Cultural Learning Processes through Local Wisdom: A Case Study on Adult and Lifelong Learning in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This article provides the background and concept of Thailand Lifelong Learning [LLL], even attempting a definition. The Thai LLL vision encompasses strategies for developing human qualities such as integrity, self-reliance, adaptability, resilience, and spirituality, to name a few. In some regards LLL seeks to recapture a more fully-developed perspective, on what in earlier times and places [1238 AD in Thailand], was called ‘indigenous education’, as it now pursues the benefits of a vibrant Learning Society. Progress of LLL in Thailand at times seems to be very slow and methodological rather than dynamic. It stems from developing a policy of learning processes for establishing solid education systems – Formal, Non-Formal, and Informal. LLL also has developed by means of garnering and integrating ‘Local Wisdom’ [a Thai term designating important valued human experience] into what has become known as ‘cultural learning processes’. This Local Wisdom is held by ‘Wisdom Teachers’ and encompasses nine areas, as follows: agriculture, handicraft/cottage industry, traditional medicine, conservation of natural resources, funding/community economics, fine arts, languages/literatures, philosophy/religion/tradition, and food/nutrition. Government Organizations and Private Non-Governmental Organizations have strongly supported and have been major forces for advancing cultural learning, LLL, and what may be labeled as a ‘Learning Society’. In addition, collaboration between Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok [Thailand’s premier university] and Lindenwood University, St. Charles, Missouri, USA, has helped Thai LLL advance immeasurably and move toward becoming a Learning Society from 2010 to 2015. Added to this, and provided a Model of Cultural Learning, with recommendations for improvement at the National and Community levels. It concludes with assurances toward its creating diversity within the constituencies to be served, strengthening a self-sufficient economy, solidifying moral values, and enhancing Thailand’s becoming a vibrant and flourishing Lifelong Learning Society.

Keywords: Cultural Learning, Cultural Learning Processes, Learning Society, Lifelong Education, Lifelong Learning, Local Wisdom, Thai Wisdom Teacher

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the world of the 21st century, lifelong learning is considered necessary for human beings from birth to death through formal, non-formal and informal learning/education. It would almost seem that the 21st century has already established itself as being labeled the Lifelong Learning (LLL) Century. This article moves quite slowly (not with flashes of lightning and claps of thunder) with the very deliberate establishing of numerous branches and stages of education/learning. Every aspect if this ultimately contributes a steady LLL movement which culminated in a Model of Cultural Learning that exemplifies LLL as an overall concept holding the nation and society together, as well as its sustaining life in all its aspects. Formal, Non-Formal, Informal Education, couples with nine aspects of Local Wisdom and Cultural Learning, adding Governmental and Private Organizations support along with the encouraging efforts and collaboration of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, and Lindenwood University, St. Charles, Missouri in the USA helping to drive a monumental LLL movement. It has been shown that lifelong learning makes a significant contribution to increasing and developing Thai citizens’ integrity, knowledge, self-reliance, and ability to adjust to changing circumstances with dignity, in a variety of cultural and environmental settings. In short, lifelong learning is a requirement for a knowledge-based economy/learning society and it is now considered a particularly suitable educational philosophy for a world society where societal, economic, political, scientific, and technological changes are rapid. Also addressed is the emergence, implementation, and sustaining of the Thai system of lifelong learning that recaptures and seeks to more fully develop and integrate the early (1238 A.D.) Thai perspective of ‘indigenous education’, for the future benefit of a more vibrant Learning Society.

Beginning with and following the dawn of the 21st century, the Thai government’s policy, the National Act of 1999, the National Education Act of B.E. 25421 (1999), the Promotion of Non-Formal and Informal Education Act, B.E. 2551 (2008) and The Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016), aims to develop integrity, knowledge, resilience, and spirituality in all age groups. Thailand is moving forward to promote and support much more lifelong learning activities by engaging in delivering basic informal education, literacy promotion and continuing education, developing educational resources and educational technology in all types of education, as well as implementing research and activities in lifelong learning to further development of human potential and sustainable development of the country among members of all backgrounds.

2. BACKGROUND OF LIFELONG LEARNING IN THAILAND

Lifelong learning in Thailand has been in place since the eras when formal schools had not been established. It can be traced back as early as 1238 AD to the Sukhothai period and early Ratanakosin periods before laws on compulsory education were proclaimed. An early educational system developed in Thailand was called by the name of ‘indigenous education’. The distinctive features of indigenous education [hardly found in the present Thai system] are: learning by doing, learning through authentic experiences, individualized instruction, and happy learning. Thailand’s own indigenous educational/learning system was informal and provided in three institutions; home, temple and palace. Parents taught children family occupation, social values and traditions while monks taught reading, morality and Buddhism. The palace was the place where all kinds of the nation’s classical art were developed, preserved and taught. (The Office of the National Education Commission, 2010).

During these periods, education was provided in the temples, mostly for boys, in...