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Community network development for integrating non-formal education and informal education in schools

Archanya Ratana-Ubol*, Weerachat Soopunyo

Department of Lifelong Education, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok 10330, Thailand

Article Info

Abstract

This research aimed to build a community network for developing and proposing guidelines for integrating a non-formal education and informal education program in schools. The target groups were school administrators, school committees, teachers, representatives from the communities, and faculty members from Department of Lifelong Education, Chulalongkorn University. This research was conducted with Research and Development (R&D) process: (1) exploring collaboration in schools and analysing school context contributing to the integration of a non-formal and informal education approach; (2) developing guidelines for integrating a non-formal and informal education approach in schools; (3) validating the guidelines; and (4) synthesizing and developing a community network to promote the guidelines for integrating a non-formal and informal education approach. The results found that the community network development was composed of the family, schools, community and social support groups. The guidelines for integrating a non-formal education and informal education in schools included: (1) creation of school clusters; (2) changing roles of the university and educational institution; and (3) creation of policy conditions that enhances integration of non-formal and informal education.

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Introduction

Schools in Thailand have been promoting lifelong learning among students with the emphasis placed on learning to learn, the foundation for learning for a lifetime. To achieve this, all forms of education including formal, non-formal, and informal education should be integrated in order to allow learners access to educational and learning opportunities and resources throughout every phase of their lives. Schools are expected to be among the significant places where lifelong education and learning is introduced, promoted and supported. They should be places where learners are exposed to an open and friendly learning environment contributing to the promotion of lifelong learning skills and attitudes, including self-awareness, learning curiosity, self-directing in the learning process, and the love of learning. Schools should not only encourage learners to grow up as lovers of learning but must be good at arranging learning strategies and ways to satisfy their needs and learning styles. To link and incorporate the three forms of education, namely, formal, non-formal, and informal into school settings and conditions is seen to be essential. This requires addressing

a range of commonly encountered difficulties in schools, such as recurring disciplinary problems, poor academic performance in Mathematics, etc. One way to solve the problems in schools is building a positive relationship with students, parents, teachers, and communities to solve problems collaboratively.

In recognition of the importance, its vision and mission, the Department of Lifelong Education, Faculty of Education at Chulalongkorn University actively supports and guides educational institutions to understand and recognize lifelong education in practice as with a project of community network development integrating non-formal education and informal education in schools in areas of Saraburi Province, Huai Haeng and Tan Dieo, Kaeng Khoi District. The research aimed to (1) build a community network for developing guidelines for integrating non-formal education and informal education in schools in the areas of Huai Haeng and Tan Dieo, Kaeng Khoi District in Saraburi Province; and (2) propose guidelines for integrating a non-formal education and informal education program in the schools.

Literature Review

In the 21st century, lifelong learning has become significant as people face changes and adapt themselves to a sustainable society and individual empowerment. Lifelong learning encompasses learning at all ages, informal, non-formal and formal learning. The European Lifelong Learning Initiative defines lifelong learning as "a continuous supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetime and to apply these with confidence, creativity and enjoyment, in all roles, circumstances, and environments." (Watson, 2003)

Thailand is a country in South East Asia that has implemented non-formal education and informal education as a complement to formal education. The concept of lifelong education has been found to be fruitful for Thai citizens. In 1999, the Thai Government passed The National Education Act. Under this Act, Education means the learning process for personal and social development through imparting of knowledge; practice; training; transmission of culture; enhancement of academic progress; building a body of knowledge by creating a learning environment and society with factors as available conducive to continuous lifelong learning. The Act also states "credits accumulated by learners shall be transferable within the same type or between different types of education, regardless of whether the credits have been accumulated from the same, or from different educational

institutions, including learning from non-formal or informal education, vocational training, or from work experience." These statements show the willingness of the education system in Thailand to open the opportunity to all and consider it as a lifelong learning process (Somtrakool, 2002). According to the National Education Act B.E. 2542 and its Amendments followed by the Non-formal and Information Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551, education management in Thailand should take into account the conceptual framework of lifelong learning for all people. Lifelong learning is the inclusion of three major forms education and learning, namely, formal, non-formal, and informal (Office of the Education Council, 2010). Based on this framework, educational institutions are expected to be the major source where the three approaches to education and learning can be organized inclusively.

The European Commission (2001) found that lifelong learning has "four broad and mutually supporting objectives: personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability/adaptability". In this regard, lifelong learning has broad dimensions which transcend narrow economic and vocational aspects. In Sweden, the National Agency for Education has put forward a conceptual framework for both lifelong learning and life-wide learning. Lifelong learning is seen as a holistic view of education and recognizes learning from different environments. It consists of two dimensions (Skolverket, 2000): (1) Lifelong learning recognizing that individuals learn throughout their lifetime; and (2) Life-wide learning recognizing the formal, non-formal and informal settings. In conclusion, life skills are defined as psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. They are loosely grouped into three broad categories of skills: cognitive skills for analyzing and using information, personal skills for developing personal agency and managing oneself, and interpersonal skills for communicating and interacting with others (World Health Organization [WHO], 1999).

Methodology

The design of this study was Research and Development (R&D). This research was designed and developed to be conducted in the following four steps:

1. Exploring collaboration in schools and analysing school context contributing to the integration of a non-formal and informal education approach. After heading into the area to find the problems of combining the educational model, the researcher conducted the four steps of action research which included planning, action, observation and reflection, that led to design, monitoring and assessment, as well as a lesson-learned.

2. Concluding answers from schools for developing guidelines for integrating a non-formal and informal education approach. A lesson-learned was analysed and the guidelines created according to the contexts of the target groups and areas.

3. Validating the guidelines from different schools and areas. The researcher proposed the guidelines for improvement and suggestions on issues associated with other schools and areas.

4. Developing and proposing a community network to promote the guidelines for integrating a non-formal and informal education approach in schools.

Participants

The target groups of the study were school administrators, school committees, teachers, representatives from the community, faculty members from Department of Lifelong Education, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University. All key formants could be defined into 7 groups described as follows:

1. Administrators were those who had been working in the school for at least 5 years and who provided school policy support, physical support, and psychological support.

2. Teachers were those who had been teaching in the school**s** for at least 3 years and who needed to improve educational program from the workload.

3. School committee members were those who had been working for school development for at least 3 years and who suggested policy.

4. Faculty members of Lifelong Education were academic staff who had been working in the Department of Lifelong Education, Chulalongkorn University for at least 3 years and who provided academic information as coaches, mentors, and facilitators.

5. Student was a person who was studying in the school and who provided learning needs or any learning information.

6. Community representatives were those who had been living in the community for at least 10 years and supported local wisdom and learning resources.

Data Collection

The areas of study included Huai Haeng and Tan Dieo, Kaeng Khoi District in Saraburi Province. These two areas had a great potential and willingness to develop community network. Key informants were selected with a purposive sampling which consisted of the criteria based on their roles as described previously. Data collection was conducted with in-depth interviews and focus group. Triangulation was used to strengthen the study by combining various methods including interview and observation.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the researcher focused on investigating the informant's experiences and generating knowledge from the substance of those experiences. The data analysis involved a content analysis based mainly on verbatim note taking and voice recording.

Conceptual Framework

To obtain the aim of this study, there were two dimensions that linked with the integrated community network in school including a cooperative network and integration of non-formal and informal education in school. The conceptual framework, as a basis for operation, was formulated as shown in Figure 1.

Results

The results of this research can be stated as follows:

1. The community network development consisted of the family, schools, community and social support groups. These community networks collaborated in providing support and promoted student development.

2. The guidelines for integrating a non-formal education and informal education in schools included (1) creation of school clusters; (2) changing roles of the university and educational institution; and (3) creation of policy conditions that enhances integration of non-formal and informal education.

Development of a Cooperative Network for Integration of Non-formal and Informal Education in the Arrangement of the Participating Schools

Due to the network operation for the integration of non-formal, informal educational arrangement in the schooling system, organizations that were interested in supporting school clusters included government, private sector, and community. All sectors cooperated in terms of educational policy conditions. They also combined their efforts and resources in identifying, testing, and implementing more effective ways of learning in schools and communities. University and educational institution as facilitators generated teaching practices of creative thinking in order to arranged learning supporting process. Hence, learners improved their knowledge, behavior, attitude, and skills. This cooperative network, which included 4 networks and 14 schools, was synthesized into the following operational guidelines:

1. Community relations creation networks for mathematics path and upgrading learning achievement level: Wat Huakongkawarawas school (Host network); Wat Ponggonsao School.

2. Enhancement and development of schools towards sufficiency path network: Wat Burugaram school (Host network); Wat Bosoke school; Wat Taseebodhinua school; Wat Nongnamkeaw school; Wat Sattaruangsri school; Wat Tumtao school.

3. Literary support network: Wat Tamaprang school; Choomchon Watbumroongdham school; Bansubborn school.

4. Sports path school network: Bannongsonghong school (Host network); Banchong school; Choomchon Nikomtubkwang Songkrahe 1 school.

Operational Guidelines

Creation of school clusters

1. Marking the heading school by searching for school with the qualifications, which includes willing to cooperate, dare to change, open to accept changes, and administrators and teachers having unity as one.

2. Operation in integration of non-formal and informal education in the educational arrangement in the heading school system.

1) Self-learning and context of the leading school, which includes learning of capability and readiness of the school, learning the context of the community of the school, learning of the students of the school, and learning of theoretical main points concerning 3 educational patterns.

2) Target specification of the leading school, which includes specification of readiness and scope of target according to the conditions obtained from self-learning and context.

3) Specify operational methods towards the target, which includes prioritizing the work, specifying 3 educational activities that are appropriate with each working step, coordinating with the organizations that are interested in support from the government, private sector, and community, and specifying guidelines in monitoring target achievement.

4) Operation towards the target with facilitation of the universities and support from the organization.

5) Monitor target achievement, which includes analysis of outcome, identifying the non-effective areas outcome, and proposing improvement and changes.

3. Creation of a network of schools with common interest, which includes creating opportunity and forum for the heading school to propose their work and the consequences affecting other schools, accepting other schools to participate in the network with the leading schools, and enhancing the learning process and self-development within the network.

Changing roles of the university and educational institution

1. Change from "the one who knows theory" to "the one who learns reality in practice" in the context of the school operation.
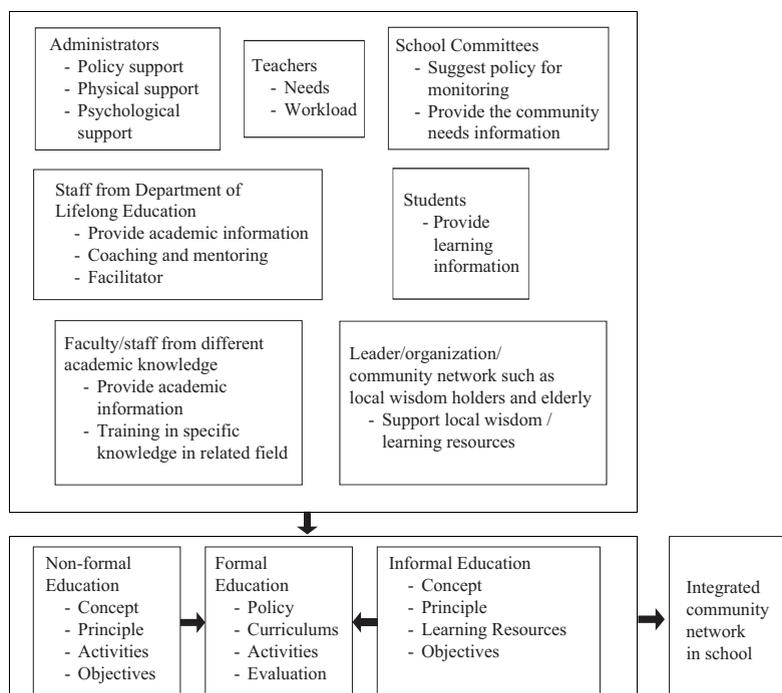

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

2. Change from the "outside" to the "insider" who practically envisions problem and conditions as they really are in the context of the school.

3. Must be able to propose "connection" between theory and context of the actual operation of the school.

4. Must change logical thinking from "theory leading operation" to "theoretical change according to operation".

Creation of policy conditions that enhances integration of non-formal and informal education in the educational arrangement of the school system

1. Change of logical thinking from "pattern-based educational arrangement" that causes plan/framework-based activities arrangement to "creation of environment that enhances learning in accordance with the way of living context and traits of the learners".

2. Change of logical thinking from "non-formal education in the educational arrangement of NFE (Non-formal education)" center to "non-formal education is the educational arrangement that can be arranged by school when understood".

3. Change from "informal education is arrangement of learners who can learn anything" to "informal education is to arrange anything that enables the learner to learn".

Discussion

Information from stakeholders, community, teachers and principals revealed that the incorporation of non-formal education and learning in formal school conditions needed clarification. Mutual understanding and agreement on the concepts, principles, and methodology of non-formal education and informal learning between everyone involved in school management should be concluded as the first step to start. One school principal emphasized that it was necessary for stakeholders to understand their roles for helping schools to accomplish lifelong education in schools and that "the university should organize both formal and informal meetings to discuss the existing matters and the incorporation of non-formal education in school curriculum."

The mission of Chulalongkorn University is giving support to all communities. The university and schools should work collaboratively especially for developing the students' learning. The university should organize ongoing evaluation and feedback sessions, problem solving and support to the schools.

Promoting networking among schools, community and university, is important to encourage all sectors to work together to achieve the goal of developing students for learning the essential contents and life skills. Networks and schools coordinate to develop school activities which include the school environment to promote students'

learning, practicing, transformative thinking and creating value. Schools should play an active role as an innovative organization that integrates teaching and activities. Families should play an important role in supporting the children, accepting changes, and modifying the lifestyle in the families to promote the potential of children. The community must strengthen co-operation and support school activities. Community must promote non-formal education and informal education in a formal school including support and advice. Universities should be involved in networking by collaborating with learners as mentors, coordinating networks, adding both academic and technical concepts.

1. The building of a school and community network was essential. Schools brought together many diverse sectors of the community to discuss and decide what the best solution and approach were afforded by the school and what these networks mean to their schools, families, and social environment.

2. All networks including the university were involved in a collaborative project initiated by the school and the community. All networks were brought together.

3. The guidelines for integrating non-formal and informal education programs in schools were proposed. School contents did differ according to the major needs and context of the school.

1) Self-reliant school

Self-reliant school was based on the cooperation of the self-reliant family and community by integrating the philosophy of Economic Sufficiency and self-reliance into the curriculum. Students learned from good role models in the community. A self-reliant community would be a learning resource for students and community members. Key persons in the community served as a role model to students. The Community collaborated with the schools and families. In schools, integrating the philosophy of Economic Sufficiency and self-reliance into the curriculum, focused on instruction for developing self-reliance and independence. Teachers created the environment for self-reliant activities in school, and most importantly, the role of families in supporting school activities and adapting their lives to the changes brought about due to the updated curriculum.

2) Mathematics for use in everyday living school

This model of Mathematics for use in everyday living was a composite of the value of the environment in utilizing relevant spaces, thus promoting understanding with community support to schools, involving the community network, and proposing guidelines to promote mathematic. The most important factor for success was the integration of the curriculum and promotion of the three approaches to education (i.e., non-formal, informal and formal education). In addition, the appreciation led to changing teaching methods and the collaboration between all the teachers in the school.

3) Sportsmanship model

The model of Sportsmanship was an extension of the classroom using an approach to learning with fun, unity, self-discipline and responsibility. The model consisted of using school areas and the environment to enhance games and sport activities in school and the community. The purpose of the model was to teach life lessons by cultivating such aspects as being the best person they can be, fairness, diligence, team effort, leadership, respect for ones' opponent, graciousness in winning or losing, integrity, courage (Character building), as an extension of the academic program. Examples of activities were building some games and sport activities into the school roster, promoting community sports and competitions.

4) Reading and writing school

The model of reading and writing consisted of the use of school spaces and context as learning resources of reading and writing, promoting community and network resources, this being essential in developing a learning society. Key persons in reading and writing in the community, using the community space to promote reading and writing skills, was a significant step for this model. In addition, integrating reading and writing in all subjects in the curriculum promoted organizing classes with emphasis on writing and reading, and created activities to enhance reading and writing based on the context of school and community. The factors effecting the success were teachers as activists and thinkers, and the community involved in supporting and teaching.

The operational guidelines for integrating a non-formal education and informal education were significant for school administrators, school committees, teachers, people in the communities, and faculty members from University. All three guidelines included of creation of school clusters; changing roles of the university and educational institution; and creation of policy conditions that enhances integration of non-formal and informal education, were promoted the Lifelong learning approach (The European Commission ,2001) encompassed learning at all ages, informal, non-formal and formal learning.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusions are as follows:

1. The building of school and community network was essential. School brought together many diverse sectors of the community, to discuss and decide what the best solution and approach afforded by the school and all networks means to their own school, family, and social environment.

2. All networks including the university were involved in a collaborative project initiated by the school and the community. All networks were brought together. The synergies happened around the project.

3. The guidelines for integrating a non-formal education and informal education programs in schools were proposed. School contents did differ according to the needs and context of the school.

Recommendations are as follows:

1. We are living in a learning society which is dynamic, changeable and unpredictable. Teachers need to be mindful and attentive to ensuring students are taught the appropriate skills that are going to be important as proposed by schools. Schools also need to be mindful of developing as 21st century learners, living in a learning society. An education that prepares all learners with all families and networks in the society should be promoted.

2. Education is a lifelong process. It will become a more continuous process in its role within other functions of life by non-formal and informal education. Formal education will become more meaningful and relevant in its application. The policy makers, therefore, should recognize the importance of the lifelong process in practice.

3. School, community and family being committed to active citizenship and equal opportunities. This supports lifelong learning within the school framework of its vision and mission.

4. School must recognize the concept of a learning society in which students adopt a lifelong learning approach to life, drawing on a wide range of resources in and outside schools to enable them to support their lifestyle practices.

5. School should promote the appreciation of the implementation of informal education and non-formal education system in formal education systems.

6. Educators should be given in service updates to equip them to deal with the changes.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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