

เปิดประเด็น

Issues Raising

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“If It Were A Team”-A Viewpoint to Institutional Teaching and Working Culture in Thailand

Given the privilege to work with Thai teachers and teacher educators for a couple of years, there also has been a timely opportunity in several in-service and pre-service events and sessions to listen, study and observe the presentations, feedback, development trends and willingness of educators. Once there already is an accepted Journal article on teacher education, teachers' working culture and decision-making, it is appropriate to reflect and share some of the ideas that have occurred during the past two academic years in Thailand.

In an in-service occasion 80 teachers were presenting publicly as teams-and also individually in private-what kind of skills they wished to be able to develop. Second, they were asked, what kind of skills and working routines they already have adapted.

First and foremost, an overwhelming majority expressed their willingness to develop personal encouragement skills, and also use them when facing problems and challenges in work. This already was, how they faced the problems in school-life and with stakeholders. Second, they estimated the information literacy skills to a high esteem and regarded themselves to be successful in that field. Third, the teachers wanted to enhance their personal problem-solving skills. On the other hand, their self-assessment practices were in seldom use and private by nature.

To examine a little these trends, a mainstreaming goal seemed to be on



individual professional development and skills that promote it-personally. In addition, these teachers also saw themselves as main sources of knowledge for their students regarding the content in lessons. Subsequently, they expressed-also in several other connections-repeatedly that lesson planning took very much time due to all the existing information on their field they needed to have. Apart from this, the professional self-reflection, or self-assessment, which was practiced with a colleague or a group of colleagues, was very low. Only five (5) percent of the teachers shared professional information regularly with his, or her, colleagues and/or network.

These trends were not exceptional but occurred in several occasions and connections, in which in-service training and professional reflection were discussed in groups by teachers and teacher educators. Another survey reached 36 teachers around the country. One of their most popular working method was to teach the classroom of 8-45 students by instructing them solely on a group level. At the same time teachers felt that they nurtured the students' individual motivation while treating them as a group. Individual teaching work and group methods were seen to promote individual learning in students' group. An observation on these teachers' lesson practices told that every third of them practiced actively teamwork during a single lesson. The teamwork sessions were short and focused on a certain task, or question. Irrespective of the learning outcomes during the teamwork session, the timetable in most cases was same for all. The students seemed to be adapting different roles during the teamwork sessions. Apart from this, they did not have time to change their interacting roles and, consequently, adapt new responsibilities to learn from them.

Another information source comprised 450 university teacher students, who presented in teams the most important skills in their teaching profession on the 21st century. Every third emphasized critical thinking-individually. Almost the same number saw communication as a crucial skill. They separated two ways, or levels, of communication. First, there was an important one-way communication in the classroom as a teacher. Second way was a collegial communication using a dialogue. They were ready to share best practices and experiences professionally-within the same age group they represented. Senior teachers were not seen collegially as an important opportunity to share and learn from experiences. An outstanding finding



was that 2/3 did not see the importance of communication skills. Instead of that, they spoke about content knowledge, classroom management and global citizenship-not sharing those in an institutional level. They were presented more as abstract metacognitions they only would determine further for themselves.

In those workshop cases, in which the teachers said that administration did not encourage them for collaboration, there was still the same number of teamwork among the teaching staff as it was in the opposite cases. If the administration urged teachers for closer cooperation, it did not add the quantity of quality of teamwork. Quite much the opposite, an administrative urge for teamwork was seen as a requirement and not so much an opportunity for interactive professional development.

Conclusively one may say, first, that Thai teacher seems to be a lonely worker and a soloist. Furthermore, she or he has highly individual professional development plans. Quite much paradoxical it is to find that the teaching methods-or didactics as they are called in some pedagogically oriented studies-are aimed for and implemented in a group level, however. More natural trend for a solo worker would be to give (her or his) learners similar individual attention the teachers require for themselves inside their institutions.

Working alone has its benefits. However, it also may be a heavy burden when problems rise. In institutional life and in the middle of numerous people and their infiltrating family lives, problems always occur. Sharing challenges, best practices and solutions in a constructive, accepting way would benefit any single Thai teacher enormously. So-called "tacit knowledge" knowhow would be a step towards a more social working culture and self-esteem as a team. Who would be brave enough to start to ask for that? Which institution would have courage enough to manifest that learning from each other is their success factor and strength in the future? In the light of international literature, a step to success would simply be learning: where is the institution that will seriously regard all the people as learners every day and all the time?

Solo teaching job, however, may serve. At least, it may serve as long as culture, society, environment, and nature of information do not change. When the changes come, a single teacher may feel them extremely stressing, embarrassing,





and even seriously threatening. Previously so safe content knowledge may start to be a strangling threat. This kind of dilemma will cause resilience or stronger resistance-not to mention exhaustion and low motivation. Regardless of any of these opposing emotions and personal rejections, the changes will inevitably come. They even have started to come with a progressive speed. Dynamic societies which adapt rapid changes into new practices are already elsewhere than static ones.

What else is left unused from a solo teacher? The power of the institutional deep knowledge and knowhow will remain secret, unknown and will thus have no real, promoting meaning. Institution of 100 experts from different fields also has 100 development stories and experiences. The lack of time is not an excuse, since shared lesson and course planning, collaborative test preparation lessons, combined classroom solutions and other kind of minor practical changes would easily save an entire hour out of two. It would be worth of using to collaboration and better, prompt solutions for the same, repeated problems. At the same time teachers would get to know their colleagues better and see more than just another person in a uniform, different position and of another age.

To facilitate collaboration in an institution during a school year, or an academic year, is not difficult. Much more difficult it is to accept the change in the nature of information. In any fast developing countries and improving nations the ownership of information is not important. The speed and efficiency in sharing the information and using the shared ownership in the best way is, what matters and guarantees the progress and consequent success. That is why the research has started to study so-called learning organizations already 25 years ago. However, a very limited number of institutions have adopted the sharing structures, like a real “flat” organization. I have seen, how even those who professionally investigate learning organizations, hide their findings and information from their closest colleagues. Paradoxically enough, they act against their own official opinions in practical level.

The manager or leader is no more above-or behind any desk-but should come to facilitate in the middle of people, arrange meetings and take care about



shared information as a necessary pre-arrangement for development. Sharing the information also means sharing responsibility. Once there is a message, memorandum attachment, meeting agenda and an agreed team meeting, no-one should enter into such being unprepared. In an advanced meeting the agenda is clear, emerging people have ready opinions and arguments, and all the meeting takes just an hour or less. Those ones who are not prepared, may stay quiet. Their homework was not completed and meetings are not lessons. Discussion meetings on the topics may be arranged separately for those, who want to attend.

Decisions done together in a preparatory, fluent way are fruitful products that grow in the meeting agenda and matter in the future. They present the benefits of shared information that will utilize and foster any professional development and organizational success story. Shared information speeds the positive development up faster than reputation. The latter is only an illusion, while shared information is a living and collective reality.

ผู้เขียน

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