

## **Perspectives on Education: Effective Processes for Effective Learning of Learners<sup>1</sup>**

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### *Abstract*

*Education is a crucial tool for developing human resources in all countries at present, but, obviously, it fails to function now than used to be. The question is why because education has been a new promised tool providing learning for human species for the last three or four thousand years. My observation is that we have been focusing too much on education while neglecting learning, which is a priority goal of education. Moreover, learning had been the survival skill of human beings thousands of years before education was invented. This article calls for new perspectives on which education should be conceptualized and applied to assist learners' learning more effectively.*

### **Introduction**

I always admit that I have been much better well off than my ancestors, who had been farming inherited for hundreds of years, because of education, an old fashion one. My primary school education taught by no certificated teachers and the classroom was an open air temple Sala.<sup>2</sup> My secondary education was provided by a private school, mostly, taught by no certificated teachers either. I was, firstly, taught by certificated teachers when I entered the first year at Maharsarakarm teachers' college. But keep in mind that was fifty years ago and life and society were much simpler and less complex than nowadays.

Then, I had no definition of education of my own, but cited John Dewey or Carter V. Good, with little understanding of what they meant. However, I managed to get by and graduated with my first degree, Bachelor Degree of Education in 1974. I became a teacher and acted as the one who delivered education to my students. It seemed to me from the very beginning of my teaching career that I used different approaches to perform my teaching from other teachers, mixing with my best knowledge learned while being trained as a teacher-student and my western education experiences as an exchange student to the United State of America for one year.

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<sup>2</sup> Sala is a temple building used for multipurpose villagers' activities with only lower parts of the walls around the whole building, but no classroom walls.

At that time and even now, it has been mysterious to me whether American teachers have been trained differently from Thais or not, and rather that American teachers have understood John Dewey's or Carter V Good's definitions of education better than ours, but it seems to me that learning through activities and open views, speaking up and discussions are much more beneficial. But why Thai education rarely applies those techniques. This really worries me because I am one of educationists who believe that education is a promised device for survival of mankind. But at present, education is accused of not functioning because educational quality is troublesome throughout the world. So, I cannot just sit still and do nothing about it. This is why this article appears in this journal.

### **What Goes Wrong or Misunderstood?**

I believe learning still plays a great role in human beings' survival and progress. I doubt it that formal education would facilitate the meaningful learning for our youngsters if formal education provision is not adapted to twenty first century needs.

Tony Wagner (Wagner 2014) proposed seven survival skills for the twenty first century consisted of (1) Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, (2) Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence, (3) Agility and Adaptability, (4) Initiative and Entrepreneurialism, (5) Effective Oral and Written Communication, (6) Accessing and Analyzing Information, and (7) Curiosity and Imagination. However, I won't jump to the conclusion that this is the final nor the correction of what goes wrong.

Finland education has been honor as one of the nations of the highest education quality (The guardian, 2010), and even as the best educational systems since 2000 (Human Rights Advocate, 2017). At the same time, unemployment rate is now higher than before. Why? Does it mean good education does not guarantee employment? What sorts of educational aims and processes are suitable for preparation of new generation for the future world? Why could simple teaching methods better prepare students to cope with new situations in the past than more complicated ones now? These are issues needed to take into serious consideration now than just blaming education.

In case of Thailand, many accuses have been thrown over to education as Black Coffee (2016) wrote that he got a one critic on education which seemed to revealed problems related to Thai education as some points as fallow: (1) Thai youngsters paid more attention on using mobile phone, chatting on lines all night, went to bed late, and woke up late, while paying less attention to learning, (2) Teachers did their duty only to minimum function requirement, parents influenced schooling, and the directors could not do much, just pleased the parents, (3) Evaluation had no meaning, no matter how much students learnt, all

passed the tests and moved on, (4) Employment was not based on quality of an applicant's qualification, but connection, (6) More foreigners took over business in Thailand.

All these problems and more, I believe, are causes because we are unclear of what we have been doing because of less precise definitions of education and learning, which lead to unclear aims of education and malfunction of education processes. Environment and situation of new world are more complicated and less predictable. Changings are fast and unconventional. Present best knowledge might not be capable to meet the future problems. Education might be blamed for not preparing citizens' sufficient knowledge, skills, and characteristics ready for future living situations, and cannot secure employment because job positions and employment are manmade social systems. The only blame could be accused of education is that *it does not prepare good- enough hearted authoritarians to create and exercise better systems to serve man-beings.*

### **What Should be Proper Definition of Education and Learning?**

There is neither right nor wrong definition of education or learning, but proper to suit that person, society, or related users. I call for rethinking and conceptualizing new definitions of education and learning for two reasons. Firstly, whatever definition we define, for both education and learning, it should be the one that benefits practical implementation and communicates what we want to be done. In the past we might not need precision of what we have to do, education and learning included, because there were not much to learn, problems were not so complicated, effects were no serious, and a lot of resources to spare. But nowadays, our world hosts almost nine thousand millions of people, less resources but more demands, full of complex problems to be tackled, rising from natural causes and man-made troubles. So this is why we need know exactly what we want and how it should be done properly, efficiently, and effectively.

Good definition of education or learning in the past might be only partial assistants at present. For example, one of Dewey's education definition (Winn, 1959) saying that education was "a process of living, not a preparation for future living" or interpreting that "education is life". It is definitely correct that education and living are two sides of a coin. Living without learning is like traveling without maps and plans. More to that is what and how could the definition be implemented? Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's definition (Wilai Tang-Jitsomkid, 1996) pointed out that education was the human beings' opportunity to obtain the best thing in life by eliminating animal instinct within our souls. This is also morally right, but what and how could it be done? Most definitions come up with similar conclusions, so I propose new dimensions towards education as follow. "Education is a process to facilitate learning of a person and

society, which leads to some changes in that person on personal and societal preferable knowledge, skills, and/or characteristics. It means that education consists of what we want ourselves or learners to learn and processes through with those learners participate to acquire learning. Learning depends on the learner's interest and responsibility, for the benefit of the learner's self and/or societies' demands. Education could be done by the learners themselves (life-long education), by others or institutions, such as schools or universities (formal education), or less formal, but by some types of institutions (non-formal education). Whatever types of education, it compiles of what to be learnt and by which process through with learning could be facilitated.

In case of formal education, which, I believe, is now accused of being malfunction. So, those people who are responsible to get the job done must redefine knowledge, skills, and characteristics for each level of education towards which students should acquire, suggest what processes should be implemented to facilitate learners to learn. Aims of education should be précised, but leaving some margin of adaptation, while education processes could be suggested, but leaving open choices for practitioners to decide what to do as far as the desire results are met.

Now, let us discuss on learning topic, which is also problematic in my view. However, there is at least one conclusion that educationists agree among themselves is that "learning would not be realized unless some likely or relatively changes of learners occur". One of the time marking definition of learning by two great writers, Hilgard and Bower (1975), who defined learning as "the change in a subject's behavior to a given situation brought about by his repeated experiences in that situation, provided that the behavior change cannot be explained on the basic of native response tendencies, maturation, or temporary states of the subject." More recent definition of learning by Schunk (2008) who declared as follow: "Learning is an enduring change in behavior, or in the capacity to behave in a given fashion, which results from practice or other forms of experience". And the author expanded the concept that (1) learning is behavioral change or change in capacity for behavior, (2) behavioral change (or capacity for change) endures over time, and (3) Learning occurs through practice or other form of experience.

I propose the new dimension of learning that "learning is a process of an inner-personal interaction and response to a situational experience of a person which leads to likely permanent change on knowledge, skills, and/or characteristics of the learner." The most important part of learning occurs inside the learner. So no one could force a learner to learn if he resists and is not ready to learn. I wrote that you might take a horse to a river, but never be able to force the horse to drink water. Same truth to learners, you may teach students, but learning is their responsibility" (Saman Asawpoom, 1996). But don't get me wrong that I mean teachers do not have to take any responsibility. A teacher's job is to create suitable

education processes to facilitate students' learning. Another part of learning is how a learner interacts and responds to a situation or problem the learner faces. This is why most self-educated learning is much more effective than schooling-educated learning because we never know how many students really engage in the lesson presented. Misleading from special cases like, Bill Gate or Steve Job, or many millionaires, both in Thailand and foreign countries alike, are not high certificated education holders, but that does not mean they do not learn. And the last part of learning is that enduring change within the learner occurs. Without changes, learning has not been achieved.

### **What Should be Proper Aims of Education?**

As my definition of education suggests above, aims of education are crucial starting points of education, following with effective educational processes. Of course, aims of education have been used targets of learning ever since education was invented, but not as a part of education definition, but mainly as aims of curriculums. I mean aims of education should be developed and declared as national agenda, divided as preprimary, primary, secondary, undergraduate, and graduate education. Details of each level could be set as aims of the curriculum for each level. Preprimary schooling should focus on readiness preparation, primary education should focus on basic knowledge and skills for further education, secondary education on basic knowledge, skills, and characters for work, life, and harmony working with others, and living morally and cooperatively according to society preference. Graduate education should focus on practical profession for a Master degree level, and higher practical profession and/or on philosophical and theorizing perspectives of new knowledge and application for practices for a Doctoral degree level.

Proposing what should be the aims of education needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not an easy task. Wagner (2014) proposed seven survival skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century as mentioned above. Trilling and Fadel (2009) proposed three groups of needed skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, namely Learning and Innovation Skills, Digital Literacy Sills, and Career and Life Skills. Sub-categories of Learning and Innovation Skills consist of Critical thinking and problem solving, Communications and Collaboration, and Creative and innovation. Digital Literacy Skills consist of Information literacy, Media literacy, and Information and communication technologies literacy. Career and Life Skills consists of Flexibility and adaptability, Initiative and self-direction, Social and cross-cultural interaction, Productivity and accountability, and Leadership and responsibility.

Nichols (2013) wrote in her post that as educators, we constantly strive to prepare our students for the real world that they face. We might teach them how to read, to write, to calculate, and also less

tangible skills, such as how to work in team, think critically, and be curious about whatever they encounter. She proposed seven skills, which are congruence with Wagner's (2014) mentioned above, that students would always need to survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as follow: (1) Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, (2) Collaboration Across Networks and Learning by Influence, (3) Agility and Adaptability, (4) Initiative and Entrepreneurship, (5) Effective Oral and Written Communication, (6) Accessing and Analyzing Information, and (7) Curiosity and Imagination.

Scott (2015), summarized twenty-first Century Learning into four categories called Four Pillars of Education, namely Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to be, and Learning to Live Together. Core subjects needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century may look similar to the old ones, such as Grammar, Language Arts, World Language, Art, Mathematics, Economics, Science, Geography, History, and Government and Civic, but not as isolate contents, but more of integrated content knowledge. Moreover, the 21<sup>st</sup> century learners should be lifelong learners, continually access what they know and implication to work and life. Four themes of interdisciplinary and relevance to modern life were global awareness; financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy; civic literacy; and health literacy including health and wellness awareness. This what Scott summarized as Learning to Know.

For Learning to Do, Scott subdivided into 6 aspects, namely, Critical Thinking; Problem-Solving; Communication and Collaboration; Creativity and Innovation; Information, media and Technology Literacy; and Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) Literacy. Learning to Be was also subdivided into 6 aspects as follow: Social and Cross-Cultural Skills; Personal Responsibility, Self-Regulation and Initiative; Sense-Making Skills; Metacognitive Skills; Entrepreneurial Thinking Skills; and Learning-to-learn and Habits of Lifelong Learning. And his last pillar, Learning to Live Together, subdivided into 5 aspects which were Seek and Value Diversity; Teamwork and Interconnectedness; Civic and Digital Citizenship; Global Competence; Intercultural Competence.

The most challenging task of educationists is how to educate learners with past and present knowledge and devices, but prepare the learners to cope with the unknown world. But if we can assist the learners with on-going development skills that might be much more helpful than burdens of factual knowledge which might not have even a single chance of using them because new problems root from new causes, and need new approaches to tackle. New scopes and intentions, proposed as alternatives, for 21<sup>st</sup> century education reviewed above all have promised lights for the bright future. However, I would like to support Scott's framework, the Four Pillars of Education for 21st Century Learning because each category opens options to choose and fill in, meaning adaptations could be done to suit each educational system for each society.

However, there should be another major pillar of education, that is “Learning to Reconstruct a new World”. Although Reconstructivism theory was proposed over a century ago, but mostly referring to reconstruction of social reforms. My recommendation is to focus our attention to the reconstruction of the new world in all dimensions so that our world would become the better place to live. Related to the new economic reform, namely “value-based economy”, or known in Thailand as “Thailand 4.0. However, often misleading concept is to lean everything on “innovation”, which is only one facet of new economic era. As I wrote in one of my article (Saman Aswapoom 2017) I proposed that value-based economy might be commonly known as “value-added in whatever we do”. Economy, for example, mostly means to create and exchange goods for profit, but value-based economy should balance between profit and wellness of others as well, so that we all could live together in harmony. In case of value-based education, since everyone and every career must have been basically passed through education. So, new era education should aim to world reforming (reconstruction) and done by basing on value-based philosophy, the philosophy of the new age, “value-added” in whatever we do, for the sake of survival of mankind. We, ALL, have only one world to live together, more crowded population, limited resources, so it is the duty of us, ALL, to reform this world anew for all of us.

### **What Should be Effective Processes of Education?**

I believe that learning is more important than education, but since learning is personal matter, meaning no one could teach anyone how to learn except oneself. As an educator I must focus my attention to education and how education could facilitate learners’ learning.

Although learning and education are related, as mentioned in my definition of education that education is a process to facilitate learning, at the same time they are independent from each other. So, two duties of educationists, administrators, and teachers, they should acknowledge what learners need and how they learn, and also how to design the best educational process to facilitate learning. In this section of my article, I shall revise and present some approaches on the matter, and one of my own.

First approach I would like to mention about is Gagne’s instructional design (Gagne’ 1974, 1977, 1979). Gagne’s design of instruction might be dated almost a half century, but I admired it as one of the best approaches of instruction. Gagne’ proposed that when we designed a lesson for students to learn, we should arrange external events that met students’ internal learning processes. Nine external or instructional events included (1) Gaining attention, (2) Informing the learner of the objective, (3) Stimulating recall of prerequisite learning, (4) Present the stimulus material, ( 5) Providing learning

guidance, (6) Eliciting the performance, (7) Providing feedback about performance correctness, (8) Assessing the performance, and (9) Enhancing retention and transfer. And inner learning process compiled of (1) Reception of patterns of neural impulses, (2) Activating a process of executive control, (3) Retrieval to working memory, (4) Emphasizing features for selective perception, (5) Semantic encoding, (6) Activating a response organization, (7) Establishing reinforcement, (8) Activating retrieval, making reinforcement possible, and (9) Providing cues and strategies for retrieval.

More up to date approach to facilitate learning was proposed by Ambrose and others (2010) calling seven principles for smart teaching as (1) Students' prior knowledge can help or hinder learning, (2) How students organize knowledge influences how they learn and apply what they know, (3) Students' motivation determines, directs, and sustains what they do to learn, (4) To develop master, students must acquire component skills, practice integrating them, and know when to apply what they have learned, (5) Goal-directed practice coupled with targeted feedback enhances the quality of students' learning, (6) Students' current level of development interact with the social, emotional, and intellectual climate of the course to impact learning, and (7) To become self-directed learners, students must learn to monitor and adjust their approaches to learning.

And last one, of my own, consists of components as follow:

1. Make sure what you want to teach your students is also their desire to learn, and have them engage from the very beginning.
2. Help your students to see the link between their prerequisite learning and the new one, and clue them to their own ways of learning.
3. Use experience-based as learning fuel and let the learners learn for themselves with a teacher as a facilitator.
4. Evaluate learning is used as a mean for more effort of the learner's learning at his or her own space. As far as they are still engaging in learning, and that means effective learning.
5. Standards and milestones of progress are essential system of learning, but with margin of acceptance and no limit of time, or more assistant to facilitate learning as far as learners still want to learn.

### **My Learning Might be a Lesson, If It Could Help?**

I hardly claim what I have learned to be the best, but I just would like to share my course of learning that shape myself as I am today. I began the journey of my learning as a farmer family, a son of the village headman. I went to primary school just like other village's boys did, acting according to the law with no clear objectives to achieve. I wanted to learn to read so that I could read Kamnan and Phooyai



Ban Journal, which my father took home every month from the district meeting. When I finished Grade Four (Prathomsuksa Four), one of the teachers came to see my father and told him that he should send me to study in town and become a teacher. My aim of learning to read had changed when I began my education in town: Read to become a teacher even though I did not know how.

New language was taught when I studied in Grade Five. I was cool to learn another language, which no one in my village would know except those who went to school in town, too. My aim of learning English Language changed when one day a new teacher at my school mentioned about a poor student at Mahasarakarm Teachers' College, named Wattana Kasang, could go abroad by winning A.F.S. Scholarship. From that day on, my aim of learning English changed, and it paid off some years later. I won A.F.S. Scholarship and went to America while I was studying at Mahasarakarm Teachers' College.

I told you my story to point out that "learner's intention of what and why to learn something is a crucial self-motivated to learn". The intention or aim might change, from time to time, it would keep the learner learning as far as the goal motivates her or him to ignite learning by herself or himself.

From the point I started my education journey and now, the travel has been too far to tell you all, but here are a few conclusions I would like to share.

1. Effective learning begins with learner's true learning objective, not a teacher's teaching objective. The learner should, at least, know what she or he makes sense of what he is learning.
2. Every learner has his or her own style and pace of learning. My style of learning is to dig down to the core concept and make all my interesting learning issues my own understanding theories. I believe I am in the middle range of IQ, learning is not easy for me, so I would double, triple, or even more time to seek out what I want to learn. That means I have to work hard on every learning I want to learn. I believe in Bruner's theory (Hoy and Miskel 2008) that everyone could learn about anything if she or he wants to, but may have to use different duration of time and effort to achieve it.
3. Learning is a part of living, so we have rarely known in advance what will be needed when problems obstacle us. Preparing ourselves or our students to cope with what we or our students will face in the world is a big prediction. Early part of my learning, I enjoyed learning facts, events, and all sorts of what I believe I could use them, but later part of my life, I focus more on learning skills, adaptable mind, and readily fail accepted orientation, ready for any situations may occur. I believe the later approach is more useful for this unstable, chaos, rapid changing world at present and in the future.

4. I, maybe like many others, used to feel sorry that I wasted my time learning something turned out not very useful, but as I have grown up, (in fact grown old) I have learned that nothing we have learned (really learned), is wasted. Having more weapons to fight in war is much better than having nothing to use. Moreover, without all elements you process, you cannot construct what you want to build when time come. So, enjoy all lessons and learning you encounter, then all you have learned would pay off one day.
5. I never realize to be a guru of education, but I heartily believe and devote all my life to education. I never lose trust in education although many accuses have been thrown to education up to now. All troublesome are not from education itself, but misunderstanding, misleading, and not enough commitment on education.

### **Conclusion and Application**

I do not claim that this article will solve all the problems related to education, but hope it as a starting point that educationists and all who are responsible would turn around to reexamine the matter and reshape education before all of our stakeholders will lose faith and turn their back to us. Let us begin from redefining education and learning, then revising aims of education that would be more applicable for living in the new era. Central authority could propose educational policies on instructional designs and learning management, but empower to field practitioners to decide what to do as far as aims are achieved. I hope this article will be some use and ignite engagement and commitment to reform education for the benefit of all sorts of lives on earth. Thank you.

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