

Participatory Action Research for School-based Management and Teacher Professional Development

Chalerm Sri Jogthong
Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University, Thailand

Rosarin Pimolbunyong
Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University, Thailand

Abstract

The new five-year curriculum for a bachelor's degree in education with more than one year internship at a school site has provoked Thai educators' concerns about the qualification of cooperative teacher professional development schools (CTPDS). These two successive studies were conducted at a primary school in order to look for the patterns of school development and to find out the influential factors of teaching and learning in the school. One of the research projects was to set general standard for the eligibility of CTPDS. The other focused on one specific aspect of teacher development. Both research projects were qualitative participatory action research (PAR); the collaboration of school's personnel and university's faculty members. Each project took one year to be completed. Data were collected via supportive group discussions, individual interviews, classroom visitations and documentations. For the first project, eight standard criteria of CTPDS were proposed as the results. In the second project, findings revealed the patterns of the development. Specifically, the success of these two studies revealed the effectiveness of utilizing PAR process to develop school-based management and teacher professional in Thai educational context.

Key words: School-based Management, Teacher Professional Development

Introduction

The extension of one year in-service duration of internship at schools is the new five-year curriculum for bachelor's degree in education in Thailand. It is part of Thai Educational Reform (the 1999 National Acts of Educational Reform) that emphasizes the importance of teacher professional development. It is also to assure the competency of the new generations of teachers to be able to work in relevance to educational reform policy. This change casts the burden on the host schools of the interns to get ready for such educational environment. It is also the responsibility of higher education institutes to look for the highly qualified schools suitable for their students' internship and help the cooperative teacher professional development schools (CTPDS) to meet the requirements.

Many higher educational institutes have launched research-based projects at their proposed CTPDS for similar purpose which was to empower teachers' potential in classroom management and in professional development in general (See Rajabhat Ban Somdejchaopraya Institute, 2001; Rajabhat Chankrasem Institute, 2001; Rajabhat Kanchanaburi Institute, 2001; Rajabhat Suan Dusit Institute, 2001; Rajabhat Suan Sunantha Institute, 2001). Most of the projects adopted participatory action research (PAR) model for the research and found it most effective. The methodology they employed was based on the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) steps of action research. In these studies, PAR process was proved to transform the daily practices of teachers.

This article presents two successive studies conducted at one school site. One study was to find out the possible model of school-based management in order to set standard criteria for other CTPDS. The other focused on one specific aspect of teacher development, which was teaching English as a foreign language. Both research projects were qualitative participatory action research; the collaboration of the school's personnel and the faculty members of Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University.

The School Site

Ban Lak Roi is a public elementary school located within a short distance from Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University. This school is one of the University's CTPDS based on the notification of Ministry of Education. There are sixteen teachers including the administrator and 410 students reigned from kindergartens to sixth graders. The number of students in each class is from 25 to 30. Like all other elementary schools in Thailand, classes are categorized into two levels--first, second and third grades are in Level 1 and fourth, fifth and sixth grades are in Level 2. In Level 1, only one teacher is assigned to handle each particular class in all subjects for the whole academic year, while in Level 2 a group of teachers rotate to take part in one specific subject for an hour each day. Similar to all other public schools in Thailand, each teacher has clerical errands to take care of besides teaching.

1st Study

The first study (Pimolbunyong et al., 2004) was aimed at the development of the whole school in order to set general standard criteria for the CTPDS. Five principles of school-based management; decentralization, participation and involvement, returning power to people, self-management and checking and balancing (Boonprasert, 2000) were reviewed in this study along with the roles of people involved.

Research procedure started with introducing the project to school personnel at teachers' meeting by the research team. After each party got familiar with each other,

another meeting was held for the revision of school action plan. In the meeting, SWOT Analysis was applied and the analysis of previous information from the school survey about parents and community's need and related documents were discussed in order to investigate the school's baseline. The next step was the cooperation among the research team, the school administrators, and teachers in developing the school development planning.

Using the SWOT analysis and the brainstorming of all teachers, four development strategies were set in response to this analysis; 1) the development of teaching English for communication, 2) the integration of learning and teaching activities, 3) the development of the teachers in manipulation of learning process, and 4) the development of teaching materials and technology. For the rest of the project time, the school manipulated the developed plan with the help of experts in the area. The research team visited, supervised and followed up the school as planned. Finally, criteria of CTPDS were developed. Content analysis was used to analyze the data.

As the results, model of school-based management and criteria of CTPDS were constructed based on the best practice of research process. They were as follow;

1. The development process

The development process for criteria of CTPDS was clarified as the following four steps:

- 1.1) Study related documents and manage an experts' interview to specify framework for criteria construction;
- 1.2) Manipulate some workshops for criteria drafting;
- 1.3) Synthesize and develop criteria and indicators for CTPDS;
- 1.4) Hold public criticism of the criteria constructed.

2. Criteria of cooperative teacher professional schools

The criteria consisted of three important components--criteria statements, indicator statements, and criteria for considerations. The total of eight criteria and twenty-eight indicators were as follow.

2.1) School readiness

Criterion statement 1 The CTPDS are ready for in-service internship of teacher-to-be-students.

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Indicator 1 | The schools volunteer to participate in teacher professional development partnership. |
| Indicator 2 | The ratio of teachers per students is proper and the number of facilities provided is appropriate. |
| Indicator 3 | The schools' personnel are qualified according to their academic proficiency and their teacher professional efficiency. |
| Indicator 4 | The schools are located within transportation reach community. |
| Indicator 5 | The schools are situated in safe environment for teacher professional practice. |

2.2) Schools' administration and management

Criterion statement 2 The schools' administration and management are consistent with the goals of the Nation's Educational Acts.

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Indicator 6 | There is a specific plan for academic administration, budgeting, personnel administration, and general administration that provides students the utmost benefits. |
| Indicator 7 | The administration is decentralized and involves stakeholders' participation in decision-making. |
| Indicator 8 | Team-based work culture, knowledge construction and systemic problem-solving oriented are encouraged. |

Criterion statement 3 The schools' administration is based on moral principles.

Indicator 9 Administrators and schools' committee enable to be the role model for students, teachers, parents and community members.

Indicator 10 The schools' administration and management is legal- and moral-based, transparent, and recheck able.

Indicator 11 There is the ability to handle the education effectively and economically with the limited resources.

Criterion statement 4 The schools' administration and management allows the access of quality and efficiency inspection.

Indicator 12 Quality assurance system is available for inspection both by the assessors and by the community.

Indicator 13 Information technology system for the administration is available for the sections of academic administration, budgeting, personnel administration, and general administration.

Criterion statement 5 The schools' development plan is provided.

Indicator 14 There is the school's plan or strategic plan for development.

Indicator 15 Actions are thoroughly practiced according to plan.

2.3) Learning management

Criterion Statement 6 The schools focus on learner-centered based.

Indicator 16 There is the up-to-date school's curriculum which is in relevance to the need of the students, community, and society.

Indicator 17 Curriculum management is systemic and continuity.

Indicator 18 Learning activities are varying, flexible, and suitable according to the nature and needs of students.

Indicator 19 Facilitation, follow up system, and supervision of teaching and learning quality are emphasized and conducted regularly.

Indicator 20 There is the effective use of teaching materials and technology.

Indicator 21 Both outside and inside database and learning resources are available for teaching and learning.

Indicator 22 The assessment processes are varying, appropriate, and in relevance to learning process and contents.

Indicator 23 Classroom research for teaching and learning development is encouraged.

2.4) Personnel care taking and professional development

Criterion statement 7 There is the encouragement of personnel care taking and professional development for the benefits of students.

Indicator 24 Teacher professional development is encouraged systemically and continuously.

Indicator 25 The administrator and teachers satisfy with their job and loyal to it.

Indicator 26 There are teacher networks and organizations available in the community for the educational benefits.

2.5) Community relations system

Criterion statement 8 The schools provide the opportunities for the stakeholders' involvement in school administration and management.

Indicator 27 Parents' and community's involvement in school administration and management is encouraged.

Indicator 28 Parents and community participate in school's activities continuously.

It was noted that the success of this research project was also due to the administrator's supports and sincerity. The administrator took roles in providing

opportunities for the teachers to share and propose ideas, facilitated the teachers in working, and followed up supportively and regularly.

2nd Study

This latter study (Jogthong et al., 2006) focused on the development of the teachers' potential in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Similar to the first study, it was primarily an attempt to look for patterns of teacher professional development and, more specifically, to find out the influential factors which affect the potential of teaching and learning English in the school. This was also to set a development model for other schools and for this cooperative teacher professional development school itself to be the host of in-service training. Study reviews had indicated that participatory action research worked well in many educational contexts (see Gudjonsdottir, 2000; Lemelin, 2003; Ryan, 2001; and Vanosdall, 2004). This study, thus, utilized participatory action research principles in working with the school personnel.

Similar to most of the elementary schools in Thailand (Luangangoon, 2001), there was not any English teacher at Ban Lak Roi School who received a certificate or a degree in English teaching or in related fields. However, English had practically been taught in every class at this school, as well as at all other schools, and the demand of English teaching for young learners was getting high. Based on the group discussions and the school's documentations, school curriculum which integrated English into other learning contents was proposed by the group of teachers in this school.

The main activities employed for this research and development were planning for English integrated learning and teaching, fostering learner centered-based classroom practice, and conducting classroom action research. According to English integrated learning and teaching management, all teachers in the school were trained to enhance their language skills competency and to integrate English into their everyday lessons. Workshops and seminars in English teaching and learning including classroom research were held regularly mostly after school and a few times outside the school when appropriate. The duration of this research was one academic year, starting from April, 2005 to March, 2006. The results of this research and developments were as the followings.

1. Patterns of the development

Findings revealed patterns of the development in three areas.

1.1) Pattern of research cooperation development. As for the administrator, cooperation was based on the role taken in participation for this research, funding, and academic promotion. For the teachers, cooperation could be enhanced by encouraging understanding, supervision, participation in all activities, and promotion opportunities.

1.2) Pattern of procedure for development. The process began with problems and needs analysis, then looking for the possible solutions, taking actions, evaluation and conclusion, and dissemination if satisfied, otherwise, restarting by analyzing problems and needs.

1.3) Pattern of supervision. The supervision styles varied due to situations. They were formal, semi-formal, and informal--with whole group, small groups, group representative, and one-by-one supervision. Notably, supportive and friendly styles worked best with all said types of supervision.

2. External and internal factors for development

External and internal factors were found affect the development.

2.1) External factors. The external factors were:

2.1.1) Learning resources for teachers and students;

2.1.2) Community and parents supports;

- 2.1.3) Supervisor and consultant networks;
- 2.1.4) Promotion opportunities; and
- 2.1.5) Funding.
- 2.2) Internal factors. As for the internal influential factors, they were:
 - 2.2.1) Administration factors, which comprised of facilitation, cooperation, participation, encouragement, and supervision;
 - 2.2.2) Working culture factors, which were identified as age, years of teaching, knowledge and working experience, and working environment; and
 - 2.2.3) Teachers' workload which were classified as the job of teaching, doing school's supplementary tasks, and monitoring school activities.

3. Positive changes in the development

The results of the development at Ban Lak Roi School also revealed changes within students, teachers and the administrator.

3.1) Students' attitude towards English learning. The students became more open-minded, enthusiastic, and interested in studying English. They were able to use more English words naturally, developed the habit of self-study, and showed good relationship towards their teachers.

3.2) School personnel's attitude towards teaching and learning. Teachers and the administrator accepted that they had learned along with their students and were more confident and open-minded in learning new things. They believed in the students' ability to learn. Their English skills had improved. They also had the opportunity to develop the skills of teaching English across the disciplines and were able to conduct their own research. Cooperation, acceptance in each other and in changes, and learning to work systematically were achieved procedures for these personals resulted from this research. The satisfactory of research participation was at the high level and there was a tendency of professional development continuity of participants.

4. Standard criteria of English teaching and learning in schools

Finally, standard criteria of English teaching and learning in schools had been proposed as follow;

- 4.1) Schools' policy or strategic planning for the development of English teaching and learning has been stated clearly;
- 4.2) Effective patterns of teaching and learning English management are encouraged and; adequate, modern, and usable technologies are available;
- 4.3) Teachers show good English skills, employ the student-centered teaching skills, and have undergone classroom or action research and;
- 4.4) Systemic and regular supervision and supports from the community and parents are encouraged.

Concluding remarks

In order to serve the urgent need to enhance teachers' potential of teaching and learning management in schools, due to the 1999 Thai Educational Reform Acts, participatory action research may be the solution for the development. The results of these two studies have confirmed that in Thai educational context, participatory action research yields effectiveness and positive results in the development of school-based management and teacher professional. The cooperative nature and supportive environment of this research type process allow participants to work with the researchers spontaneously, resulted in positive changes within the organization.

Bibliography

- Boonprasert, U. (2000). **The Study of School-based Management Model for Schools' Administration and Management**. Bangkok: Office of National Education Commission
- Gudjonsdottir, H. (2000). Responsive professional practice: Teachers analyze the theoretical and ethical dimensions of their work in diverse classrooms. Dissertation, University of Oregon, USA. **Dissertation Abstracts International** [Online]. Available, <http://www.od.arc.nrru.ac.th/dao/detail.nsp>. [Dissertation Abstracts Online] September 28, 2005
- Jogthong, C., et al. (2006). **The Development of Teachers' Potential in Teaching English for Level 1 and Level 2 Students in Partnership Schools for Teacher Professional Development By Implementing Participatory Action Research Process**. Unpublished Research Report.
- Lemelin, N. (2003). An inquiry into participatory action research as a tool for curriculum and professional development in the museum. Dissertation, University of Toronto, Canada. **Dissertation Abstracts International** [Online]. Available, <http://www.od.arc.nrru.ac.th/dao/detail.nsp>. [Dissertation Abstracts Online] September 28, 2005
- Luangangoon, N. (2001). **Improving English Language Teaching in Thailand**. Ed. D. Dissertation. Deakin University, Australia.
- McTaggart, R. (1991). Principles for Participatory Action Research. **Adult Education Quarterly**. 41(3), 168-87.
- Office of the National Education Commission, (2003). **Education in Thailand 2002/2003**. Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing.
- Pimolbunyong, R., et al. (2004). **The Development of Teachers and Schools for Co-operative Teacher Professional Development**. Unpublished Research Report.
- Rajabhat Ban Somdejchaopraya Institute. (2001). **Pioneer Project for Learning Reform Schools Applying Action Research Professional Development: The Case of Sra-yaysom School**. Bangkok, Thailand; Group of Educational Personnel Development, Ministry of Education.
- Rajabhat Chankrasem Institute. (2001). **Pioneer Project for Learning Reform Schools Applying Action Research Professional Development: The Case of Suphannaphum School**. Bangkok, Thailand; Group of Educational Personnel Development, Ministry of Education.
- Rajabhat Kanchanaburi Institute. (2001). **Pioneer Project for Learning Reform Schools Applying Action Research Professional Development**. Bangkok, Thailand; Group of Educational Personnel Development, Ministry of Education.
- Rajabhat Suan Dusit Institute. (2001). **Pioneer Project for Learning Reform Schools Applying Action Research Professional Development: The Case of Suphanburi Kindergarten School**. Bangkok, Thailand; Group of Educational Personnel Development, Ministry of Education.
- Rajabhat Suan Sunantha Institute. (2001). **Pioneer Project for Learning Reform Schools Applying Action Research Professional Development: The Case of Ban Thasadet School**. Bangkok, Thailand; Group of Educational Personnel Development, Ministry of Education.
- Ryan, T. G. (2001). An action research study of secondary science assessment praxes. Dissertation, University of Oregon, USA. **Dissertation Abstracts International** [Online]. Available, <http://www.od.arc.nrru.ac.th/dao/detail.nsp>. [Dissertation Abstracts Online] September 28, 2005

Vanosdall, F. P. (2004). Transformative pedagogy through heuristic inquiry: Lessons for professional development. Dissertation, Arizona State University, USA.
Dissertation Abstracts International [Online]. Available,
<http://www.od.arc.nrru.ac.th/dao/detail.nsp>. [Dissertation Abstracts Online]
September 28, 2005

