

A New Breed of Teachers: Thailand's Efforts to Improve the Quality of Her Teachers

Annop Pongwat

(Chiang Mai University, Thailand)

1. Introduction

There it goes again! Teachers are to blame. Whenever the quality of one country's education is deemed to be deteriorating, her teachers will be primarily and publicly held accountable despite the solid and well-recognized fact that one thousand and one factors normally contribute to the realization of educational quality. Bad news! The good news though is that "educational strategies of countries all over the world accord highest priority to teachers education/training and development" (Yaemnoon, 2010, p. 15)

In fact, it is quite common but actually sad in Thailand to put the "main" blame on schools and their teachers when things seem to go wrong in society, i.e., socially, economically, politically, culturally and/or spiritually. In particular, school teachers, the largest group of educational actors and probably the most vulnerable of all, have been most to blame. But, if we assume it is unequivocally and empirically true they are the major cause of the problem, it still makes a lot of people feel good to also know that they are still believed to constitute the major part of the solution. Without them being turned over into quality classroom masters, and despite many other instrumental factors/variables, it has been argued, it will admittedly be near impossible for the decreased quality of education across the board to improve. This is why "educational strategies of countries all over the world accord highest priority to teachers' education/training and development."

It is certainly comforting to derive the identification of both the cause and solution to the educational quality problem assuming all involved parties agree what this quality means. In Thailand, it's even more comforting to know that the identified culprits are not making any noise. They, as a professional group of about 700,000 or so, including university instructors, never publicly protest the verdict. Their complete silence, then, signifies nothing else but their tacit acknowledgement. This situation has been around for quite sometime despite the total lack of scientific and beyond-any-reasonable-doubt cause-effect evidence. This is not the place and time to look for and identify such evidence. Suffice it to state that in countries all over the world the teacher-caused perception has apparently become a reality. We seem to have no choice but to live with this perceived reality for a while.

2. The Situation for Thai Teachers

Traditionally but somewhat rhetorically, Thai people have publicly been told or even themselves say that farmers and teachers constitute the backbones of the nation. Their professions and crafts are portrayed to be absolutely crucial to the existence, well-being and future of the country. But, when asked whether they would like their children to become, either farmers/peasants or teachers, when they grow up, very very few people would give a positive answer. Specifically as regards the teaching profession, those university teacher students enrolled each year at about 100 schools/colleges/

faculties of Education or so nationwide are publicly known to have arrived there as their third or fourth choices. Moreover, they are not the “best and the brightest” among high school graduates because this cohort of high school leavers as a rule chooses and ends up at other more prestigious and prized colleges/schools/faculties. And once they are there, 4 years prior to the 2004 academic year (June-May) and 5 years since then, there is no sure-fire guarantee they will receive the best education and training. This must be so and with due respect because quality teacher education/training/development, like quality education and quality of teachers, depends on one thousand and one factors/variables, both within and external to those colleges/schools/faculties. Assuming they in general are of good or high quality, which is totally unrealistic, the longer time teacher students stay in them, logically speaking the better! On the contrary, mediocre institutions are less likely, only on a miracle basis, to produce qualified quality teachers. The most recent call for a “new breed of teachers”, the title of this paper, clearly indicates that the overall teachers’ situation has not fared very well.

How about the teachers’ means of living which enables them to perform their lofty assignment?

Until only recently, in late 2004-early 2005, Thai teachers were civil servants and, like other types of civil servants, entitled to the same salary scales and other fringe benefits. The beginning salary for beginning teachers with a B.A. Degree was around US\$ 235 but rose in 2005 to around US\$ 270.

At the same time, like other civil servants, they enjoyed a number of fringe benefits such as house rentals, medical expenses for themselves and their parents, spouses and offspring. Those teaching in remote, difficult-to-access and physically deprived areas were also entitled to an extra 10% on top of their regular salaries. It even became a joke among themselves they all would soon become millionaires since there were no chances and places for them to spend their meager salaries and “accumulated wealth.” The situation seemed to get better following the promulgation in late 2004 of the Teachers and Educational Personnel Rules and Regulations Act accompanied by new salary scales. In addition, the Act stipulates 5 levels of teachers’ academic ranks ranging from regular to speciality expert. These levels above those of the regular starting teachers are accompanied by monthly amounts of 3,500, 5,600, 9,900 and 13,000 Baht (US\$ 116, 186, 330 and 433) respectively, on top of their salaries. Not bad, is it? The only trouble is that they must try to find ways and means to make the most of their efforts and energy to undertake a

lot of work to meet the requirement of moving from one level to another. If such efforts do not take them away from their classrooms too much, they will not be accused of chasing after the financial rewards at the expense of their students' learning.

Even given all these amounts of financial intakes, it is still quite common to hear from many teachers that their overall incomes are quite low compared to those working in the private sector, which is true. And it is not at all surprising to also hear each academic year, May-February, about the problem of teacher indebtedness, one of the main causes of teachers low morale and, subsequently, less enthusiasm for classroom, not to mention quality, instruction. It is not our intention to find the root causes of their indebtedness. But, the fact that many teachers were indebted, e.g., in July 2008 "140,000 indebted teachers joining and seeking the help from the Teachers Indebtedness Problem-Solving Fund had the combined debts of no less than 100,000 million Baht," was clearly indicative of many other undesirable obstacles to their full devotion and dedication to their teaching, not to mention quality teaching. If this really were the case, improving the quality of these teachers requires, among other things, effective eradication of their current debts as well as the ways and means to prevent them from falling into other. In fact, as can generally be remembered, most governments in the past including the present one always came up with a bunch of schemes intended to tackle this persistent problem. Again, like the educational and teachers quality problems, the teachers' indebtedness problem pops up every new academic year and with every new government in office.

It is interesting to point out at this juncture that when people generally attribute causes of the falling of educational quality across the board to demoralized, underpaid and indebted, misplaced and disgruntled teachers, they usually mean teachers in the remote, rural, isolated, mountainous and difficult-to-access schools which are typically small-sized. Rarely are those teachers comfortably and conveniently placed in medium-to large-sized schools situated in wealthy, decent and easy-going/coming provincial, district, municipal and city/town seats, etc., to blame for the deteriorating quality. Most small-sized schools are normally primary ones. And more than 13,000 of such small-sized primary schools of 6 years each have less than 120 students. This perception sounds and seems perfectly logical. Both old and new teachers usually do not want to be teaching there. They are far away, very hard to reach, many of them dangerous to travel to, so isolated and solitary, etc. Given the small numbers of students, their annual per student subsidies from the central government are close to meaningless. As a rule, school principals and teachers in those schools carry out their assigned mission with the utmost of their abilities today in order to get ready for tomorrow, next week, next month, next semester and the next academic year. If they survive the first few years of hardship, they think they are ready to request for a transfer to another "better," less harsh school. But, also as a rule, transfer requests from one school to another in the Thai educational administration system are not really easily honored. In the meantime, boredom sets in and at times hopelessness reigns. Particularly, if they learn at some point in their career they are the main culprits primarily responsible for the country's low across-the-board education quality, imagine how they will really feel.

A few years ago, 2006 to be precise, a national survey conducted by the Institute for the

Development of Teachers and Educational Personnel and Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Education found, among other things, that, out of 7,760 school personnel in 1,350 schools nationwide, "83% of the teachers reported that they had spent approximately 20% of their regular work hours on school general clerical and administrative affairs work and about 10% reported having spent 50% of their regular work time for this purpose." Therefore, it is not again surprising to learn from the same survey that "48.5% of the teachers wanted to change profession and 14.4% said they really wanted to do... and 61.6% expressed the intention of joining the next round of early retirement scheme..."

The list can go on and on. But, we should stop here since we have already been convinced, via our perception, that it is the teachers, especially those in K-12 grades, who are primarily responsible for the low quality of education. What next?

3. Remedy Plans and the First Round of "A New Breed of Teachers" Efforts

Brushing aside for the moment those other one thousand factors/variables, let's now turn to the perceived truth that Thailand's teachers, especially at the K-12 levels, are the main cause of the country's low quality of education and at the same time are key to the improvement of it. According to the present chairperson of Thailand's Council of Teachers, Dr. Direk Pornsima, after having extensively reviewed many countries' successful paths to reform of their educational systems and on top of his rich knowledge and experiences of the educational system of Thailand, he says; "I see no other possible path to reform success but the reform of teachers (including school, educational administrators and other educational personnel) ... since many countries have already and clearly proved to us that "teachers" are the final answer." This conviction is perfectly in line with Dr. Kwang Cho Kim, Director of the Bangkok UNESCO Office, former Assistant Minister of Education of the Republic of Korea, who believes that "teachers devotion/dedication is the key ... and that the quality of teachers is more important than any other classroom technological gadgets." All this is sufficient to convince the public that fixing the quality of teachers and their instruction leads to increased quality of education across the board. Thus, a myriad of teachers' reform proposals and packages started to appear in public. But, the dividing line or decisive break from the "old breed of teachers" era goes back to the promulgation of the first education legislature of the nation in 1999, the year signifying the beginning of the first round or first decade of the nation's Third Major Reform (1999-2009) of education (the First and Second Ones being during King Rama V's reign 1868-1910, and between 1974-1978).

Article 75 of that law, the third revision of which just took effect on July 23, 2010, mandates the setting up of the Education Reform Office charged, among others, with designing, preparing and proposing for cabinet considerations and resolutions systems of teachers, faculty staff, and educational personnel as provided in Chapter 7 of the Teachers, Faculty Staff and Educational Personnel Act. However, it is not our intention to examine and/or evaluate details of the proposed systems. On the contrary, it is our intention to point out that the proposed systems with accompanied details submitted to the then cabinet on April 25, 2001, if approved by it or by

subsequent cabinet(s), would actually constitute the master plan of the “new breed of teachers” education/training/promotion/development. Unfortunately, political situations and wrangles within the country got in the way and either intentionally or unintentionally prevented the much and long awaited implementation of the above master plan. Finally, the Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act, B.E. 2546 (2003) was promulgated on June 1, 2003 followed on Dec. 23, 2004 by the most important legal framework and prescriptions for the production, promotion and development of the “new breed of teachers,” the Teacher and Educational Personnel Act, B.E. 2547 (2004). By this time, Faculties of Education at universities all over the country had already launched the new teacher education/training curriculum, the 5-year one in place of the 4-year program. The date was June 2004, the first semester of national efforts to produce “a new breed of teachers.” To both motivate and encourage “the good and the bright” among high school graduates to become members of the new breed, the government generously provided scholarships to 2,500 students and promised them teaching jobs right after their graduation. Developments at that point seemed hopeful and promising. If everything went as planned, the country would have 2,500 highly motivated and quite committed new teachers plus a certain large number of the remaining uninstalled ones by May of 2009 in the country’s classrooms, the first batch of “the new breed of teachers.” Unfortunately, in 2005 and subsequent academic years, scholarships were suspended and graduates left on their own without the promised positions. The situation was made worse by a military coup in September of 2006 ousting from office the government of Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatra. And since then, political factors have not really been favorable to educational reform in general and quality reform of the teaching profession in particular.

However, amidst dark clouds of uncertainties, confusion, political divisions and doubt about the future of educational reform, elements of hope appeared igniting another round of optimism.

In February 2009, the then Minister of Education in the Democrat-led coalition government, the very government behind the engineering, designing and promulgation of the first and historic educational reform-oriented National Education Act of B.E. 2542(1999), appointed the Teachers and Educational Personnel Production and Development Planning Committee to be chaired by former Deputy Minister of Education, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Warakorn Samkosit. This particular body was charged with the power and duty to plan the production, utilization, development, monitoring, supervising and controlling of teachers, educational personnel and to make certain their quality was up to standard and in accordance with the country’s educational development needs. Sometime, in the middle of 2009, “A New Breed of Teachers” Production Project (2010-2020) was submitted to the Minister who in turn submitted it to the Cabinet for consideration and approval. The approval finally came on December 8, 2009, 21 days before the government delivered its policy platform to the Parliament. Also in mid-2009, July to be precise, the Ministry of Education’s Office of the National Education Commission issued a very crucial and timely report entitled “Nine Years of Educational Reform (1999-2008): A Summary Report,” outlining 9 key points covered by the Reform, later known as the first round or first decade of the Third Major Reform of education in Thailand’s modern history. And of course, Production and the

Development of Teachers and Educational Personnel features prominently.

From that particular summary report, i.e., the overall performance of the first round of “A New Breed of Teachers” production, training and development, we learn that

The Cabinet has approved the 3-year (2004-2006) plan to produce at the undergraduate level (5-year curriculum) teachers in 8 fields, 2,500 per year at 50 state higher education institutions totalling 7,500. But in practice, 2,139 students actually enrolled in the first year, 85.56% of the set target. In 2008, 2,051 remained to graduate in March 2009 because some had dropped out and others left for the reason of failing to meet certain academic requirements. Each student was awarded the annual scholarship of 84,000 Baht throughout the 5-year curriculum. The second and third batches, 2008 and 2009, were not so lucky since the government suspended the scholarships altogether... Due to the government policy of freezing the state sector manpower employment as well as the introduction of motivational measures for early retirement, schools were found to have lost a lot of teacher positions, thus leading to the problem of short supply of teachers. Moreover, some graduates decided not to become teachers after their graduation, all contributing to the problem, i.e., lack of teachers, quantitatively and qualitatively both at the basic and vocational education levels. Rural schools in particular are known to suffer the most, especially as regards the lack of specific subject teachers...

Prior to that plan, the special 3-year project, 1996-2002, jointly designed and undertaken by the Ministry of Education, Higher Education Commission and Institute of Science and Technology Teaching Promotion, was able to produce only 1,500 talented science and mathematics teachers while the need for them was so great. In other words, the figure did not match the magnitude of the problem. But, it was a good beginning when viewed within the context of what was to follow at the beginning of the second round/decade of the Third Major Reform which also meant, again, the second round/decade of the “New Breed of Teachers” efforts and schemes.

Specifically, the reliable figure of teachers found lacking in the middle of 2009 in Thailand stood at around 60,000 at both basic and vocational levels with the latter being approximately 23,500. Two sets of remedial measures were proposed in the above summary report: Immediate and Long-Term. The former included an urgent request for a 100% return to the Ministry of Education policy with attached salaries of all retirement positions during 2008-2011, e.g., 29,553 at the basic education level and 1,026 at the vocational one; a proposal to revise the teacher positions determination criteria at both levels clearly dividing them into 3 groups: classroom teachers; school administrators and supporting staff. The former’s teaching load calculated in actual teaching hours per day must be key to such determination, etc. Long-term measures include, among others, more systematically planning the production and development of teachers, and educational personnel ..., establishing work plans/projects to effectively tackle the problem of teachers and educational personnel shortages taking into consideration

administration/management efficiency and quality as well as participation of all relevant stakeholders' concerns; investing more in the "new breed of teachers" production and development in order to meet the overall educational development needs and compensate the number of retiring ones; seriously reviewing the government policy of freezing the state sector manpower employment and recommending the extension of the retirement age from 60 to 65 (in cases of basic and vocational education levels) and 65 to 70 (in cases of the higher education level); setting up a system facilitating graduates from other disciplines who love the teaching profession ... as well as encouraging educational institutions to mobilize human resources, local wisdom, folk experts/specialists and community/local learned persons to become involved in classroom instruction and learning development, etc. These and many others are probably all too familiar to us educators in general and teacher educators in particular. We know these prescriptions are made possible because of a lot of prior efforts and brainstorming of and among many a great number of "the good and the bright" in the field and those from other related disciplines. However, whether all these noble schemes will succeed as logically planned and concretely lead to the improvement of teachers quality and ultimately educational quality across the board remains to be seen.

4. What Is Really on the Table Now? The Second Round/Decade of Teacher Education Reform

Thailand's cabinet on December 8, 2009 approved the "New Breed of Teachers" Project proposed by the Ministry of Education, a 5-year, 2010-2015, Project starting in the 2010 fiscal year, i.e., October 1-September 30.

Main beneficiaries of the Project are the Ministry of Education's Basic and Vocational Education Commissions. In 5 years' time, the Project will have produced 30,000 teachers, especially in scarce and very much needed subject contents areas. It comprises 2 components: 1. The regular 5-year teacher training curriculum at state universities' Faculties of Education taking in qualified high school graduates or third-year students of the Lower Vocational Certificate Program; 2. The 4+1 curriculum which takes in graduates from undergraduate programs deemed scarce and very much needed, in the Thai case being science and mathematics, who are interested in becoming school teachers. In the process, student teachers must maintain rigorous academic standards not to fall below the required point. And upon their graduation, teaching positions readily await them. They will not have to undergo as normally is the case competitive examinations required of such positions. If this and other related plans go well, we can soon expect to see and welcome to our schools, basic and vocational, the first group of the new "New Breed of Teachers" who are expected to make a real difference, qualitatively speaking, in our nation's classrooms, schools, colleges and the entire educational system.

As mentioned earlier, the Project is handled by a high-powered committee headed by Dr. Warakorn Samkoset, currently President of one of the famous private universities in Bangkok. The Project is funded by the already won budget of 4,235 million Baht (approximately US\$ 150

million).

The budget covers, among other things, the expenses to be spent on two types of student teachers in the Project, those to be installed in schools right after their graduation but without scholarships and those to be both installed and provided with annual scholarships. To ensure the continuity and consistency of the Project, it is placed under the direct supervision and administration of the national level Commission chaired by one Deputy Minister of Education. In addition, participating Faculties/Schools/Colleges of Education will receive a certain amount of extra budget to assist in their tasks of educating, training and developing their student teachers throughout the 5-year and 1-year curricula.

In a nutshell, they are expected to inculcate the spirit, the soul and the ideology of authentic teachership, the very crucial requirement leading many concerned stakeholders to raise other probably more serious questions.

5. What Seems to be Missing?

In the Education Reform in the Second Decade (2009-2018) Proposal approved by the Thai Cabinet on August 18, 2009, it is quite comforting to learn that “the most important issue in the Reform is the development in a sustainable fashion of educational standards and quality, the promotion and elevation of professional standards of teachers, faculty staff and educational personnel.” At the same time, it recognizes also that the current system of education essentially comprises teachers, learners, the curriculum and didactic system and processes. And like previous reform schemes, in order for this particular Reform which includes all its components to be successful, similar reform schemes and efforts in auxiliary, parallel and superior systems or sub-systems both in the education system per se and in society as a whole must also be in place. And this is known to constitute one of the most difficult and problematic success conditions as all the previous reforms have experienced. For example, political situations in Thailand in the last few years, at present and political uncertainties in the months and years to come **alone** can easily invalidate any or all hopes of success in implementing the new “New Breed of Teachers” Production and Development Project. Certainly, Project architects and engineers are also well aware of this crucial fact.

The Project Committee Chair, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Warakorn, for example, believes it represents another serious attempt to raise the country’s educational quality, especially the quality of teachers on conditions that “only if we can recruit into the teaching force the bright/smart and the good...only if they possess new teaching approaches and techniques capable of captivating students’ attention, then they all could help make as a result students learn with quality. It all depends on whether the state would be able to continuously support the Project through and through.” The Higher Education Commissioner who features at the beginning of this essay also has this to say: “The Project is the real beginning of the reform of teacher education/training/development.”

His only reservation is that “Success of the Project depends on the selection of truly

responsible and qualified institutions of higher education. They must of necessity accord real importance to organizing supplementary activities aimed at developing as perfectly as possible ideologies, skills and knowledge about exemplary teachership. Besides, it also depends on the transparent selection and recruitment of students to the Project so that appropriately qualified students will be turned over into members of the new breed of teachers.” But finally, it must be remembered that extending the training duration from 4 to 5 years in itself simply cannot magically produce the “new breed of teachers” so long as Faculties of Education, their teaching staff and their curricula are still of the old-breed nature. In addition, old-breed graduates of past years are still around looking for teaching jobs. It is, therefore, quite obvious that many factors and components/ingredients will be needed and must be acquired for both the successful implementation of the 5-year teacher education curriculum and subsequent production of a new breed of teachers.

But as members of institutions of higher education charged with the above implementation and production, we have an obligation to actively take part in projects of this nature and help make them reach set objectives on the condition that we truly believe such projects will really bring about desired ends. Then, we are obliged to deeply look at ourselves, our colleagues and our institutional make-up and honestly evaluate whether we have at our disposal the required caliber, psyche and chemistry to do the lofty job. To do it the way we have been doing since we started teaching teachers-to-be years back will even be a disservice to the noble Project. We are required to turn ourselves or be turned over into “new-breed” teachers or teachers-to-be. Our next important task is to help our faculties/schools/colleges of education make certain the selection and recruitment process brings in the right raw materials to be molded and subsequently turned over into “new-breed” teachers 5 years from now on. Given the fact that the Thai Government has for the next 4-5 years already made certain institutional, organizational, technical and even financial/budgetary arrangements, this particular task should not be that tough. It is not however and obviously very easy either.

What we think is terribly missing from the entire discourse, though, is the almost total absence of the serious debate on larger issues than institutional, organizational, technical and financial/budgetary ones currently in vogue. These larger issues essentially underpin and contextualize what the “New Breed of Teachers” Project is all about. They essentially are of sociological, political, theoretical and a philosophical nature.

For instance, quality teachers, as portrayed earlier in this paper, are those who know what to teach, how to teach, how to interact with their students and how to properly relate to environments both within and larger than their classrooms and schools. The first obviously has to do with the curriculum and its contents which in any national context simply does not fall from the skies above. On the contrary, they are outputs and outcomes of the theories and theoretical debates of some sort from earlier times. Most of us educators and teacher educators, not to mention our student teachers, are not aware of this and many simply do not care. But, as Mounier (2010) points out “but theory and theoretical debates illuminate educational choices, which are the deciding factors that determine the quality of education”(p. 270). And moreover, “In Thailand, as

elsewhere, there are very few historical analyses of curriculum.... Such analysis should be one of the priorities of research in education” (pp. 273-274).

The same seems equally true as far as the second qualification of quality teachers, how-to-teach knowledge and skills, is concerned. It is appropriate to assume as regards this matter that most teacher educators are familiar with and expert in theories of pedagogy. Based on this assumption, we should assume further they are skilled in transmitting theoretical knowledge and the accompanying practical skills to their student teachers. And in the process, we would also expect our colleagues to be able to instill in the students the right attitudes of good teachership. In practice, of course, we have yet to know and prove this assumption is valid.

The last two qualifications of quality teachers, interrelationships and interactions, are key domains of a discipline of educational science called didactics. As detailed by Mounier (2010):

Didactics is a discipline of educational science that explores and explains the relationships between knowledge, teachers and learners.... It focuses on the black box of the teaching-learning process, analyzing it concretely and in depth by observing the actors in action and their interactions... As opposed to pedagogical theories, the didactic approach stresses that teaching and learning are acts which cannot be isolated from knowledge. Teaching and learning actions are not understandable in themselves but only in relation to the content of the knowledge, that is, to the discipline which is meant to be taught and learnt (Mounier, 2010, pp. 278-289).

Again, we have to assume that most colleagues at Education Faculties/Schools/Colleges are experts in didactics and well aware of a myriad of theoretical propositions and prescriptions of different but relevant theories, tenets or traditions stemming from it. Furthermore, we assume they can impart necessary involved knowledge to their charges along with the proper intellectual tools to help them choose the “right” ones to help turn them over into “new-breed” teachers.

These qualifications represent just the tip of the iceberg of what actually is required if Education Faculty members will successfully contribute to the molding of “new-breed” teachers. All of us teacher educators are well aware of this. But, we have already decided, no matter how difficult it is and will be, to be part of the solution after having been part of the problem for quite a while.

Finally, we need to point out to our colleagues in the teacher education field in particular and in the field of education in general that what is least talked about in public, i.e., teacher education and education reform philosophies, is probably the most important in determining the course, outcomes and quality of both types of reform. The least talked about issue is normally the issue most deeply buried under the surface, i.e., the philosophical foundation of education and particularly education reform which has finally led to the teacher education reform presented under the banner of reform of the teaching profession under discussion here. According to Mounier (2010) “Education policies are always underpinned, whether explicitly or implicitly, by philosophies of education and derive much of their meaning from these philosophical positions”

(p. 109). And in addition, philosophies of education “have always mirrored social and political structures and changes, and have always nurtured educational controversies” (p. 139). However, in reality, isn't it a generally accepted fact that the philosophy of education course normally offered by the Department of Educational Foundations is not particularly popular, not to mention meaningless? What is being suggested here is that Education Faculty members be urgently made to feel and appreciate the urgency and supreme value of philosophies of education, regardless of one's preference, and collectively work, for the collective profession's sake, towards clearer and better understandings of different philosophical propositions and foundations so that we can choose the right ones for our mission. And our mission, in fact one among others, is to equip our student teachers, seeds of “A New Breed of Teachers,” with intellectual and philosophical tools so that when the time comes, they will help them rightly decide the crucial issues of what and how to teach in their classrooms.

Secondly, we, as a professional group holding the future of our country's teacher education in our hands, must understand the serious dilemma both the first and second rounds/decades of the Third Major Education Reform have been facing: “...the parallel implementation of two conflicting goals...The first goal is political and economic in nature...The second goal focuses on the improvement of cognitive skills by reforming the teaching-learning process” (Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010, p. 58). Their conclusion:

“...these two goals and the provisions of their implementation are contradictory and incompatible; in particular, the first goal may preclude the second” (p. 58). “New-breed” teachers must be made aware of this dilemma and able, with the help of the above tools, to choose and stick to the right goal because in the end, their worth and quality will be judged on the basis of their choice and subsequent actions. And again, it is we who will primarily have to do the job of making them aware and able.

Last but not least, Education Faculty members and, through us, “new-breed” teachers-to-be, must also pay serious attention to: ...the low quality of education in Thailand cannot be overcome except by delivering a “knowledge-based” education. The supposed dilemma of the choice of a teacher-centered versus a child-centered education is beside the point. Unfortunately, most protagonists of Thai education have endeavored to avoid the steep and painful path of establishing a knowledge-based education, ignoring the glaring signs that it is essential to the country's progress” (Mounier & Tangchuang, 2010, p. xiii).

Now, it is high time we all took the steep and painful path of establishing a knowledge-based teacher education program intended to produce “a new breed of teachers” as partially outlined and argued for in this essay, of course on top of all institutional, organizational, technical and financial/budgetary arrangements the current Teachers and Educational Personnel Planning and Development Committee of Thailand has nicely put in place. We do not expect a miracle and neither do we expect it to be smooth and easy. We will do our best and work very hard since we believe that

...school improvement is related not just to what teachers do and think. Equally important is what those around them at the school, district, province/state, and federal levels do. Too often we think of the need for change only in terms of the teacher. If there is any changing to be done, *everyone is implicated* and must face it in relation to his or her own role (Fullan & Stiegelbauer 1991, p. 143).

And what is really at stake here and now is not just school improvement. It is the improvement of the quality of teachers who are expected to serve as key actors in the improvement of the country's quality of education across the board. **What a challenge!**

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