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## Engaging Underprivileged Children in Collaborative Partnership via a Curriculum

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### Abstract

Curriculum is one of the collaborative partnership strategies used in the community efforts to develop the underprivileged children in Malaysia. This curriculum was developed by the community members to assist community partnership efforts to impart ICT knowledge and skills, personal development elements, and encourage learners to contribute to the society via a CSP. Based on the available documents, this paper examines how the curriculum is able to bring the stakeholders together in the collaborative partnerships, and how underprivileged children are engaged in the efforts. This analysis will focus on the distinctive conjunction of personal development, ICT, and community service elements in the curriculum.

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### 1. Introduction

Information communication technologies (ICTs) have grown rapidly in Malaysia due to positive support, especially from the government and corporate sectors in terms of policy buildings, financial allocation, putting up resources in place, and offering affordable Internet access. Since its independent in 1957, the development programmes of Malaysia have been conducted through five-year development plans according to the needs and resources of the country within those specific periods. Currently, the country is in its Tenth Development Plan

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(2011-2015), ICT is considered as one of the twelve National Key Economic Areas, the approach taken to transform the country into high income economy based on specialisation (*Tenth Malaysia Plan 2011-2015*, 2010). However, this constructive development also instils a fear that some segments of the society like children in orphanages might be left behind. These children will also be referred as underprivileged children throughout the discussion of this paper. They are being considered as underprivileged because they are being placed in orphanages due to various family issues, lacking in education and struggling with a lot of emotional and psychological problems.

Realising the importance of including these children alongside national ICT development, CyberCare initiated community collaborative partnerships with various stakeholders to serve the children through numerous programmes and activities since 1998 (Muda, 2009). The stakeholders involved are ranging from orphanage administrators, corporations, government, volunteers, and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The children in orphanages are considered as indirect stakeholders because when the organisation was set up, it centred around one specific orphanage and there is no child in its board members (Muda, 2009). Based on a qualitative case study of collaborative partnership in CyberCare, this paper mainly focuses on the curriculum used in carrying out Care4U programme. This paper identifies how the curriculum gets the stakeholders to work together in the collaborative partnership, and how underprivileged children are engaged in collaborative partnership efforts. It begins with the background of *Mengecapi Aspirasi Diri-MAD* (Living my Aspirations) curriculum, followed by the theoretical review of collaborative partnership and curriculum components, and the analysis of MAD content.

## 2. Background of MAD curriculum

The MAD Curriculum was first developed for the purpose of a project called *Menguasai Aplikasi Internet dan PC- M.A.I.N.PC* (Mastering Internet and PC applications), organised by the Association of the Computer and Multimedia Industry Malaysia (PIKOM) with seven key partners including four corporations, one government sector, and two NGOs with a vision to bridge digital divides between urban and rural communities (*MAD Curriculum* 2008). Each partner has its own specific responsibility in the implementation of the project.

All of the corporate stakeholders involved including PIKOM were actually the main key players in the ICT industries nationally and internationally. Their involvement mainly in supporting the smooth running of the curriculum implementation by providing facilities and infrastructure, computer hardware and software, sponsorships, technical support and maintenance, and Internet connection. The government stakeholder involved in providing telecentre and computer training facility. The other NGO served as a patron to CyberCare at that time and involved in controlling the account flow, and providing volunteers and network support. CyberCare was responsible to develop, design, and implement the training curriculum, and conduct pilot studies to test the suitability and effectiveness of the training curriculum.

The uniqueness of MAD curriculum lies in the incorporation of three distinct elements of personal development, ICT and community service. It incorporates personal development aspects together with ICT learning in order to help individuals to increase their self-confidence, positive beliefs, motivation, and other positive values while mastering ICT skills. These have come into focus based on the experiences and difficulties faced by the stakeholders involved in serving the children during the early years. Ultimately, this curriculum aims to raise public's awareness on community service and involvement in contributing to the society.

## 3. Collaborative partnership and curriculum

Pertaining to partnership, there are many definitions given from diverse field of knowledge. As simply defined by Frank and Smith (2006), partnership is about people working together in a mutually beneficial relationship which oftentimes doing things together that might not be able to be achieved alone. This implies the sharing of resources, work, risk, responsibility, decision-making, power, benefits and burdens. Viewing from inclusive education Todd (2007) asserts that partnership between children and young people, with parents and professionals is clearly very important for the development of inclusion, and the challenge is to move beyond the conceptual notions of partnership towards collaborative practices experienced by all parties. Brown et al. (2002) discuss the changes in how the people or service providers put their efforts to improve outcomes for children where they came to adopt collaborative partnership. Osborne and Murray (2000) stress that collaborative partnership does not have to involve equitable power relationships but all partners have a significant contribution to make. These demonstrate that, depending on situations, it is important for the stakeholders to find ways to work with each other to sustain their

collaborative works. One of the ways is by using a tool such as a curriculum to provide them with the means of getting together and contribute.

Based on a more formal structure of curriculum in school education system, Beauchamp (1982) views three legitimate uses of the word curriculum as referring to a document prepared for purposes of describing the goals, scope and sequence of culture content selected for purposes of attaining the selected goals, a curriculum system which has its purposes on the development of a curriculum, organised implementation and evaluation of that curriculum, and as a field of study. Eash (1991) believes that the holistic effect of a curriculum derives from the integration of its components similar to the interactive orchestration of component systems in the human body. Hence, he provides five widely agreed upon components which are in line with Beauchamp (1982) definition of curriculum.

The first component concerns the learner and society as a framework. It is the first guiding construct among curriculum planners in determining learner's ability, needs, interest, motivation, and potential for learning particular cultural content. The second guiding construct is society's orientation to nurturing or using the individual which describes the society's preferences over individual. The assumptions guiding the choices in provisioning components of the curriculum largely emerge in the answer to the questions of whether a curriculum is to be based on: 1) the needs of the learner, 2) the needs of the society, or 3) a position that is a reconciliation of the two. The second involves aims and objectives (purposes). Aims and objectives become significant for they assume a directing relationship to the provisioning of the subsequent components. They evolve and change as cultures and their participants change. The issue which concern scholars such as Eash (1991) is the curricula inadequacy in reflecting these changes and how to keep a curriculum up to date.

The third deals with content or subject matter with its choice, scope, and sequence (learning experiences). Guided by knowledge of learners' abilities and a position on society's requirements of learners' knowledge of subject matter, the curriculum planner exercises selection in the choice of subject matter and develops a scope, the range of the subject matter to be studied, and sequence in which the subject matter is to be studied. These selections are translated through materials like textbooks, curriculum guides and other directives to teachers and learners. In this case, MAD curriculum is the learning experiences that have been compiled into the modules to guide the coach and learners involved in the programme.

The fourth discusses the modes of transaction, for example methodology and learning environment (organisation). They are designed to accompany the presentation of subject matter. They are viewed as major determinants in learners' outcomes especially as they affect attitudes of students as well as content mastery. As suggested by Joyce and Weil, the role of the teacher and learner in the transaction of learning and their respective degree of choice in determining the modes of learning, for instance learner active/ learner passive or verbal mode/ symbolic mode may provide further classifications of direct or indirect modes of transaction (as cited in Eash, 1991). Modes of transactions in the MAD curriculum involve a cycle: the passing down of the learning experiences from the coach/ coaches of Cybercare to undergraduate university interns, and then to underprivileged children and the cycle will continue when these children will be able to contribute back to the community. The final component is evaluation. As an integral element to a curriculum, evaluation may give emphasis to providing the individual with information on performance to guide the learner to the next steps in the sequence of the subject matter. The evaluation is thus related as a guide to modes of transaction and sequencing.

## **5. Content of the curriculum**

The curriculum focuses on three main elements of personal development (PD), ICT skills, and CSP. It is the product of collaborative partnerships which builds collaborative partnerships as well. In brief, the structure and content of the curriculum are presented in *Figure 1*.

### *5.1. Structure of coaching and approach*

The structure of coaching and approach serves as guidelines for coaches and facilitators involve in the programme. This section is further divided into four substructures of coaching, approach, building rapport, and introducing MAD Curriculum. The first substructure emphasises the need to have a lead coach and facilitators to run each coaching session. It clarifies clearly about the roles and functions of the lead coach/ coach and facilitator including the issues they need to be aware of in the programme. Among the important points, a coach is reminded to

respect and accept the learners as they are, treat them equally, and observe appropriate ethical conducts to remain objective.

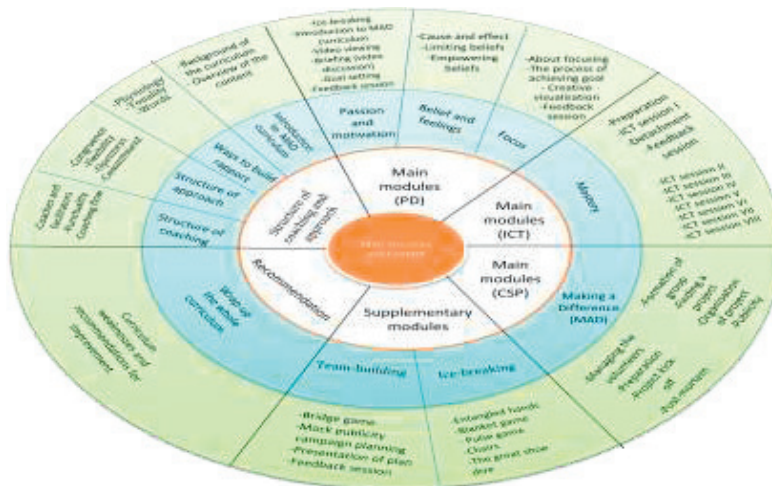


Fig. 1: The structure and content of MAD curriculum.

### 5.2. Main modules (Personal development)

This section includes three main modules of passion and motivation, belief and feelings, and focus. In the first module, passion and motivation, the objectives are to help instill passion and motivation among learners towards ICT learning, and to ensure learners are ready and excited to start their journey throughout the curriculum. It is carried out in six sessions. In each session, it mentions the objective, duration, activities, and also material if there is any. Additionally, in goal setting session, the coach gives lecture based on S.M.A.R.T goal setting: S - specific/ special, M – measurable/ meaningful, A – achievable/ as if now, R – realistic/ relevant, and T – timely/ tangible. At the end of session, learners are asked and guided to fill in the form about their goals based on SMART technique.

The second module aims to change learners' limiting beliefs to empowering ones. It contains three sessions: 1) cause and effect for the learners to learn about living on causes and not effects of life; 2) limiting beliefs for the learners to identify limiting beliefs that often come into their minds and to change; and 3) empowering beliefs to expose the learners to empowering beliefs that can help them realise their goals. Rather than filling each session with facts only, the coach is encouraged to share his/her personal experience relating to the concept as well, and to explain the concept of detaching and not taking negative comments personally to avoid misunderstanding.

The third module is designed to help learners to focus on their goals once they have set them, and equipped with constructive beliefs that they can achieve them. It is carried out in four sessions which begins with creating awareness of focusing to achieve a goal, and ends with the learners' reflections on what they have learnt and how they would apply it in their lives. As in the previous modules, this module also highlights some potential problems and suggestions, and the thoughts from the trained coaches.

### 5.3. Main module (ICT)

This main module of ICT (mastery) is the fourth module in this curriculum and contains eight ICT focused sessions. It aims to equip learners with ICT knowledge in theory and application. It begins with preparation session to teach the learners about taking initiative to prepare them for the ICT lessons. The first ICT session begins with the learning of computer fundamentals, and paint and notepad. After that the learners involve in the detachment session where they learn how to give and accept feedback constructively. The coach guides the learners by using comparison examples. At the same time the coach is also aware of the potential problems and how to deal with that.

Then, the intensive learning of ICT continues with second ICT sessions focuses on Microsoft word, third ICT session focuses on both Microsoft word and Microsoft excel. The fourth ICT session focuses on Microsoft Power Point. The learners start to learn Internet application in the fifth ICT session onwards. It starts with the learning of

how to search information online, use email, to how to create and update blog. The learners also start to create a proposal for CSP in the sixth ICT session. And in the final ICT session, the learners apply all of the knowledge and skills they have in preparing for CSP such as preparing power point slides, letter, and flyer.

#### 5.4. Main module (CSP)

In this fifth module, the learners have to apply all the learning in personal development and ICT training to make a difference to themselves and also outside themselves. Specifically, this CSP module aims to: i. Enable the learners to put into practice what they have learned and apply it in real-life setting; ii. Instil teamwork among the learners; and iii. Build strong character among the learners. CSP module includes the sessions of group formation, finding a project, organisation of project, publicity, managing the volunteers, preparation, project kick-off, and post-mortem. Each of the sessions is having its specific objective(s) and instructions of how it should be carried out.

#### 5.5. Supplementary and recommendation modules

This final section contains ice-breaking and team building modules. These two modules act as supplementary to the main modules mentioned above. In the Ice-breaking module, some activities and games are suggested to help relax the learners and bring them into the mood of excitement. They can be used to illustrate certain concepts that the coach wishes to explain. The team-building module helps the learners to develop a sense of teamwork among them in achieving a common objective.

In the recommendation section, the curriculum developers are aware of some weaknesses of the curriculum. They are concern that the curriculum might not be suitable to all age groups especially young children who might not fully understand concepts like limiting beliefs or exercises like visualisation to fully benefit from the curriculum. This curriculum only acts as a guideline for coaches, and is not rigid where coaches have to follow exactly of what is stated.

## 6. Discussion

This collaborative partnership involves various stakeholders of different backgrounds in an agreement to bridge digital divides between urban and rural communities. CyberCare has come to focus on underprivileged children. The content of the curriculum and its plan of implementation show that each of the stakeholders – both in ICT and human services areas – are able to benefit from the partnership.

As the concept of partnership focuses on significant contribution of the stakeholders involved rather than equitable power relationship (Osborne & Murray, 2000), I will argue that this curriculum will able to align them together and maintain their partnership in the long run as they are able to share the same vision for ICT and community besides other differences, and this involves doing things together that might not be able to be achieved alone (Frank & Smith, 2006). This curriculum will not be able to be developed and implemented if it is not because of various contributions made by the stakeholders who collaborate in the partnership. In this case of collaborative partnership, CyberCare and its volunteers ranging from university students to life coaches were involved with the designing and implementing the curriculum.

Applying the concept of curriculum components as explained by Eash (1991), the way the curriculum focused on developing the children with the personal strength, ICT and community service skills have demonstrated the stakeholders' chosen framework of assumptions. In this discussion, the learners' guiding construct is simply referred to the needs of the learners that include the intern students and children from orphanages, and the society's guiding construct is further specified into the needs of the stakeholders and the general society. The needs of the learners are the main concern in constructing this curriculum. Among them as being portrayed in the curriculum are learners' needs to develop their abilities, strengths, and potentials as individuals and leaders, to become confidence, know their goals, have empowering beliefs, and have ICT knowledge and skills. These needs are relevant considering this curriculum is also targeted for use for underprivileged children. As the main developers were also the intern students of Psychology who have gone through the coaching programme, the content of the curriculum also highlighted some important terms with scholarly defined explanations such as various terms used for rapport building. In term of stakeholder needs, the focus of the curriculum on ICT reflected the corporation orientations, which are the key players of ICT industries. It serves their needs in marketing their products, creating demands, increasing sales, and



developing social capital for their future needs for human resource. Supporting community related activities can also help them in creating and developing the image of the corporations and serve their purposes of corporate social responsibility.

The content of the curriculum as a whole demonstrates the general needs of the general society. These needs are mostly related to the accepted values and ethical conducts, and other significant needs of the society. For instance, in introducing the learners to the curriculum, the structure of coaching and approach are explained clearly. In that part, the emphasis is being put on the roles of the individual subjects of the curriculum, particularly the coach and learner. It explains what the coach should do and what the coach should not do where the coach is reminded of societal values that should be observed and ethical issues that should be avoided.

Purposes of the curriculum are clearly stated in the curriculum which reflect a construct provisioned for a sequence of study (training) and map out the arena for a teacher's (in this case refers to a coach) directed effort (Eash, 1991). The aims and objectives of the whole MAD curriculum are divided into its general aim to bridge digital divides between urban and rural communities, main aim to encourage learners to contribute to the society with their ICT knowledge that they have acquired into the execution of the CSP, and long term aim to increase public's awareness on community service and participation among the society. Then in each specific module, each specific objective is mentioned. Some modules have specific objective from session to session. All these purposes reflected the assumptions of the learner and society needs mentioned in the discussion of the first component earlier. As this curriculum means to provide modules to guide coach and learner in the process of achieving collaborative partnership vision, the curriculum really served the purpose. The curriculum developer also aware about the important to keep the purposes up to date according to the needs as it is mentioned at the end of the curriculum section that the curriculum is not a final one and it is open to change in the future.

Although the terms used and roles are explained precisely (coach, lead coach, and facilitator), some are used without further explanation like the terms animator and ICT trainer/ trainer, and assistant. In an occasion, the word animator is mentioned together with the coach: "The coach and animators deliver the concepts that they have prepared." Here it shows that the coach and animator are different people but it is not clear if animator is also play the role of facilitator.

In other passages ICT trainer/ trainer and assistant are also mentioned together (John, 2003):

- Trainers should know how to balance the speed so that fast learners would not feel bored while slow learners would not find it hard to catch up.
- It is highly advisable to have a main ICT trainer with as many assistants as possible to give personal attention to each learner.

It is no clear explanation anywhere in the curriculum whether ICT trainer/ trainer and assistant can be the same people who serve the role as a coach or facilitator too. In the explanation of the ways that can be used to build rapport, the verbal and nonverbal effects of communication upon other people, which claimed to be based on a research are clearly described with certain percentages given. However, the exact details of the source are not clearly mentioned, which make it looks like a made-up story rather than a convincing fact.

Based on Eash (1991) explanation, the organisation of the subject matter and the plan of implementation of MAD curriculum are the key factors that demonstrate the modes of transaction of MAD curriculum. How the content is being delivered and who are the people involved in the process are showed. This is one of the significant parts to see how the stakeholders are brought together in the collaborative partnership via a curriculum. Generally, the methods of content delivery are planned to flow in cycle.

Then the content flows from the first cycle to the second cycle involving the learners. Here, the learners refer to the undergraduate student interns in CyberCare. Using the same curriculum they have been trained with, these learners will become coaches and deliver the curriculum content to underprivileged children in orphanages who formed the third cycle. At this stage the interns are still having connection with their coaches. Whenever they face a problem in the process, they will consult their coaches.

Together with the children, the interns plan a CSP to be carried out at the end of their internship period of fourteen weeks. For the purpose of the project planning, they put together what they have learnt throughout the modules into practice and acquiring the leadership skills. This CSP project is the stage where many other stakeholders involving members of the community, NGOs, orphanage administrators, corporate and government sectors are brought together in the realisation of the project. It is also the stage where the interns and children are becoming closer to the community. On the event, they can show the community that they can make a difference.

This curriculum is also designed to see that in the end the underprivileged children involved will be able to come back and contribute to the community.

After the finished of the CSP, the coaches, interns, and children will celebrate their accomplishment together. The interns will carry out a post-mortem with the children, and the coaches will carry out a post-mortem with the interns, and this is where the final component of evaluation is involved. Some of the feedbacks from the previous interns are mentioned in the explanation of the modules of the curriculum as well which are seemed like testimonials to promote the programme and curriculum. The coaches will also conduct the individual assessment on each intern and the reports of their performances will be sent to their university. Based on the current format of evaluation, it is seemed that the evaluation of the curriculum is being sought from the selective stakeholders only. What is lacking is the thorough evaluation from all stakeholders involved in the programme and the members of the community. In order for the curriculum and programme to be improved in future, the specific format on how the evaluation should be done and analysed has to be constructed as well.

The focus of the curriculum on the three main elements of PD, ICT skills, and CSP in engaging underprivileged children in the collaborative partnership representing a new approach of developing a community, and with commitment of all stakeholders involved to implement the documented curriculum, it can be a good example for a community project which makes meaningful use of ICT. However the stakeholders' vision in constructing a curriculum which is "to bridge digital divides between urban and rural communities" needs to be reviewed. It is because the issue of digital divide is highly debatable.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has shown that it is beneficial for the community project that involved various stakeholders with different backgrounds like CyberCare to have a comprehensive written guideline such as a curriculum to align them together under a similar purpose, so as to provide a clear direction of their collaboration, and to help them to carry out their role in an organised manner. More people have realised that to prevent or close the digital divide among the children or individuals, providing them with the ICT skills or access alone may not be the best solution. What is more effective is to include both human and technological aspects in the process as CyberCare framework which include the combination of personal development, ICT knowledge and skills, and CSP. Studying the content of the curriculum alone is not the best way to identify the engagement of the children and people involved. What can certainly be identified is the ways the curriculum designers intended to engage the learners. Thus it is important for us to observe the implementation process as well.

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