

Sustainable Learning Environment of Effective Schools in the Twenty First Century from Thai Parents' Perspectives

Mr. Neba Denis Fuh (St. Theresa International College, Thailand)

SUMMARY

This is a look at how to make learning environments sustainable from Thai parents' perspectives without destroying natural beauty and features.

The problem today is that many schools still reflect their Industrial Age origins with rigid schedules, inflexible facilities, and fixed boundaries between grades, disciplines, classrooms and functional roles. The 21st Century, on the contrary, requires a new form of education, one that breaks through the barriers separating schools from the real world, educators from each other, and policymakers from the communities they are supposed to serve.

Let us look at two types of learning environment, the modern "mansion" building and the school set in natural surroundings.

In Thailand, parents believe the best learning environment is that made up of modern buildings, well decorated walls, air conditioned and technologically equipped traditional classrooms, even if the school does not have a team of academic staff.

Yet we need to look into natural learning environments and out-of-classroom settings. For example, why not hold a science experiment outdoors?

The 21st Century requires a different approach to education in Thailand. Thai parents need to understand that the definition of a learning environment has changed and a revolution is taking place in the labour market. This revolution is in line with the call by the United Nations to protect our environment and recreate what has been destroyed.

A crucial problem is that educational investors and administrators are focused on erecting modern buildings rather than the need to recreate natural resources on or off-the-school campus for sustainable learning.

It is not just a matter of a sustainable learning environment. Despite all the investment made in terms of teachers and learning materials, technology and classrooms, the process of learning, largely based on a rote learning system, is ineffective. Students do not respond well to the current learning process.

When examining sustainably learning environments, effective school construction, and the changing need for employment skills, schools in Thailand need to be assessed in terms of the natural learning environment, out-of-classroom settings, professional learning environment, community learning environments, and the class learning environment.

What are my recommendations? Researchers need to carry out research in their own education environments. What has to be understood is we cannot build schools without the parents' understanding. They need to be involved in the process.

Beyond this we need to assess, what is a job? When students graduate, they don't understand this and they have had no contact with the real job environment.

DISCUSSIONS

Question: When we look at effective schools, how important is the parents' level factor?

Answer: We have to understand the situation from the parents' level. We need to have an understanding in the building of the school from the perspectives of the designer, the educator, the administrator, the students and the parents. We wanted to understand Thai parents and Thai culture and norms.

Question: You covered the natural environment. What about the social environment?

Answer: The social level comes under the community level environment. We need to go out into the community and to understand community values.

Question: What about the religious and racial environment?

Answer: This would come under the community and social level contacts. You may go out into the religious community. This depends on what way you want to design the activity.

Question: How can the school learning environment be more sustainable in terms of pedagogy?

Answer: I have been living in Thailand for five years as a school administrator. What is needed is to design the whole system to be sustainable. There are so many systems. If we look at the example I gave of the "mansion" school, this is an international school where unless you are white, you cannot be a teacher. They are all "farang" teachers, British and Americans. The fees are high in this school compared to the "natural" school.

At the mansion school, the students are learning one skill. Marketing is important. This is a prestigious school. But then if you ask the children, what can you do, there is never the chance to get in other activities that may broaden their horizons.