years old).

Parents are of the perception that with the integration of the country's development philosophy in the curriculum, it is a better way for the education of their children. Students are observed as being more aware of the social skills, mindful of their ecosystem and its importance in addition to which, the GNH curriculum *“not only teaches, but it also inspires.”* According to the participant's interview perspective they observed, students are also observed to having adopted fair and just lifestyles.

Dispositions and Values of Learning with GNH Infused Curriculum.

According to the parents, the dispositions and values of learning with a GNH infused curriculum are observed in the students, the school administration, and also the pedagogy, as a result of which there are a lot of benefits of teaching with the GNH infused curriculum rather than the traditional curriculum.

The answer samples here are representative of a typical response given by the parents:

“Students are mindful about every aspect of their lives, fall in disciplinary issues, more sense of responsibility with public goods” (Wangchuk, 49 years old).

Another respondent observed that:

“Imbued with sense of volunteerism, naturally look happier, positive about life. Care and concern for seniors and animals. Learner-centered teaching, value-laden class. Creative and critical thinking are also promoted. Decentralized administration” (Jamtsho, 56 years old).

From the survey analysis, children have learned to participate in social services, being positive about life, and caring about themselves and the world around them .

Creative and critical thinking are also observed. Culture preservation and promotion are

also valued more consistently with the school emphasis on promoting and preserving the culture.

Challenges of Learning and Teaching with GNH Infused Curriculum.

Parents are aware of the school administration as well as other important things happening in the school, as some of these parents are a part of the school management board.

“GNH values are not clearly stated. Proper mechanism to measure the progress of GNH curriculum must be made available for everyone to see the change”
(Lhendup, 49 years old).

Another respondent expresses that challenges of GNH infused curriculum are as:

“GNH concept should be made accessible to every citizen of Bhutan since the proper function of GNH will only succeed when there is mass involvement of the entire nation” (Karpo, 58 years old).

According to the parents, the Ministry of Education has not stated the curriculum direction clearly anywhere, in addition to which there are no strategic measurement tools that will help in the actual measurement of how effective the schools have achieved the goals of teaching and learning with a GNH infused curriculum. There is a need for an explicit GNH infused curriculum guideline so that teachers and administrators can apply the themes without any hindrance.

Analysis

Although the GNH definition is worded/expressed differently by each set of participants, the meaning of GNH revolves around the same themes. From the summary of definitions given by all the participants, GNH is a development paradigm which takes

into consideration both physical and emotional needs of all citizens and development policies focused on humanistic values. Sustainable use of resources were also observed as a common theme of the respondents. Preservation and promotion of culture was mentioned as another important aspect of GNH. Two respondents have also mentioned that GNH with reference to curriculum has led to the construction of an environment which will foster holistic education.

The school provides a GNH learning environment, as a result of which, even if the GNH curriculum guidelines are not available for the teachers to apply, students have expressed that up until now, they have gained a lot of social skills, understood environmental issues, and developed their psycho-cognitive emotions have also developed. Both academic and non-academic skills are nurtured and revived. Students are expected to graduate with GNH values and skills. Children have also become aware of important cultural values. With the GNH infused curriculum, the dispositions and values are numerous as described, observed, and expressed by the participants.

The most common responses by all the participants are that children are becoming mindful/ aware of their actions and words, in addition to which children are also observed to have become more considerate and compassionate to all the living beings. Students and school staff alike have valued the need to preserve and promote their culture and tradition. Learning has become more learner-centered and the purpose of learning has shifted from merely meeting ends to bringing about spiritual well-being or genuine happiness, which can be expressed in their own experiences.

One of the challenges of teaching with a GNH infused curriculum reported by all the participants is the obscure directions given by the Ministry to teach, without any

uniform guidelines and directions of the GNH values at each grade level. There is also a need expressed for a strategic tool to measure the progress of teaching with a GNH infused curriculum, so that appropriate interventions can be adopted as applicable.

Some student participants have expressed their wish to know the goals and objectives of learning and teaching with the GNH infused curriculum. They expressed a desire for the administration to make it an opportunity for them also to participate in the formulation of the goals and objectives of GNH curriculum. There is also a need to change the text books from the Indian context. (Bhutanese schools used text books imported from Indian with the Indian syllabus for a long time when Bhutan did not have enough human and capital resources to produce their own books.) Although many books are now in the Bhutanese context, there are still some text books that are still with the Indian syllabus, and due to this reason it was also seen as an obstacle to teach effectively.

Another challenge was expressed as the need for the whole nation to be aware of the concept of GNH so that everyone can contribute and collaborate in helping the schools produce GNH graduates. This is reflected as a suggestive idea for the Ministry to address so that the nation as a whole will be aware and help the schools more consistently.

In order for the Ministry of Education of Bhutan to utilize GNH infused curriculum to foster a holistic education, the Ministry will need to provide support so that teachers, administrators, community members, and students frequently have a platform to discuss, explore and better understand the GNH infused curriculum goals. In this way, teaching and learning practices can more deeply align with the expectations of the GNH curriculum.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

On the basis of the research conducted, it is observed that infusing the curriculum with GNH values is a wise decision that the Ministry of Education of Bhutan has adopted. Infusing core ideas of Bhutan's GNH development model into the education shows promise for a brighter future for the children and citizens of Bhutan. This is because the GNH curriculum not only has the potential to address the social, political, economic and environmental issues of the moment, it also educates children about the future and the need to heighten awareness of their actions and thoughts. If the schools can sustain the practice of the GNH infused curriculum with enthusiasm, life would become more meaningful for the Bhutanese children because the curriculum would address the nine domains of GNH more fully: psychological well being, health, education, culture, time use, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity, resilience, and living standards. These domains provide the basis upon which teachers and the administration's plan their skills and strategies to teach their children.

In addition, GNH infused curriculum addresses holistic teaching and learning, which provides a climate for children to be able to come into contact with those values that are worth adopting and teaching to the Bhutanese students with reference to the country's cultural aspects as well as the country's Buddhist traditions. Another reason that Bhutanese education should preserve and sustain this curriculum is because it will

provide children with more opportunities to learn the skills to solve problems, be role models, believe in collaboration with others, communicate effectively, think critically, and be more reflective of their words and actions. This will also address Bhutan's unique cultural identity and more importantly lead the country to develop efficient and skillful human resources.

However, if the Ministry of Education of Bhutan aspires to produce GNH graduates who would be aware of the values and ethics derived from the nine domains and four pillars of GNH, there needs to be a clear understanding and emphasis on the desired curriculum development for different grades. If the school is looking forward to inculcating the GNH principles as directed by the Ministry of Education, the school will have to address more realistic goals. The schools cannot instantly produce GNH graduates, those with the GNH values incorporated in their actual living. Nevertheless, if the administration and the Ministry of Education can plan and work towards those relevant goals for a period of time, take time to evaluate programs and progress with care, make necessary remediation when called for, the promise of a better education system can be realized..

In addition, all those who are responsible for education, such as the community, parents, and the school as a whole including the students themselves, should be encouraged to be more responsive of the values of GNH and its goals and objectives for the efficiency of the curriculum.

Even if there is the existence of a climate for the preservation and promotion of the culture and tradition, still due to more focus on the academic portion of the

curriculum, students do not get enough time to get accustomed to the culture and traditional practices.

Teachers and administrators also need to stress the importance of the GNH curriculum and discuss with parents and the community at large about what they can do in order for the curriculum to flourish in the school.

Recommendations

The current study is preliminary and represents only a start on the kinds of research this topic warrants. This is true with respect to all three of the research questions explored here. The first question concerns the way GNH is understood in general; further study is needed to explore this question fully as public understanding grows and changes. The second question on the impact of GNH curriculum in schools warrants more detailed studies in more schools at all levels in Bhutan. The third research question concerning how best to nurture GNH values in education calls for further study of the complex factors involved in efforts to deepen the impact of GNH values in and through education. For these reasons, it is highly recommended that there should be further research on the GNH curriculum since this research is just done on a small data collection. It will be more justified if all learning and teaching institutions in the country can be studied, so that more recommendations can be utilized at the appropriate time.

The Ministry of Education and the school together can also enhance the promotion of the GNH infused curriculum through empowerment of teachers by encouraging research on different areas related to schooling especially on topics where the focus of their professional developments could address the different learner centered pedagogies, including approaches being explored in various other places in the world.

Although the GNH infused curriculum is used in the schools currently, the actual school curricula are still far removed from the needs and sometime they are beyond comprehension of the students , teachers and administrators themselves, This is a discrepancy that needs further study.

One of the reasons for such discrepancy in the goals and achievements of the GNH infused curriculum lies in the current trend of professional development for teachers and principals, which falls short in many realistic strategies the schools could adopt. This includes the rarity of workshops and seminars on GNH for teachers and administrators, and hardly any orientation for the community and the students. Therefore, efforts must be made toward awareness and to address the current national as well as global educational scenarios related to the GNH infused curriculum. Since the world is becoming more technologically advanced every minute, and children would have more diversity in their learning skills since different children have different learning abilities, some learn visually, some verbally and some with psycho motor skills.

Despite the much acclaimed learner-centered pedagogy, teaching still remains more aligned to teacher-centered approaches. This strategy of teacher-centered teaching would undermine the encouragement of skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and development of nurturing relationships in students. Therefore, teachers can help students with reorientation of the pedagogy on how to motivate and provide learner-centered teaching and learning environments.

If the Ministry of Education has expectations from the schools to produce GNH graduates, there is an immediate urgency in the school to study the impacts of the GNH infused curriculum in all the schools in Bhutan and address the challenges and provide

more clarified directions of how to implement the GNH values in the schools. Since GNH infused curriculum claims and aspires to address social, political and environmental issues, there is also the need to address these concepts more meaningfully and practically without integrating it with the academic content of the curriculum. For if these subjects are not addressed, firstly it will cost the Bhutanese dearly in terms of the environmental hazards, social problems and political crisis. Secondly, the GNH infused curriculum will fail its claims on being the better curriculum to teach children with if school does address these issues. There is a trend observed in the schools still, which focuses more on the academic portion of the curriculum, as a result of which the GNH values are very vaguely applied and adopted.

So, in order for the GNH curriculum to be effective and more relevant in the schools, the Ministry of Education will need to develop strategic plans where the application of the values are not diluted or confusing for those applying these GNH values in the school. If Bhutan wants to achieve self reliance, fulfill all the basic needs of the citizens, maintain environmental sustainability, foster their unique culture, stand democratically sound, whereby citizens would be creative and capable of responding to the global issues of environment, social and economic matters, the GNH infused curriculum must be nurtured with care, love and responsibility by the citizens of Bhutan. Schools alone would not be able to take on such a huge responsibility. In addition, it makes it more worthwhile and it will be more fruitful if everyone collaborates on the sustenance of GNH values either at work, home or school. The more people begin to be aware, respect, value and feel the urge to adopt GNH values as their guiding principle of

living, the sooner the nation will be able to achieve its goals of being one of the happiest nations on the earth.

Appendix A
HSIRB Approval Letter


WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: April 11, 2014

To: Paul Farber, Principal Investigator
Sonam Zangmo, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number 14-04-01

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Gross National Happiness Infused Curriculum" has been **approved** under the **exempt** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., *you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study."*) Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: April 10, 2015

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