

# Breadth or Depth? Parallelism and Re-spiraling of Araling Panlipunan Competencies for Elementary Learners in Saint Louis College-Cebu

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## Abstract

This action research is conducted to address the issues surrounding the competencies and instruction in teaching Araling Panlipunan in the Elementary Level of Saint Louis College-Cebu. The learning competencies which serve to be the scaffold in understanding the civic, cultural, and historical context embedded in the curriculum have a different progression when the Revised-Basic Education Curriculum shifted to K-12 Curriculum. In the new curriculum's spiral progression, several topics or competencies from higher grade level were distributed to the lower grade level to which in effect, these competencies are no longer aligned to the level of understanding and appreciation of the grade school learners. Learners from the 4<sup>th</sup> grade to 6<sup>th</sup> grade were chosen through random sampling to answer the researcher-made survey questionnaire. The questionnaire focuses on the approaches, integration of the different domains such as integration of the core values and relevant social issues, and the competencies' level of difficulty. The relationship between the level of difficulty and the insufficient mastery of the topic shows the negative impact of distributing the advance topics to the lower grade level. This conforms the readiness of the learners' level of understanding. Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies) is exploratory, discovery, and value-laden discipline, thereby, it is essential to redesign the progression of competencies to give more depth and meaning to the competencies that learners need to master.

**Keywords:** Competencies, Spiral progression, curriculum, Araling Panlipunan

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## 1. Introduction

The curriculum of Social Studies or better known in the Philippines as Araling Panlipunan carries the expected transformation on the bases of civic responsibility, governmental duties, nationalism and patriotism, and preservation of the national and local heritage as part of the general context of the Philippines' culture and tradition. The curriculum itself had undergone several reformations to address the depleting understanding on the citizens' duties and responsibility as members of the community. Moreover, the appreciation of our very own culture has becoming superficial due to the raising exposure to social media which limits the young learners to recognize the beauty of what their country possessed. Thus, this reality posed a greater challenge in the teaching of Araling Panlipunan to give flesh to its dictum, nation building.

In a study conducted by the Far Eastern University (FEU) students in Manila entitled "Discernment of Truths and the Democratization of the Internet" which was mentioned by Rappler last April of 2022 in one of their columns, the researchers observed that the era of disinformation paved the rise of user-generated content to which some of it lack the necessary data to support its claim and even use claims that draw wrong conclusions. Indeed, forming the critical thinking of the young learners must be given emphasis and not limit teaching on memorization. Professor Emeritus of the University of the Philippines, Dr. Maris Diokno with her team of researchers also found the Araling Panlipunan curriculum lacks in terms of breadth and depth of information about the Philippines' struggle during the period of Martial Law under the reign of the late President Ferdinand Marcos. The textbooks for Grades 5 and 6 did not cover enough events about the 21-year period of dictatorship which resulted to the spread of misinformation and disinformation due to the absence of factual data.

With the current situation of our country both in the socio-economic and education aspect, one could not deny that there is somehow a shortfall in our educational system. However, the final conduct of instruction does rely on the content of the curriculum per se. When Araling Panlipunan competencies delivered conventionally, learners encountered difficulty in acquiring the skills and concepts needed (Moreno, 2019). Should teachers teach according to the scope of the curriculum guide or teach with breadth and depth?

## 2. Review of Related Literature

In the past years, teaching the competencies of Araling Panlipunan have encountered several issues that varies from instruction, allotted time, medium of instruction, and to the congested competencies. These issues had gotten worse when the pandemic caused by the emergence of Covid-19 challenged the world on how to keep

things turning despite the danger posed by the deadly disease.

This paper seeks to establish an approach to re-spiral the competencies which could help address the learning loss in Araling Panlipunan in the elementary level, especially that schools are now slowly reverting to the regular class schedule. Among the many issues of Araling Panlipunan, this study chooses to focus on the prime mover element in teaching the discipline which is the curriculum and its competencies. The content of Araling Panlipunan or Social Studies is the most inclusive of all school learning areas (Ross, 2006).

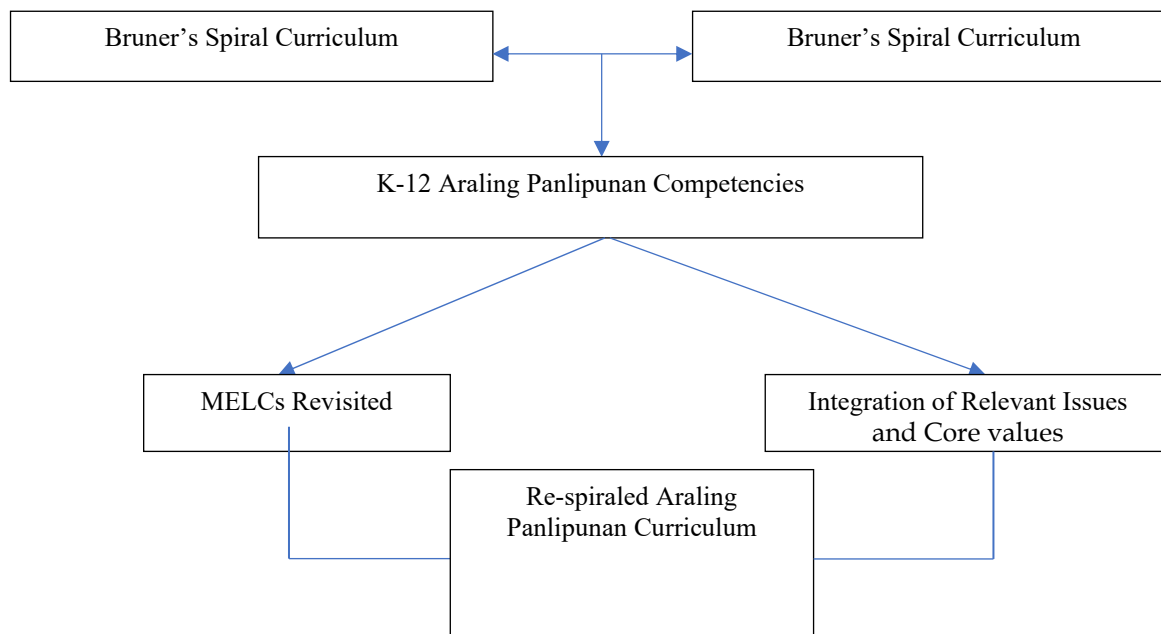
When the Basic Education Curriculum was enacted in 2002 under DepEd Order No. 25, s. 2002, the primary aim of the Philippine education is to produce functional literacy among the graduates of both public and private institutions. This move was even further enhanced when the Revised-Basic Education Curriculum was signed into a law. Under the implementing guidelines of BEC and R-BEC in DepEd Order No. 43, s. 2002 where Araling Panlipunan was then known as Sibika together with MAPEH and Values Education became the components of Makabayan. It is worth noting that Makabayan might not be one of the core subjects, yet it carries the role of promoting and producing proactive citizens in the society highlighting key points on healthy personal development and recognizing national self-identity. The learning identity of Makabayan can be correlational to the four pillars of knowledge of UNESCO. Educators must be guided by these pillars to create scaffolds between the knowledge gained to human experience (Rodrigues, 2021). The 21<sup>st</sup> century education has to be a transformative enterprise in shaping learners who possessed logical reasoning which is appropriate to its current reality (learning to know); can demonstrate the learning constructively at home and in the community (learning to do); lived with respect to life, empathetic to others, and coexist harmoniously with other living beings (learn to live together); and contributes knowledge and potentials for the betterment of the society (learning to be).

In the struggle between completing the lessons from the curriculum guide and mastery and deepening of the subject matter, it is not enough to see the conclusive notion found in the curriculum audit where all competencies are tried to finish by the teacher in one school year. Araling Panlipunan is not a skill-based discipline nor simple content subject. It is the holistic study of human enterprise through which mastery of the competencies is soundly demonstrated through action in dealing with others (Ross, 2006). R-BEC and K-12 Curriculum shared the same advocacy in forming the lifelong learning skills to enable them to become functional individuals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the complexity of the K-12 spiral progression for Araling Panlipunan made the competencies more congested and incohesive. So, did the progression of competencies found in the K-12 curriculum guide advance the learning of the learners?

Jerome Bruner's Spiral Curriculum (1960) established the idea of spiralization in a hypothesis that any subject in a contextual form needs to be introduced to the child in a specific stage of development. In addition, the availability of competencies intended for each grade level have to be suited with the age and level of understanding of the learners. Bruner's model for curriculum development suggests that a competency is to be revisited multiple times throughout the school year to establish learning reinforcement. This curricular flow allows progression to be parallel with the child's cognitive ability. In the spiral progression approach, the teachers should be cautious in maximizing the activities to get a good learning outcome in the teaching-learning environment (Salazar, 2019). However, it can also be argued that competencies in the curriculum guide as arranged using the spiral progression only help improve the learning performance of the learners if mastery of the concepts started in the lower grade (Rico & Baluyos, 2021). Thus, familiarity and mastery of the key ideas enables a new construct of learning to take place. Thereby, producing a mediocre result can be avoided if barriers in the mastery of competencies are sufficiently addressed, especially in the design and implementation phase (Perez, 2020).

This study finds the theory of cognitive constructivism a good supporting bench in re-spiraling the competencies using Bruner's model. Cognitive constructivism is a learning theory which adheres the possibility that knowledge is acquired through a process of reflection which lead to creating new meaning towards an experience (Mascolo & Fischer, 2010). In a phenomenological perspective, as the teacher deepens the topics and competencies by integrating social and relevant issues, this forms the learners' notion to see problems hermeneutically. One has to note that the insufficient information could loosen the acquisition of evidence-based knowledge. Nevertheless, the breadth of the competencies of Araling Panlipunan in the elementary should not be the hindrance in putting deeper understanding to every concept both in a contextualize or localize form.

Oliver Crisolago (2021) pointed in his paper entitled Relevance of Social Studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Society Students' Perspective, that Social Studies or Araling Panlipunan plays a significant role today as it encourages the participation of the community in enhancing critical and creative mindset, fosters cultural sensitivity, broadens global views, and promotes values formation among the Gen Zs and alpha learners. To set the necessary alignment and deepening of the competencies in the curriculum and the level of learners' understanding, teachers at the same time has to possess much knowledge and skill when implementing diverse educational principles of teaching and learning (Ediger, 20000).



**Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework of the Study**

The school operates as an agent of transformation by crafting curricula that provide learning experiences that will harness social criticism and positive action towards contemporary issues of the country (Tantango, 2016). The formal curriculum followed by the school from the Department of Education strongly suggests the intention of developing the social awareness of the learners. Core values of the school are important elements in developing the consciousness of the learners. Through the curriculum, learners are given the space to practice and demonstrate their role as part of the society and understand the responsibilities of their actions (Lovat, 2009) both in school and community. In the same manner, Stromquist (2007), argues that schools are not only place for learning, rather, it is also a cultural setting where learners are influenced by not only educators but also the school's culture. Thereby, Araling Panlipunan instructions and learning requires a high level of thinking which aid in the increase of the learners' performance (Acojido, 2021).

### 3. Statement of the Problem

This action research is primarily concerned on the outcome of instruction after the whole pack of competencies are given to the learners of Grades 3 to 6. It is determined to identify if the curriculum of Araling Panlipunan was able to create a scaffold between the knowledge gained during the formal delivery of instruction and living its context in their day-to-day experiences, thus demonstrating a lifelong skill that reflects the core values of Saint Louis College-Cebu.

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions.

1. Are the competencies/topics given emphasis through;
  - a. inductive and problem-based
  - b. cooperative and collaborative; or
  - c. reflective and inquiry?
2. Do the competencies/topics comprise of context not suited for the level of understanding of the learners?
3. Do the competencies/topics of Araling Panlipunan;
  - a. too advance for the level;
  - b. being repeated every quarter; or
  - c. help master life skills?
4. Are the competencies/topics aligned to the;
  - a. core values of the school;
  - b. real life experiences of the learners;
  - c. local cultural preservations; and
  - d. current and relevant issues.
5. What specific action can be done to create a parallel alignment of competencies which may result to a collective mastery of the subject matter and wholistic demonstration of the core values?

### 4. Methodology

The seamless progression of the curriculum increases the probability of learning mastery. The continuous

revisiting of topics and key concepts of the lesson builds knowledge and understanding, rather than mere memorization. This action research employs the theory-based method to determine the probable cause of the prevailing issues in the competencies of Araling Panlipunan and to identify what approach and model of learning can be used in re-spiraling the competencies to establish parallelism for AP in the elementary.

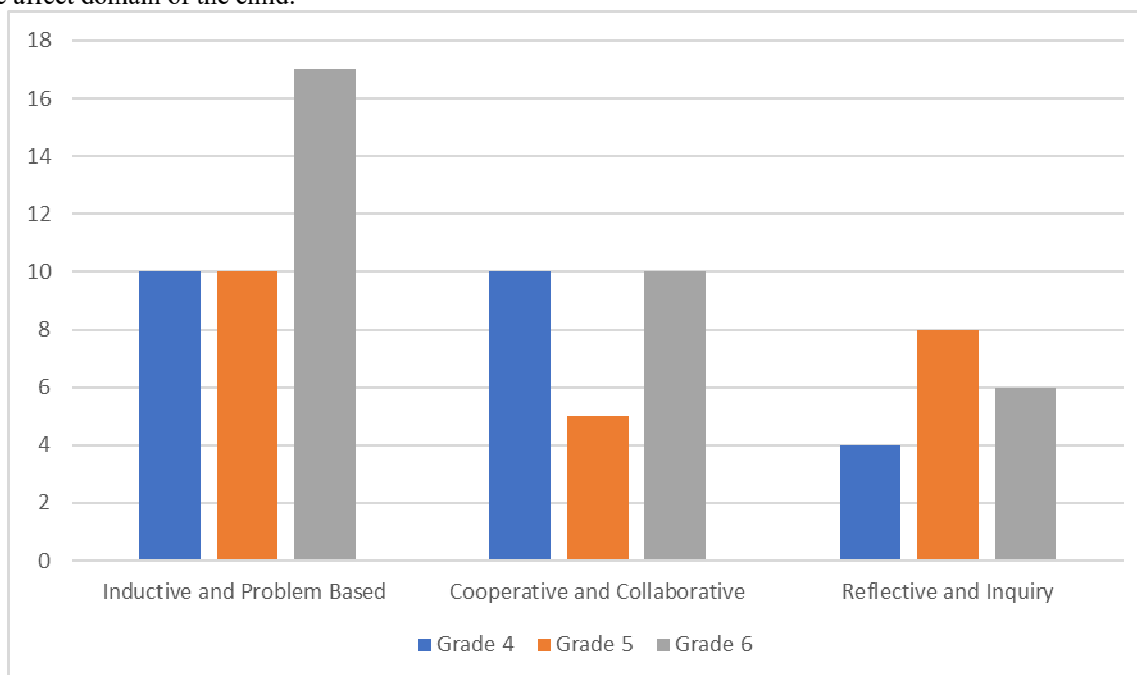
The study was conducted in the Elementary Department of Saint Louis College-Cebu, a Catholic sectarian academic institution located in the bustling City of Mandaue. The learners of the primary department of the school come from different part of the city and neighboring cities like Lapu-lapu, Cebu, and from the Municipalities of Consolacion and Liloan.

A researcher-made survey questionnaire was used to collect the necessary data for this study. Using the random sampling method, the AP teachers chose only 30 learners per grade level from Grade 4 to Grade 6. The questionnaire contains the different domains of the Araling Panlipunan curriculum and instruction. Moreover, learners from the same level were also interviewed to give more weight to the possible outcome of the data gathering. Three areas were given much emphasis; the approach used, the number of competencies given per instruction, and the integration.

## 5. Results and Discussions

### 5.1 *Approaches in teaching Araling Panlipunan*

The approaches you see in Figure 2 are the common approaches used during AP discussions and other classroom-based instruction and activities. Inductive method and Problem-based is the most common among the three. It is a pure lecture with social and current issues are being used as springboard to broaden the lesson. Cooperative and collaborative on the other hand, is normally administered when performance task or activities take place. Here, teamwork and social skill is being develop. In Araling Panlipunan, reflective and inquiry method is considered the highest and perhaps one of the most challenging methods to be employed, for it touches the affect domain of the child.

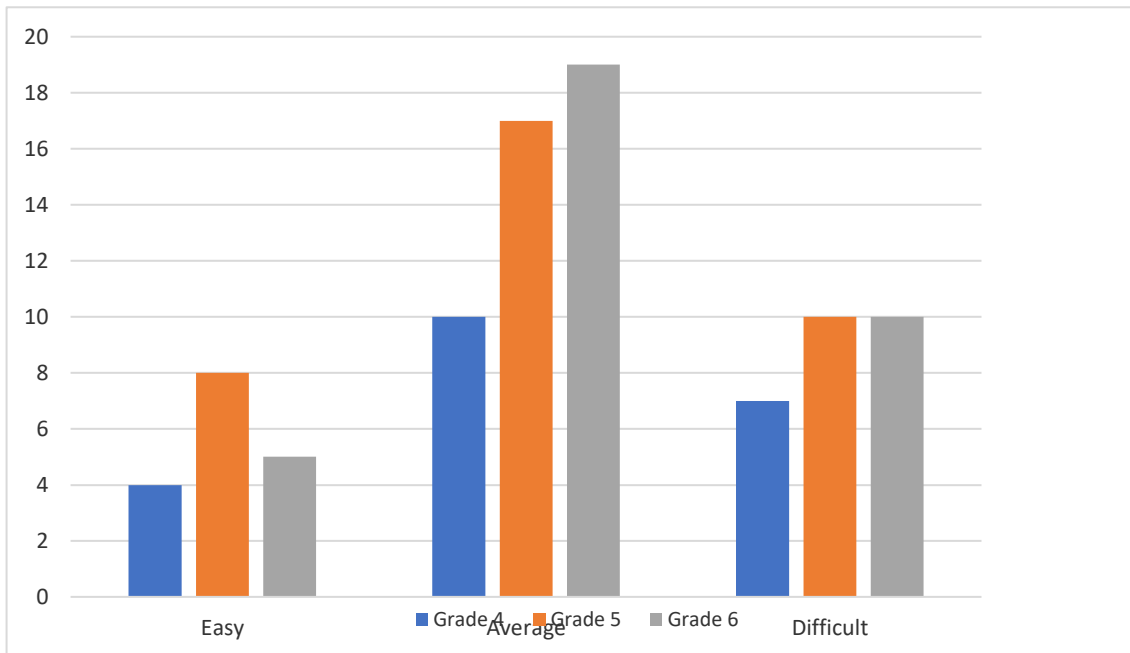


**Figure 2 – Approaches in Teaching Araling Panlipunan**

If we examine the graph (figure 2), the approaches used varies in every grade level. Seeing the trend, the fourth grade is more on inductive and cooperative but less on reflective and inquiry. Meanwhile, the fifth grade is more on inductive and problem-based but had lesser exposure on collaborative and cooperative learning. Surprisingly, Grade 6 is more on inductive or lecture with problem-based instruction, however, less on reflective and inquiry.

As the level of the learner goes higher, critical thinking skill and reflective conscience should be developed (Ogbuanya, et.al, 2015) since this is the goal of Araling Panlipunan under the K-12 Program, to produce learners who are analytical and with social and moral consciousness. Furthermore, Moreno (2019) affirmed that teachers should use approaches that fits to the nature of the competency to establish better scaffold of understanding on the concepts.

### 5.2 *Level of Difficulty of the Competencies/Topics*



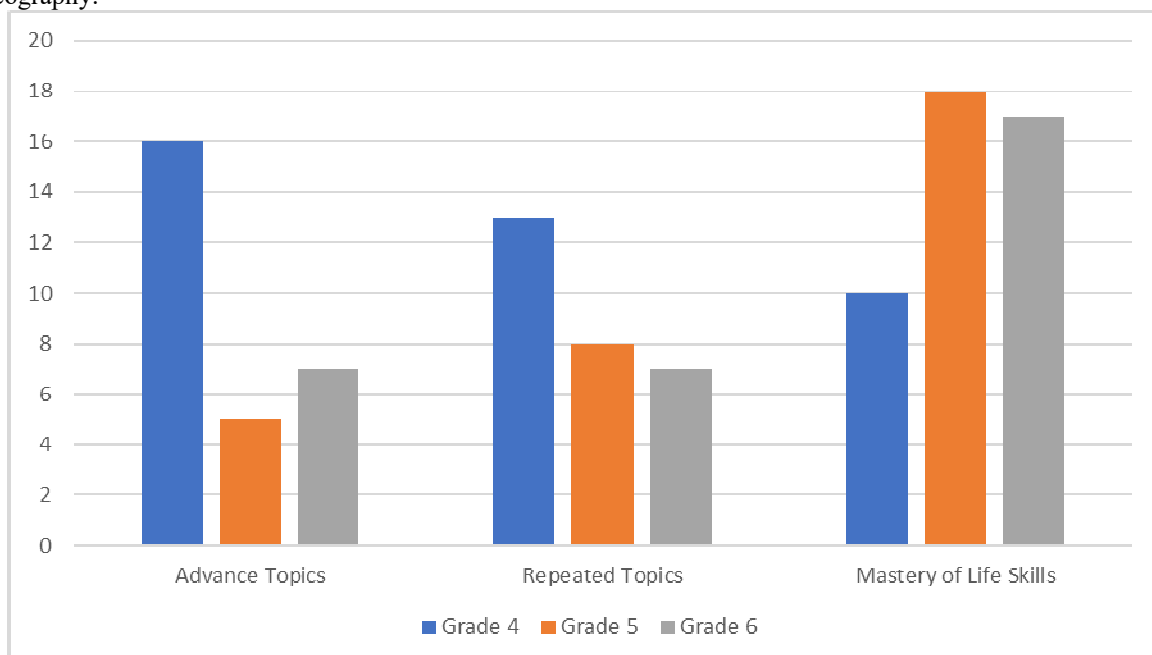
**Figure 3 – Level of Difficulty of the Topics/Competencies of Araling Panlipunan**

In the K-12 Curriculum, the competencies are both thematic and chronological. Thus, each level has its general scope.

The scope of Grade 4 is geography; however, political science, civic role, and culture have been integrated which made the competencies more compact. Grades 5 and 6 shared the same component which is Philippine History from Filipino Early Civilization to Philippine Modern History. The respondents of the three grade levels find the competencies average in its level of difficulty. However, it is also noticeable that several topics fall on a difficult level as shown in figure 3. In the curriculum guide, topics such as governance and serious political issues should be placed in the level that fits the learners' readiness to understand.

### 5.3 *Topics and Skills Introduce in Araling Panlipunan*

The bar graph on figure 4 presents that there are several topics in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level which are quite advance on their level. These topics primarily fall on the category under political science or governance mixed with geography.



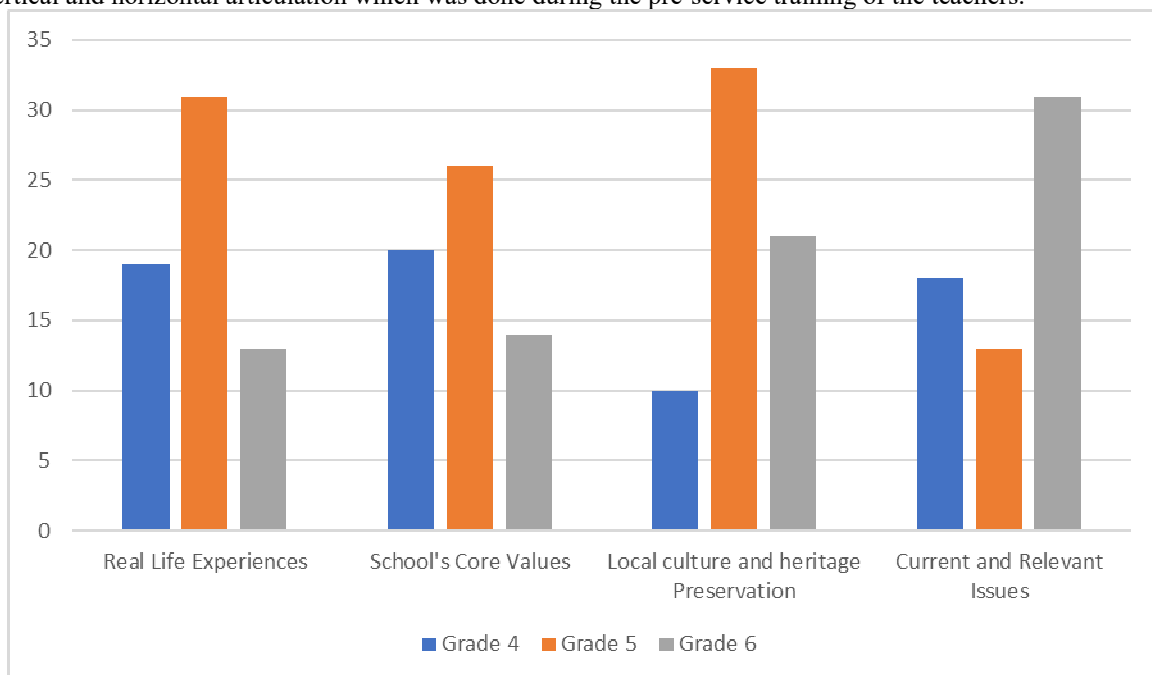
**Figure 4 – Topics and Skills in Araling Panlipunan**

If you look at the result closely, the responses of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade learners on the advance topics, repeated topics, and mastery of life skills correlate each other. These shows that advance topics despite being repeated more than once is not a guarantee that it could master the life skill, they needed for the actual demonstration of learning both in the community and at home. However, the Grades 5 and 6 bars somehow supports the theory that if topics are parallel to the level of understanding of the learners and are revisited to establish understanding of concepts, it can develop life skills such as map reading, following rules and regulations, etc.

In Bruner’s modes of representation in his model of learning (1966), learners ages 7 and above acquire learning using words and symbols to describe experiences. Thus, building concepts with springboard on real life situation suited on the child’s understanding aids in creating a new construct of learning.

#### 5.4 *Alignment of AP Competencies to other domains*

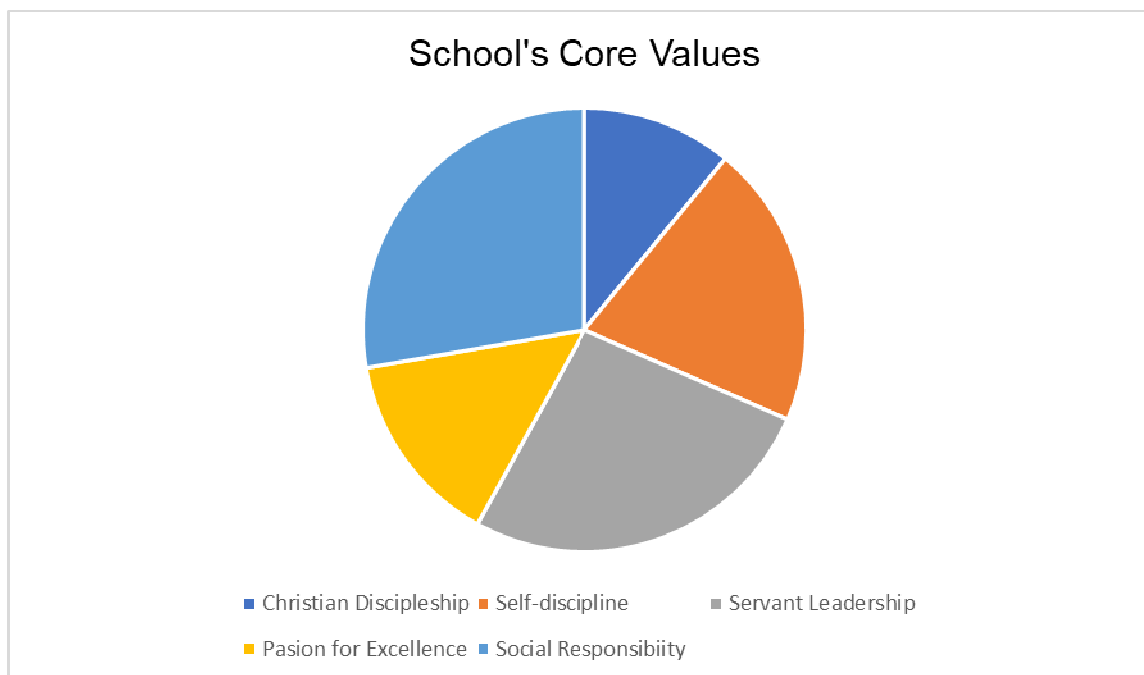
Competencies are more holistic when other domains are integrated to it to establish a broader scope in developing the child’s critical thinking and sense of appreciation. Figure 5 shows the different domains where the competencies of Araling Paanlipunan in the Elementary is aligned. These domains were identified during the vertical and horizontal articulation which was done during the pre-service training of the teachers.



**Figure 5 – Alignment of AP Competencies to Other Domains**

On the regular curriculum guide of Araling Panlipunan, competencies are broadened through the integration of current and relevant issues. This explains why the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, has more exposure on the issues surrounding the community and the society. However, it is not that visible in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Theirs is more on the appreciation and recognition of the local culture and heritage preservation. This brings us to the notion that Grade 5 Araling Panlipunan competencies are focused on the different aspect of Philippine History from the Early Philippine Civilization to the Emergence of National Consciousness. Meanwhile, Grade 4 has less integration on local culture, but much aligned on the other three domains.

Alignment provides a stronghold on the progression of the curriculum. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, alignment is necessary and relevant in building the learners fundamental skills towards values and cultural appreciation and belief system despite the technological advancement (Crisolo, 2021). Araling Panlipunan competencies together with the cited domains must create a seamless alignment not just seen on a simple integration through a springboard. The alignment should develop into a wider range which helps strengthen civic engagement, especially in utilizing social media since today’s generation is much exposed to social media (Kenna & Hensley, 2019). Furthermore, as Catholic academic institution, the core values is one of the significant domains which needs to be given importance. This was affirmed in the study of Balanza and Tindowen (2019), that values introduced to the learners upholds their integral formation for them to be a functional and demonstrative individual as stated in the school’s vision-mission.



Among the five core values, servant leadership and social responsibility are the most integrated core values in the competencies. This is attributed to the nature of Araling Panlipunan's identity as a discipline on the aspect of civic role. Sihem (2012) argued that the lack of awareness among learners towards empathy or sympathy to others needs to redirect through instruction embedded in the curriculum to stimulate learners' consciousness to social actions as they demonstrate how to be good and responsible citizens. In addition, Hoy and Meseil (2008) pointed in their study that when an entity gives emphasis on the process of forming learners by empowering them could create a positive social change.

## 6. Conclusion

It is truly challenging to teach the competencies of Araling Panlipunan, knowing that teachers are always caught in a dilemma whether to finish the set of competencies indicated in the curriculum guide or deepen it in accordance with the primary of objectives pertaining to the mastery of life skills needed by the learners. The different areas discussed in the study played a vital role in the re-spiraling of the competencies in Araling Panlipunan. Hence, to arrive in the desired outcome of learning, giving depth as the learners exercise reflective inquiry, there should be a seamless flow of competencies in the spiral progression.

The lack of balance in the utilization of the three main approaches in teaching the competencies might create a gap in the learning acquisition of the learners. Identifying the competencies which suited to inductive and problem-based, cooperative and collaborative, and reflective and inquiry-based is needed. This way, the teacher would know how to deepen and broaden the competency which suits in the learners' level of action. In addition, the enriching of the approaches mentioned helped in simplifying the degree of difficulty of the lesson as the learners continue to explore and discover new construct of learning.

Advance topics have a direct correlation to the mastery of AP skills. The insufficient mastery of skill and acquisition of learning could result to another issue in learning Araling Panlipunan. The advance competencies interpolated in the Grade 4 Araling Panlipunan curriculum need to be revisited for these to be aligned in the learners appropriate level of understanding. Furthermore, constant communication between the home and school as both agencies are important in the teaching-learning process, have to strengthen its collaboration to create a desirable learning outcome (Aguilar, 2021).

In general, the issues on AP's curriculum and instruction are better to be deliberated and much understood by the teachers of the discipline. Seamless flow of the progression is to be established.

## 7. Recommendation

After studying and analyzing the result, the team is commending the following to be done before its implementation in the next school year.

1. Revisit the curriculum guide in Araling Panlipunan focusing on the competencies for Grades 4 to 6;
2. Identify advance topics seen in the set of competencies and interpolate them in the appropriate level;

3. Create a seamless spiralization of competencies focusing on the life skills needed to be acquired and mastered;
4. Integrate in the formulation and spiralization the activities that further strengthen the learning acquisition of the learners in relation to harnessing life skills; and
5. Employ Contextualized Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach to reinforce methods of teaching Araling Panlipunan as it infuses the four domains.

## 8. Acknowledgement

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