

Preparing Educational Leaders for the Global Society:

Learning from Conversations with Professors in Thailand

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Abstract: This experiential study examines beliefs of Thai professors in educational leadership programs at six Thailand Rajabhat Universities. The research brings broader understanding of preparing educators for rapid globalization. Emerging from the data are ways of thinking that lead to boundless and multi-dimensional environments that prepare students for the global society.

Introduction

Round table discussions between professors from California State University and professors and administrators from several of Thailand's Rajabhat Universities affirmed that the underlying assumption guiding the direction of their respective educational leadership programs are the same. All agreed that education of all citizens is essential for the social, economic, and cultural development of society and that leadership is a necessary factor in creating quality educational systems. These strongly held beliefs put educational leadership programs in the forefront of academic pursuits at these universities. These conversations that took place in Thailand in the summer of 2006 are reflective of discussions

occurring worldwide among educators and national leaders. The global interest in the preparation and development of school leaders continues to be driven by the belief that leadership makes a difference in reform implementation, school improvement, and student learning, which in turn positively impacts society as a whole (Hallinger, 2006). Throughout the world the belief is held that education is a morally-grounded, value-driven enterprise in need of passionate, caring leaders (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). The purpose of this article is to provoke more consideration for preparation of educational leaders for the global society. Presented here are perspectives of Thai professors on the importance of preparing school leaders to maximize the potential of all students as they face the challenges of the global society.

Setting

A delegation of professors from California State University, San Bernardino visited six Thailand Rajabhat Universities after their respective presidents signed memoranda of understanding during the Fall of 2005, agreeing to exchange students, faculty, and staff. This involved attending classes, teaching classes and holding conferences between two or more universities. While the agreements included all academic areas, the timing was particularly strategic for the Thai universities' educational leadership programs.

As reported in the California State University, San Bernardino, International Newsletter (2006), a Rajabhat President, at the time of the signing, remarked,

We are now at the crossroads to balance the needs of our university. We can't do this alone. Because of the limitations in our country, we realize the need for these agreements; we see this agreement as a means to improving our students' social status as part of our mission to provide them with a good quality education.

The six universities visited are among forty-one Rajabhat Universities in Thailand that serve to educate future teachers and school administrators. These institutions became "Rajabhat Institutes" in 1995 after His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej, a strong advocate for education, renamed all teacher training colleges. The delegation from California traversed most of Thailand, traveling by van from Bangkok east to Chachoengsao, Surin, and Ubon, then by air back to Bangkok and north to Chiang Mai. To reach the last university the group traveled by van east through the mountains to Uttaradit. According to Makishima & Suksiriserekul (2003), student enrollment in the Rajabhat universities ranges from 10,000 to 35,000 and approximately 200 faculty members serve at each university.

Background

The month-long tour to these six Rajabhat Universities provided numerous opportunities for conversations between professors from California and the Thailand Rajabhat professors. Conversations took place during formal meetings, conversations while traveling in vans and while enjoying the local cuisine. When the conversation turned to the educating of school leaders, one essential question was part of the dialogue; how are preparation programs ensuring that emerging school leaders possess the dispositions and skills necessary to be successful in a global community?

The current need for training of Thai educational leaders was discussed at each of the six Rajabhat universities. Thai professors reported that local community leaders as well as government officials in Thailand are recognizing the need for formal training for school administrators. As one means of determining the needs of Thai school principals, school board members across Thailand were asked for their opinions. Gamage and Sooksomchitra (2004) found several areas that Thai school board members reported as the greatest needs for the educational preparation of principals: (a) community relations, (b) decision making, (c) human resource management and (d) understanding the role of the principal. The reported skills and dispositions in this study are not surprising.

Hallinger (2005), a leading researcher and scholar in the study of leadership and management, pointed to the development of capacities for moral leadership and efficient management as central to the work of educational leadership programs. Professor Hallinger, a graduate of Stanford University and until recently a professor at Vanderbilt University is now Chief Academic Officer in the College of Management at Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand. One could assume that his background puts him in the position to relate global ideas of leadership to the needs of educational leaders in Thailand. Hallinger promoted the idea that leadership must be inspirational and skillful, moral and practical, process-driven and results-oriented. These issues concerning the nature and role of leadership must form the foundation of any discussion of leadership preparation.

This issue is receiving much attention at each Thailand Rajabhat university in that the Ministry of Education has new requirements for the training of school administrators (Piya-Ajariya, 2002; Pupphavesa, 2002). In July of 2006 funds were available for the development and implementation of an Ed.D. degree program for the Rajabhat universities.

Currently principals in Thailand experience the traditional apprenticeship model. School leaders move through the ranks from classroom

teacher to master teacher to head of department and then to school principal. This means that they have to learn their job on the job (Gamage & Sooksomchitra, 2004; National Education Commission, Thailand, 1991). While many principals in Thailand have not had the opportunity to receive training as a school administrator there are a few attending educational administration classes on weekends. Faculty at the Rajabhat universities expressed an urgency to provide more educational opportunities for school leaders.

Method

The multidisciplinary team from California State University visited each of the six Thailand Rajabhat university sites. Duration of site visits ranged from three days to six days. Focus groups consisted of faculty groups of as many as fifteen Thai professors and most often included six to eight professors. At all university sites there were occasions when California professors along with Thai professors divided into discipline-alike groups for discussions that followed planned outlines. The research question discussed in this report did not start out as central but developed over time as California professors compared field notes after several daily debriefing sessions. Observation was done to verify interview data and gain the current view. While this is a report of experiential work it does share some characteristics with scientific work. Just as in laboratory work, the researcher for this study paid close attention to recording and reporting what happened during the work (McMillan, 2001). The conversations were driven by the need to learn how the universities best accomplished their work, consequently the conversations were organized in a somewhat orderly fashion and similar topics were discussed at each campus (Porush, 1995). Obviously not everything that was discussed is worth mentioning. Notes of some conversations did not lead anywhere. Conversations were not undertaken to prove something, rather were probing. It was recognized that a single conversation was not complete or conclusive. What did emerge was a theme and set of directional beliefs that were similar among professors in the various universities.

Analysis

As data from each site were analyzed, new questions and foci emerged from discussions. As is the tentative nature of qualitative research, subsidiary research questions arose. In the daily debriefing meetings, California professors noted that Thai professors, regardless of their subject matter discipline, were drawn into the discussions of creating and implementing educational leadership programs, including a Ph.D. or Ed.D. at each of

the six Rajabhat universities. What emerged from thoughtful discussions and reflections was the following essential question:

How can educational leadership programs prepare school leaders to think and act as they face the rapid globalization of the new millennium?

Results

Many discussions centered about predictable topics such as philosophy and course design for strategic planning, accountability, managing human resources, and facilities management. However, some conversations included ideas, questions or foci that were unexpected. It is this part of the dialogue between Thai professors and California professors which, while puzzling at first, is most provocative and informative for decisions made in educational leadership programs in California.

The following questions are a sampling of the questions recorded by the researcher that were unexpected. These questions were asked time and again in various ways and at each of the universities.

Unexpected Questions Asked:

1. How many of your students preparing to be principals want to learn to speak Thai?
2. In which economic growth countries will you provide internships for your school administrators?
3. We are concerned that we prepare our principals for globalization. Will you tell us about your international studies courses and the activities that you provide so principals understand global production systems and economic communication systems?
4. Do your principals in training really understand how world trade and the job market impact what we teach in the schools?

Conversely, a careful review of this researcher's journal showed that questions one might expect to surface in conversations about school leaders and effective schools were conspicuously not there. None of the following questions were asked in any conversation at any of the six Rajabhat universities.

Questions Not Asked by Thai Professors:

1. While California professors asked about student achievement in the

demonstration schools visited, Thai professors did not ask about the highest achieving primary schools or high schools in California.

2. They did not press to learn teaching strategies that develop leaders who can bring a school with low test scores to a proficient level. In fact, any conversation about assessment was more directed at identifying the strengths of students and matching students to areas where they could succeed with technology, communication, foreign languages and understanding world cultures.

3. Assisting teachers who failed to teach the standards or preparing students for high achievement was never discussed.

4. Never did Thai professors ask about ways to prepare principals to analyze test data, disaggregate data for subpopulations and find ways to improve academic performance.

In discussions occurring among California professors there was agreement that this line of questioning was significantly different than expected and there was agreement to probe deeper to understand why Thai professors presented inquiry and discussion focus as they did. While not making the claim to have full understanding of how these Thai professors came to approach educational issues as they do, analysis of field notes resulted in identification of three sources that influenced beliefs and attitudes of Thai professors. It was noted that Thai professors were influenced by (a) leaders of the Thailand Ministry of Education, (b) members of the royal family and (c) internationally recognized authorities they had encountered by participating in academic conferences.

Influenced by Thailand Ministry of Education Leaders

Thai professors referred to Ministry of Education leadership when defining the purpose of education.

Professor A at an Eastern Rajabhat University:

I believe a vital role of education is to help people to understand the world and others. The Ministry of Education describes our role as nurturing individuals to become world citizens. We are preparing people to pursue promising careers. Nonetheless, that is not enough. Recent publications talk about making rational judgments and choices.

Professor B at a University in Bangkok:

Our directions from the Ministry of Education are to prepare students for careers but also to provide them with the ability to make rational judgments and choices and to live in harmony with the members of society.

*Professor C at a Rajabhat University in Northern Thailand
Reading from a Ministry of Education Document:*

The purpose of education is to enable learners to learn by themselves according to their interests, potential, readiness, and opportunities.

Professor D at a Rajabhat University on the Eastern Side of Thailand:

Creating a desirable mindset of those in the various levels of educational management is, I think, our most essential task. I am talking about a mindset that recognizes our responsibility to develop each student to their fullest abilities. Actually, I believe this is one of the stated goals that come from the Ministry of Education.

Professor E at a Rajabhat University near Bangkok:

While we are aware that economic development is influenced more by political decisions and world conditions, more so than just the number or quality of science students in higher education, we do teach educational leaders that collaborating with other countries and finding our niche markets are important. The work of scholars and reports coming from the Ministry of Education has helped us to understand our history related to economic growth or economic crisis.

In reviewing Ministry of Education documents, these ideas were found to be supported. Thailand Ministry of Education National Report (2004), Human Resource Development Toward A Knowledge-Based Economy: The Case of Thailand (2003), as well as the work of Laeka Piya-Ajariya, for the Office of the National Education Commission (2002) all supported each of these statements.

Influenced by Members of the Royal Family

In most discussions, formal and informal, professors spoke of their gratitude for the support their King gave to education. On two occasions we were told of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's core concept of pedagogy and education that focused on total development of the human person by equally nurturing four domains of learning, consisting of *Buddhisuksa* (creating learners' useful knowledge and information), *Hatthasuksa* (hand-on activities which coordinate the eyes, hands and brains), *Balasuksa* (physical education and working dexterity including gardening), and *Chariyasuksa* (moral education). The Thailand Ministry of Education National Report (2004) stated the Thai Princess' belief that modern education tends to over-emphasize and use up most of the educational resources and time in the first domain that has occasionally and falsely been perceived as the only gist of learning and concluded that if we left the other three domains behind, education

might in time lead to persons that are selfish and aggressive competitors in a materialist world.

Professor F at a Rajabhat University in Northern Thailand:

I heard the Princess, in the introductory remarks at a conference that I recently attended, remind us of the development of the whole individual, the moral and physical coordination of the individual not just the intellect. You will see that we support this in the integration of curriculum that you will observe at our demonstration school.

Professor A at an Eastern Rajabhat University:

The royal family influences education in Thailand. Students are taught our culture and beliefs even in this time of globalization. The Princess recently spoke to a gathering of school leaders about continuing moral education in the curriculum.

Influenced by Internationally Recognized Authorities

Surprising and delightful was the discovery that Thai professors had attended some of the same conferences as the visiting California professors, had read the same journals and listened to the same keynote speakers. This was particularly true in the area of technology and readings related to globalization and changes in the global society. One influential keynote speaker was Ian Jukes. One professor had heard Ian Jukes at the 2004 Technology Leadership and Learning Conference in Denver. His interest in the work of Jukes had sparked an interest in others so several professors at that university were influenced by Jukes.

Professor G at a Bangkok University:

I agree with Ian Jukes that students must learn to effortlessly access information from a variety of sources worldwide. It also means that students should be presented with a real-life problem at their level of development and understanding. He is right that distance and time are shrinking for students in their search for knowledge.

Professor H at a Bangkok University:

Ian Jukes is the one that introduced me to George Gilder's book, *Telecosm*, and to [Dan] Pink. What Pink says supports our beliefs—that big picture thinking, intuition, creativity, empathy, and the ability to link unrelated things is more important than the single area of study approach.

However, the most mentioned international expert was someone none of the California professors knew or had studied. In many discussions Thai professors told of listening to and being influenced by Dr. Yin Cheong Cheng. Cheng is a professor and Director of the Centre for Institutional Research and Development of the Hong Kong Institute

of Education. He is also head of the Asia-Pacific Centre for Education Leadership and School Quality. Cheng is President of the Asia-Pacific Educational Research Association established by 22 national and international organizations in 14 countries in the Asia-Pacific Region. According to Cheng (2003), Thailand is a member of this organization.

A review of the literature showed Cheng promotes these general ideas regarding schooling:

1. The focus of schooling is to arouse curiosity and motivation of both students and teachers to think, act, and learn in a multiple intelligence way.
2. Schooling is also an open process to initiate, facilitate, and sustain self-learning and self-actualization of students and teachers.
3. Schooling provides opportunities to share the joy of learning and teaching among teachers and students.
4. Schooling is a continuously learning and developing organization, involving institutional continuous discovery, experimenting, actualization, reflection, and development.
5. In addition to the school itself, there are multiple sources of teaching and learning, self-learning programs and packages, web-based learning, outside experts, community experiential programs inside and outside the school, locally and globally.
6. Parents and communities, including social services, business, and industry, are actively involved in schooling. The partnership with them is necessary to support effective networked schooling and multiple sources of learning.
7. Locally and globally networked schooling can provide a wide spectrum of learning experiences and maximize opportunities for teachers and students to benefit from various settings and cultures.
8. With the help of globalized schooling, students can learn the world-class experiences from different parts of the world (Cheng, 2002).

Several Thai professors spoke of these principles set forth by Cheng; nevertheless, it was Cheng's ideas specifically related to preparing students for the global society that were most often shared. Professors at three of the six universities credited Dr. Cheng as the influencer of their understanding of schooling. Dr. Cheng was quoted when they spoke

of globalization and helping students find their place in the context of growing interdependence between all people of this planet.

Cheng (2005) talked of fast global transformations and serious international competitions. He stated that market liberalization and information, communication and transportation technologies more and more link people together economically and socially by trade, investments and governance. But, when it comes to the role schooling plays, it is here that Dr. Cheng took a direction that is not common. He acknowledged that many put responsibility for economic growth on educators and that much is said regarding knowledge-driven economies and information technology shaping the new millennium. While politicians, futurists, and industry leaders are quick to lay blame at the feet of educators, claiming students are not prepared with relevant skills and knowledge for a global economy, Dr. Cheng takes a different approach.

Thai professors understand the history of economic growth in their own country. Some have personally experienced the waxing and waning of the past thirty years. During dinner conversations when Thai professors spoke of Thailand's 1997 economic crisis and recovery, they mentioned export competitiveness, exchange rate adjustments, risk and cost of foreign and domestic investments and interest rate tariff and trade policy. It was not a lament of accusations hurled at educators. Given their personal recollections and explanations, to have asked if the economic crisis was somehow caused by the educational systems failure to produce high achievers in the math and science would have been absurd. The following statements give insight into why Thai professors do not see the education system as the cause of increased or slowed economic growth.

Professor I at a Northern Rajabhat University:

Let me explain why I agree with Cheng's ideas. After the World War II Thailand's international trade expanded in response to foreign demand especially to agricultural products but also rubber, maize, tapioca, teak and tin. For the next forty years exporting continued to increase for Thailand. By the 1980s you could say that Thailand was among the fastest growing economies. Japan was the largest market for Thailand. You know, we were exporting leather goods, jewelry, toys, like that. Of course you know what happened in the 1990s, the US became our largest market when it was no longer Japan. You see, these changes, economic changes were from outside of Thailand. No, no, we do not say 'the educators failed.'

Professor A at an Eastern Rajabhat University:

I think you hear that teachers and school leaders must attract and motivate students to the math and science fields. Is that right? I mean

when speaking of facing globalization. Yes? Listen, listen. Exporting for Thailand was phenomenal during the mid 1980s. Same for China and Indonesia. These three countries improved competitiveness. In contrast, Hong Kong and Taiwan lost export competitiveness. Decisions were made for exchange rate adjustments and favorable conditions for foreign investment. That was four decades of steady growth for Thailand. We became over-confident and over-optimism. This explains the 1997 economic crisis. We understand this. Students in the schools; that is a different matter.

Professor F at a Rajabhat University in Northern Thailand:

We are speaking of Dr. Yin Cheong Cheng, professor at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. Instead of seeing globalization in a fearful way, some say, if schools fail to prepare students, they say 'the sky is falling.' Some fear other countries will take over large market shares and say, 'Oh, my country will suffer.' We also want our schools to prepare students for the global economy. But in this way. I don't think we are achieving this yet but this is a goal. This is individualization for human development. This is provision to emphasize human potential. Cheng says, 'Promote individual creativity and encourage self-actualization.'

Professor G at a Bangkok University:

Training our principals to understand our changing society is important. I heard Dr. Cheng recently when I was in New Delhi at a conference. He says school principals must be prepared to maximize the intellectual assets of students. Principals need to understand development of each student to fullest potential. We teach our principals to have a global outlook. Our educational leadership students have experience in traveling to Europe or the United States. They will network and understand cultures. Of course English is required of our doctoral students. I took a few doctoral students to hear Dr. Cheng when he was in Bangkok.

Professor D at a Rajabhat University on the Eastern Side of Thailand:

It is not enough to convince principals of these important issues. It has to go to the teachers. Teachers need to help the students grow in all areas to live and work in the global community. They need to help their students so they can learn from world-class materials and from experts and teachers in different parts of the world. Their teaching should include local and global networking. I think, exposure through internet, web-based teaching, video-conferencing, cross-cultural sharing. At the university we need to promote international exchange and travel programs not just for principals but for teachers also.

Conclusion

A month long trip to six Thailand universities brought about an unexpected and positive approach to how educational leadership pro-

grams can prepare school leaders to think and act as they face the rapid globalization of the new millennium. Likely, it was not the intent of these Thailand hosts to teach a better way. Nevertheless, the sharp contrast in their views and ways of facing international competition could not be ignored.

Clearly, the Thai professors expressed a mission for their educational leadership programs. Influenced by leaders within the Thai Ministry of Education, revered members of the royal family and international school improvement researchers, university faculty at these six universities reported similar beliefs and practices. They believe that schooling is to help people understand the world, make rational judgments and choices and live in harmony with members of the world community. They found it easy to embrace the idea that each individual student is to be developed to his/her fullest potential. This means thinking of the moral, physical and intellectual qualities in the development of the whole individual.

Because school principals are the key actors in education they must understand how to develop each student to his/her fullest potential. This means helping students to have big picture thinking, intuition, creativity, empathy, and the ability to link seemingly unrelated objects and events. Principals need to lead in the creation of a boundless and multi-dimensional environment that prepares students to find their best place in the global society.

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