

# **The Problematique of Quality Education in Thailand: Material/Quantitative vs Abstract/Qualitative**

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## **1. Context and Situations: The First and Second Education Reforms**

Thailand just started the second decade of her third large-scale educational reform, itself launched from August of 1999. The country's first came as part of the big package of the overall administrative/political reform in the second half of the nineteenth century when King Rama V of the ruling Chakkri Dynasty (1868-1910) managed to avoid being colonized by dominant Western powers at that time. In a nutshell, the country, then known as Siam, had to modernize all state apparatus and demonstrate to the colonizing powers Siam was capable of managing state affairs on her own. The second reform took place between 1974-1978 and the third came following the enactment and promulgation of the country's first modern educational legislature in August of 1999, dubbed by many as the "Educational Reform Law." Then, ten years went by quickly leaving behind a very dismal success record and a myriad of both unfinished and badly needed reform projects and activities. Only within the first decade of this third reform, 1999-2009, talks about "low quality of education" were heard more often and commanded more public attention.

Concerns about the country's "low" educational quality across the board in the Thai educational system at present are both legitimate and justified. Apparently, they seem to receive unanimous endorsement from all relevant and concerned parties, educational and non-educational alike. What is obviously far from any possible unanimity is how those noble concerns are actually translated into practical actions. This situation should not surprise anyone familiar with the issue. What the government does to improve educational quality will certainly be either ridiculed or rejected outright or both by the opposition. Even among educational experts and/or educators themselves, there never exists unanimous agreement as regards the best/the most effective quality improvement approaches. Prof. Dr. Gerald W. Fry at the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development, the University of Minnesota, USA writes "Actually, there is broad consensus about quality as a desired educational outcome both in Thailand and globally. However, there is complex controversy... about the extent to which quality exists and how to move toward greater quality" (Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010, p. xi).

To begin with and like in many other nations, Thailand's educational system comprises three types: formal, non-formal and informal. Do the above concerns about the low quality "across the

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board” cover all three types? If they do, are they of the same kind? Should they deserve similar attention, treatment and solutions? If they do not, which type(s) are those concerns directed at? And to make the matter more realistically complicated, it must be made explicit that even within the formal type, i.e., from kindergarten to university or higher education, there are two levels: basic (grades 1-12) and higher (pre-degree and degree). Does low quality across the board embrace both levels or refer to only one particular level or certain sub-levels in each level, e.g., 1-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12 of basic education; or, in the case of higher education, certificate, BA, MA, and Doctoral levels. Furthermore, how about vocational/technical education, private education, general and religious education for Buddhist monks, etc.? The list can go on and on. Questions about educational quality assessment criteria and methods are even more serious. They naturally arise, as they should, during various educational reform forums and discourse. It is not because some people do not want better quality or plain quality of education. But, since it is a very important and complex issue, it must not be decided one way or the other by only a small group of educational measurement, assessment and evaluation experts. But, before we will jump in and contribute our share, let’s agree that determining and improving the quality of education across the board is a very complex, controversial and difficult but possible endeavor. Next, we will have to make certain we are talking about the same thing or more or less the same thing.

“In general, improving the quality of education is interpreted as improving the efficiency in reaching educational objectives...” (Pongwat & Mounier, in Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010, p. 86). This means first we have to know and agree on the educational objectives. Then, we have to find ways to know those objectives have been reached. And both tasks, of course, are obviously and inherently difficult.

The main objective of the first reform especially during the third and fourth quarters of the nineteenth century was to demonstrate to the encroaching colonizers the country Siam was actually becoming modern and civilized in the Western sense. There was no need then for them to actually take over Siam, modernize/civilize and turn her over into a modern nation-state. In education, the formal establishment of the modern Ministry of Education in 1892 (along with other key state apparatus) signaled and triggered the revamping and modernizing of all its modus operandi from the top down to lowest echelons. Without judging the merits of the first reform and simultaneously without making claims because of it, the end result of it all was that Siam was able to avoid the experience of colonial occupation and control while Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos fell to the French in 1863, 1883 and 1893 respectively. This is not to mention earlier episodes of the Dutch taking over Indonesia in 1619; British Malaysia in 1786, Singapore in 1819 and Burma in 1826. The case of the Philippines is somewhat unique. She was under Spanish control during 1570-1898 and then the American rule during 1898-1946.

We have no record whatsoever of educational quality during and following the first reform. However, we all know modern education of the time along with other modern apparatus plus the great leadership of both King Rama IV and V and their officials did reach the set key objective: preservation of Siamese identity and independence. There must have been then, on this objective-meeting basis, some sorts of quality.

On the contrary, the second major reform, 1974-1978, was guided by the slogan/theme “Education Reform for Life and Society.” What we can infer from this theme is that education prior to the early 1970s was not really relevant to real-life situations learners found themselves in and neither was it useful to the Thai society as a whole. In other words, key educational objectives prior to such periods in addition to the preservation of national identity and independence of the first reform had not been or had not satisfactorily been met. And on this basis, education could not be said to be of good or high quality despite the fact that, unlike during the first decade of the third reform, public and/or official discussions and debates about the issue of educational quality were almost nonexistent.

There could be some commentators who could argue strongly in favor of the existence of quality because despite its flaws, it had reached a number of other educational objectives and sub-objectives, which probably was true. Furthermore, if we take into consideration the quality question during the two decades 1978-1999, after the second reform, there exists little information on whether education really did serve life and society. At the same time, we should be reminded that a decade or so before the second major reform, the modernizing nation-state of Thailand was under the rule of military junta backed by the United States. The nation was fighting against the Communist insurgent war domestically and joining American troops in the Indochina war offering her soil for American air bases from which lethal bombing missions were launched. Modernization of Thailand during this period, itself the extension of the process beginning right after the end of World War II, and particularly intensified after the crucial 1947 military coup, meant Westernization by which Westernization meant Americanization.

Economically and socially speaking, the second educational reform occurred toward the end of the Third National Economic and Social Development Plan (1972-1976). The situations on these two fronts looked quite bleak. After three development plans, again pushed and aided by the United States and the World Bank, the rich became richer and the poor poorer. Disparities in living conditions and income between the urban and rural communities widened. Social problems, particularly in the former, became more pronounced, in many instances, than when they had first been spotted.

## **2. The Third Reform: 1999-Present**

It is therefore not surprising to learn that the third reform advocates cited as reasons for reform the following: “1. The Alarming Deteriorating Quality of Education; 2. Increased Educational Opportunity Disparities; 3. Existing Education System Not Compatible with or Relevant to Social, Religious and Cultural Conditions; and 4. Ineffectiveness and Inefficiency of Educational Administration and Management” (Education Reform Office, 2001, pp. 1-3).

Notice that the first reason officially given for the need to systematically reform the educational system is the low quality reason. And upon closer scrutiny, we discovered that low quality meant “inability to compete with neighboring countries... unsatisfactory quality of learners judged by the very low level of learning achievement of Mathayom Suksa 6 (12<sup>th</sup> grade)

students... ineffective and inefficient instructional and evaluation system as well as the low quality of teachers.... ” (ibid, p. 1)

One may wonder whether the main objective of the second reform, reform for life and society, had ever been reached. If it was, the quality should have been in place. And there would be no need to cite as the number one reason for the third reform low quality. But it was probably not the case. The evidence cited for low quality above probably had very little to do with whether or not the second education reform had reached the main determined objective.

To go back a little further, we can spot one of the major reasons for the second reform itself, 1974-1978, which was the quality reason but only hidden among others. The Office of National Education Commission (ONEC), the Prime Minister’s Office, in commemoration of its 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishment said “as regards educational quality, it was discovered that a large number of primary school graduates were still illiterate. Moreover, contents of curriculum and the instruction were not relevant to/compatible with rapid changes taking place in social, economic and political spheres” (Sriprasat, 1992, p.5). Whatever other major educational objectives set by that second reform were, the above statement was given as the reason for low quality.

Is it, then, possible the assessment was misplaced? There actually existed other additional objectives but lay people like us were not aware of and not really being reached. Or was it really the case from the beginning that literacy rates of primary or even secondary school graduates, and the curriculum contents’ relevancy to ever changing social, economic, cultural and political conditions had actually been earmarked as major quality indicators? Whatever the case may be, this is neither a time nor place to speculate. What we are asserting here is that most people in Thailand who know or tend to know something about educational matters are of the opinion that educational quality across the board, as popularly presented, is actually deteriorating. Mainstream academics writing on the topic tend to uncritically adopt the popularly presented situations, causes and proposed remedies without providing deeply thought-out alternative explanations and scenarios. And we all echoed the theme.

Probably, there are very few people today who can remember the slogan-cum-theme of the third educational reform (1999-present). “Toward Becoming A Learning and Wisdom-Based Society” was the catch phrase and quite popular during the first few years before literally disappearing from practically all reform forums and discourse. Determining the quality of education across the board during 1999-2009 would heavily rely on the answer(s) to the major question, has Thailand noticeably become a learning and wisdom-based society? To determine whether it has or has not is not our concern here. But it suffices to learn from the National Council for Education’s recent report to the public that “some (reform) proposals have legally been implemented and successful... However, others still remain to be quickly and urgently improved, e.g., educational quality,...student and teacher quality” (National Council for Education, 2009, Foreword page). Needs date and page number Again, the quality problem of the third reform’s first decade!

### **3. Solving the Low Quality Problem**

As soon as the Democrat Party, aided by some other minor parties, took charge of the government in December, 2008, the new Minister of Education proposed a myriad of educational quality improvement policies and approaches for the second round or second decade of the third reform, 2009-2018, all with the aim of helping and enabling the Thai people to learn throughout life with quality.

Here are some major proposals to improve educational quality across the board presented by the Minister and later detailed by the National Council for Education.

### **4. Principle and Conceptual Framework**

The foci of reform are educational and learning systems with properly designed mechanisms capable of systematically bringing about educational and learning improvement. At the same time, both systems must be considered part and parcel of the national development system and their developments proceeding hand in hand with those in other such systems as economic, social, agricultural, health, and employment.

### **5. Vision: Quality Life-Long Education for All Thais**

The systematic/systemic educational and learning reforms place supreme emphasis on educational quality and standards development, expanded educational and learning opportunities, and promotion of all stakeholders' participation in order that every Thai be able to learn throughout life in and through all three types of education and at all levels with quality.

By 2018, with serious implementation of the above Principle(s), Concepts, Vision and ensuring policies, plans, projects and detailed activities, the quality of education should be reflected in the wide presence of new-era Thais who possess and exhibit all desirable characteristics, attitudes and aptitudes; qualified, competent, knowledgeable and able "manpower" needed by employers and the economy; new-era teaching force whose members voluntarily enter the profession, are capable of delivering quality instruction and are constantly and continuously developing themselves personally and professionally with the help from strong and dedicated professional councils; new-era educational institutions and learning sources; and new-era administration as a management system equipped with good governance principles endorsing and facilitating the decentralization of educational administration and management authority to individual schools, educational service areas and local administrative organizations, and welcoming participation from parents, communities, the private sector and others.

Some of the more concrete policies and measures effected and even implemented in 2009 with, of course, the intention of raising the quality of education across the board could be listed as follows:

- Approved plans to train, retrain and develop more than 400,000 teachers and school administrators/directors;
- Approved plans to bring about, of course out of existing ones, three levels of good schools/educational institutions around the country: 500 internationally good, 2,500 District-or Amphur-level good, and 7,000 Sub-District-or Tambol-level good; all to be equipped with libraries filled with good books, a good learning atmosphere and good librarians;
- New computer per student ratio of 1:10 from the previous 1:40;
- Approved plans to radically adjust the instructional system so that students can become critical and analytical learners. One such plan involves the scrapping of learning achievement indicators earlier established for the 12-year duration of basic education, grades 1-12, from more than 4,000 to only 2,165 with the explicit objectives of minimizing duplication and redundancy of curriculum contents and allowing more time to be devoted to student quality development activities;
- Revamped criteria and approaches for assessing teachers' academic and professional standing. They are intended to tackle the disturbing and paradoxical situations of teachers' increasingly higher and higher standing with accompanying increased remuneration but students' decreasing learning achievement. New criteria and approaches, unlike their predecessors, therefore assign less weight, 40%, to teachers' academic and research-related paperwork but more, 60%, to students' learning results. In other words, what teachers are required to do to raise their academic and professional standing and become entitled to increased remuneration must primarily be related to students' better learning results;
- To be effective in May 2010, the beginning of the 2010 academic year's first semester, small-sized primary and secondary schools with approximately a little over one million students will receive higher student per head subsidies. At the primary level, grades 1-6, the amount will increase from ฿ 1,900 (roughly US\$ 60) to ฿ 2,400; at the lower secondary level, grades 7-9 from ฿ 4,500; and at the upper secondary level, grades 10-12, from ฿ 3,800 to ฿ 4,800, about US\$ 145;
- Accelerated and expanded policy of five **Frees**: **Free 1** is the continuation of the famous 15 years of free education with the quality scheme begun at the start of 2009. Free means students and parents do not have to pay for tuition, student uniforms, learning materials, texts, and student development activities; **Free 2** is the school milk program originally intended for students in public kindergartens up to fourth graders. But now, it will cover up to sixth graders as well as the same groups in private schools; **Free 3** is the school lunch program for kindergarteners up to sixth graders intended to cover all 8 million students up from approximately 5 million or 60% previously; **Free 4** beginning this 2010 academic year, June 2010, disabled students will enjoy free undergraduate education at universities of their choice following proper admission processes as well as free education at the Lower and Upper Vocational Education Certificate Levels; and **Free 5**, the most

recent, a September 2009 undertaking actively advocated by the Minister of Education, is the Tutor Channel program on national television. The Ministry of Education arranges for outstanding lecturers from nationally famous tutoring schools to tutor upper secondary school students with the objective of providing students in the faraway countryside or who live in places where there exist no tutoring schools with increased learning and special tutoring opportunities. The program is aired every Saturday from 10 a.m. to midday.

These and many others have been both proposed and are being implemented with the express intention of bringing about the badly needed “quality” component of the nation’s educational undertakings. To be certain and to repeat what was said at the beginning of this paper, these policies and measures, regardless of whether they will yield expected and desired outcomes, receive both “flowers and stones”, to use the Thai expression for appreciation and disagreement. And again, this is natural. The authors are not planning to argue for or against any of them. We just want to share with colleagues both from Africa and Asia what is now happening in the Thai education system. At the same time, we would like to assert that despite an apparent grandeur of the above educational quality improvement policies and measures, something is still missing and that something is what we would like to discuss in the last section of this essay.

## 6. What Is Missing?

When Mounier and Tangchuang (2010) wrote that “Thailand is in urgent need of a new and systematic education reform” (p. 2), there was no way for them and for many others who were seriously concerned about the fate of the third reform to anticipate the coming of another, dubbed by its advocates as the second round or the second decade, reform. Whether or not it’s new and systematic depends on one’s taste and political leaning. But, it did come even before the release of this seminal book. It came carrying with it the self-made mandate of quality improvement in practically every proposal it made. To recapture and repeat what Education Minister Jurin Laksanawisit disclosed before the end of 2009, let’s look at the seven quality indicators he wanted education authorities around the country to keep in mind at all times:

1. Students’ learning achievement in each core subject at Grades 6, 9 and 12 must be elevated by 2013 as follows:  
**Grade 6** the figure must be 55.62% up from 46.16% at present. **Grade 9** 45.76% up from 37.59 at present. And **Grade 12** 45.76% up from 36.08% at present.
2. Out of all basic education institutions, Grades 1-12 schools, will be externally evaluated by the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) within the year 2013; 97.09% of them must pass the Quality Assessment criteria. And all vocational and higher education institutions to undergo the assessment must pass.
3. Students must be turned over into good and virtuous persons and evaluated on the basis of

the three Ds Policy: Democracy, Decency and Drug-Free.

4. Students must be happy persons and proud of being Thai. By 2013, the number of those happy and proud students must reach 72.8% up from 52.8% at present.
5. The number of school libraries equipped with good books, a good atmosphere and good librarians will increase from 8,090 around the country at present to no less than 30,746 in 2013.
6. The figure of illiterates must drop from 2.87% at present to 0.7% in 2013.
7. Students' increased knowledge about the Southeast Asian Region.

Obviously, it is not our intention to debate and judge the merits or demerits of any or all of the official remedies proposed and implemented thus far to tackle the low quality problem. Instead, we simply would like to assert that despite their genuineness and ingenuity and while they are often presented as systematic reform measures and policies, "they may in fact be little more than piecemeal efforts that simply reflect political tussles" (Mounier and Tangchuang, 2010, p. 1). Needs author and date Although this assessment came much earlier than the launch in early 2009 of the second round or decade of the third reform, it is probably but obviously not far from the mark. According to one of the country's leading analysts and critics, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sompong Jitradub of Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Education, the second round of the third reform "proceeds with soft and light methods, compromising policies and measures and totally lacks seriously restructured connections with the first round's successes and failures... We have barely learned its strengths and weaknesses/mistakes and what actually needed to be improved. Thus, marching forward this second round could lead us off the track and make this reform, like the first round, become worse..." (Path to Reform, 2009).

Some may argue there is nothing wrong with piecemeal efforts and that academics' assessment is almost always negative giving little, if any, credit to responsible authorities' actions and performances. Of course, there probably is nothing wrong with piecemeal efforts except that they only keep us going round in circles. And worse, the compromises of reform stated in the ends and means and reflected in the language found in official texts, all propose reform policies, strategies, measures, projects and activities, etc., that are not only unlikely to bring about but even more likely to jeopardize the desired quality across the board in the long run as well.

Notice the list of recent reform policies and measures presented earlier. Only 1 or 2 items can be classified as somewhat abstract/qualitative objectives. For example, quality indicators numbers 3 and 4 refer to students being turned over into good/virtuous, happy and proud persons. In practice, before we can increase the number/percentage of those desirable beings, we must first be able to prove how and in what way our present policies and measures indeed bring about good/virtuous, happy and proud persons keeping in mind that:

There is no clearcut conceptual definition of quality of education and consequently there is no satisfactory measurement of it. Actually, no assessment of the quality of education is really objective and impartial; any assessment is debatable, at least to the



extent that an assessment reflects what the assessor intends to show and to legitimate. (Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010, p. 39)

Moreover, if we go back, as we must, to the original objective/theme of the third reform, “Toward Becoming A Learning and Wisdom-Based Society”, we certainly must expect more difficulties, complexities and perplexities. Measuring educational quality across the board based on this overriding objective amounts to trying to penetrate the Great China Wall with bare hands and garden shovels. To complicate it a little further, we are forced to revisit Section 6 of the National Education Act’s Chapter 1, General Provision: Objective and Principles which says:

Education shall aim at the full development of the Thai people in all aspects: physical and mental health, intellect; knowledge; morality; integrity; and desirable ways of life so as to be able to live in harmony with other people (National Education Act. B.E.2542). Needs author, year and page number and also needs to be added to references.

Determining the quality of education across the board since the promulgation of this Section in 1999 requires sound and seriously thought out answers to the question: Has the grand objective contained in Section 6 been reached? If the answer is positive, more questions will follow. For example, what are the assessment criteria, approaches and methods? To repeat, “any assessment is debatable!” And since the big quality questions are at present rarely and straightforwardly framed in the very language used in, for example, the above grand objectives, some commentators may argue that they instead are posed as proposed policies, plans, projects, measures, approaches and activities as discussed in this paper. Successfully answering them, i.e., reaching or meeting specific objectives set in such questions, amounts to a derivation of educational quality of some sort. This postulate sounds legitimate and seems acceptable. But, as Mounier and Tangchuang (2010) say, those answers, if really proved successful ones, “raise as many questions... as they answer them” (p. 1). Needs page number

The above discourse, admittedly confusing, has taken us already too far. However, we think it was necessary at this time now that that third reform is just beginning its second round/decade. We still have time and there still is room for all concerned parties to contribute to the enhancement of policy discourse levels and dimensions as far as the improvement of the quality of education across the board in Thailand is concerned.

Again, what is clear and commonly acknowledged is that the main problem of Thai education is its low quality. And we also know a variety of factors cause it to be either low or high and that officials’ quality improvement plans contain all possible efforts and projects, some of which were earlier presented. Yet, relying too heavily or being forced to rely too heavily on measuring educational achievements and using it to determine educational quality as in the Thai case here is not doing justice to other factors left out or plainly ignored.

Educational achievements here mean students’ high test scores. The tests are both of national and international kinds. And the major evidence for low quality of Thai education in the

past decade are low national and international test scores. More importantly, they constitute the major reason for both the first and new second rounds of the third education reform discussed in this paper.

Certainly, we are not contending that let's throw away or neglect those national and international tests and turn to something abstract and purely qualitative. But, we are of the opinion that "measuring educational achievements does not adequately reflect the conceptualization of quality of education, not with standing that it is generally held to do so" (Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010, p. 39). Educational achievements themselves are defined very narrowly so as to make them easily measurable. And when compared with international standards, both national and international assessments using educational achievement tests have "diagnosed Thai education today as being of low quality at all levels... This would have to mean the education reform prescribed by the National Education Act of 1999 has failed, as its main objective was to improve the quality of education across the board" (p. 43).

Again, we are not protesting the verdict. We are instead contending that the diagnosis based on such test scores does not take into account the evolution of Thai education during the past few decades which, according to Mounier & Tangchuang (2010) "shows that great progress has been made in terms of quality, although there is much room for further improvement" (p. 44). Even external assessments carried out by the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA), the public organization responsible for the development of criteria and methods of external evaluation and conducting evaluation of educational achievements in or to assess the quality of educational institutions created in 2000 as the result of the Section 49 stipulation of the National Education Act of 1999, primarily focus much more on improving the governance and efficiency of educational institutions than on the quality of education per se. However, its work and works are necessary and would, if properly and carefully carried out, contribute a great deal to the improvement of educational quality across the board.

Finally, what we have been asserting both implicitly and explicitly throughout this paper is that the very concept of quality itself is both biased and blurred (Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010, p. 47).

According to Mounier and Tangchuang (2010). "There are two contrasting approaches to the definition of quality of education... "substantive" or "naturalist"... and historical..." (pp. 47-58). The first views quality as something having to do with the "essence" of education or its intrinsic nature which transcends context and time. It is normative proposing to bridge the gap between real situations and the essence of education which is the benchmark for an ideal education.

The second approach takes the historical perspective to show the objectives of education are defined in different ways at different times and in different countries. Therefore, the concept of educational quality itself varies with the objectives and leads to very different recommendations for improving educational quality.

Unfortunately, most protagonists of Thai education have not been exposed to and, as a consequence, accorded academic and intellectual opportunities to debate the details, merits and demerits of the two approaches. They have rather been spoon-fed with ready-made recipes

setting rather fixed parameters within which to debate. And most debates tend to revolve around technical, methodological and methodical issues.

Moreover, there have been very little or no discussions whatsoever about the philosophical and sociological foundations of both education and education reform which are very crucial to the “correct” diagnosis of its past and current state as well as the proposed remedies for its quality improvement. It is well-known, in fact tragic, that Foundations of Education Courses at the graduate level of Faculties of Education around the country are normally despised and ridiculed by a large number of graduate students who either will have to get involved someday in the future in education or educational reform forums and discourse or were already involved before coming to further their studies. When they rid themselves from the beginning of very key intellectual tools, they arrive at the discussion table almost totally empty-handed philosophically, politically, sociologically and even ideologically. But, their hands are full of techniques and methods. In other words, we have plenty of construction tools but no clear idea what to construct.

We are not aware, for example, of the fact that “It is unclear whether the education reform undertaken within the framework of the 1999 Education Act was intended to improve the quality of education in the sense of raising the quality and scope of the knowledge transmitted within a didactic concern or in the sense of better satisfying the need of the economy for a ‘ready to work’ labor force. Probably both objectives were intended at the same time...” (Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010, p. 7).

Neither are we aware that “In fact, the political compromise,” part of what Sompong Jitradub of Chulalongkorn University referred to earlier, “has led to the adoption of perennialist objectives and post-modern means of education. As a result contradictory outcomes may well arise from the political and philosophical compromises necessary to achieve a workable reform” (Pongwat & Mounier, in Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010, pp. 79). Workable? Probably, yes! Improved quality of education as a result? Obviously, uncertain!

Although this is not the place and time to discuss various main streams of educational philosophies, normally lying concealed behind the political and public/official debates on education and in particular education reform, it is probably enlightening to learn that:

In a nutshell, the reformers believe that by sticking to perennialist educational objectives, Thailand’s hierarchical society can be protected from foreign influence and saved from the adverse effects of economic development and social change. They also believe that the quality of education can be improved by using post-modern means to enhance the quality of both teaching and learning processes (Pongwat & Mounier, in Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010, pp. 83-84).

Are perennialist objectives and post-modern means compatible? Pongwat and Mounier (2010) answer “It involves conflict in which struggles and compromises take place and where the victory of one side over the other is never definitive. The education reform is a provisional compromise... is not sustainable” (p. 84).

As things stand now, the situation does not look good for the improvement of educational quality across the board. As regards the reform goals it is also interesting to note:

A major dilemma has arisen which stems from the parallel implementation of two conflicting goals... The first goal is political and economic in nature; it in effect gives to the national education system a vocational mission, subordinating it to society (parents, community, businesses, etc.), opening it to private enterprise, fostering competition between educational institutions and delegating to local authorities a leading role in educational management. The second goal focuses on the improvement of cognitive skills by reforming the teaching-learning process... these two goals and the provisions of their implantation are contradictory and incompatible; in particular, the first goal may preclude the second (Mounier and Tangchuang, 2010, p. 58).

Following are some of the recommendations for dealing with and managing in a more satisfactory manner educational quality issues, debates and discourse to be taken into consideration along with the current implementation of the second round/decade of the third reform in Thailand:

- In-depth studies of factors determining the quality of education in a sociological, philosophical and a didactic perspective have to be undertaken on a large scale.
- Organize forums and dialogues for in-depth debates on philosophies of education most suitable to our own educational system and cultural traditions.
- “In our view, major flaws... of the reform, and the causes of (their) incompatibilities, stem from the lack of a profound and scientific knowledge of the reality of Thai education that is based on relevant, in-depth and conclusive studies” (Mounier and Tangchuang, 2010, p. 59).
- And “a real improvement of the quality of education throughout (Thailand) requires more than rhetoric, criticism and precipitate action. Major flaws have to be investigated scientifically and deeply to bring about real remedies instead of patches and placebo effects. The unique characteristics and realities of Thai education have to be explored and understood instead of blindly implementing imported and fashionable ideas” (Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010, p. 315).

Indeed, we have come a long way as far as the improvement of educational quality in Thailand is concerned. Yet, we still have a long way to go.

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