

Opening Address

at the Cambridge Education Conference

“From External Evaluation to School Improvement Achieving Excellence for Learners”

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Chris Thatcher, Director SE Asia Education Development & Past President of N.A.H.T.

Distinguished Speakers,

Conference Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,



It is my privilege and pleasure to join this gathering of distinguished international and national speakers and delegates at the Cambridge Education Conference entitled, “**From External Evaluation to School Improvement Achieving Excellence for Learners**”.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to provide a Thai perspective on this topic, and to share ideas and experiences with you. By looking at some of the different national and regional strategies that have been adopted, we can assist each other in our efforts to strengthen our schools, ensuring quality in teaching and learning and efficiency in management and administration.

School improvement is extremely important in the Thai context and a central concern in the country's programme of education reform, set out in the 1999 National Education Act (NEA) and amendments of 2002. These documents prescribed changes across all levels, sectors and areas of educational provision from: educational rights and duties; the educational system; educational management and administration; standards and quality assurance; teachers, faculty staff and educational personnel; resources and investment, pedagogy and curriculum; to educational technologies.

Different governments have approached reform in different ways and with different priorities. All, however, have shown political commitment to the reform process as a means to both increase access to and improve the quality of our schools. This, as you can imagine, is no small undertaking.

In basic education alone it automatically concerns decision-making which will affect almost 4,500 schools or other educational institutions and approximately 1.5 million students, over 21,000 teachers as well as educational administrators working in the 175 Educational Service Areas (ESA) nationwide, not to mention a whole range of partners from both the public and private sector.

In terms of budget, we are fortunate in that the government has long given priority to education and allocated a substantial part of the national budget to carrying out the reform process. The educational budget for the fiscal year 2006 reached almost 3 billion baht, or 21.7% of the national budget. In terms of distribution, 43.6% was allocated to pre-primary and primary education and 26.6% to secondary education.

Our ultimate goal is to ensure the intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional development and well-being of our learners. Under the current government, this involves the building of values that can contribute to an improved quality of life for Thai citizens and a better society, in addition to ensuring the acquisition of knowledge and skills to guarantee the country's economic competitiveness.

As in other areas of government, the Ministry of Education has integrated His Majesty King Bhumiphol Adulyadej's development philosophy, which emphasizes moderation, wisdom and insight and guides us toward a more sustainable lifestyle. This I believe makes us unique in our approach to achieving excellence for learners.

To realize these objectives, attention has been focused on the training and development teachers and educational personnel, who can bring about the necessary changes in curriculum and learning procedures, emphasizing morality and ethics. Another important step has led to the establishment of networks linking families, religious institutions, educational institutions and community groups.

Ultimately, we want our students to be able to take decisions and to act, conscious of the wider impacts these decisions and actions may have. We also want them think about and reflect on different cultural values and the practical implications of expressing them, whether to others in the community, at the national level, or in the global context. To sum up, we aim to develop the kind of skills, understanding and motivation in our students which will strengthen society, contribute to greater social cohesion, and lead to positive change.

In practical terms, to date we have initiated over 300 projects. To begin with we have been involved in the training of teachers, students and administrators as well as general public on Sufficiency Economy Theory. We have also implemented a number of extra curricula activities during school holidays. With schools and with the

Scouts organization, we have organized youth camps designed to promote good works to improve the environment or help the local community. We have also been working with religious leaders who have a major role to play in instilling appropriate values and behavior in our young people.

At the same time, various initiatives have been undertaken in conjunction with key international organizations on topics including Education for International Understanding, Education for Sustainable Development and Human Rights Education.

The Ministry of Education is also committed to accelerating the decentralization of authority to the 175 Educational Service Areas (ESA), and to facilitating institutional autonomy with regard to academic matters, management of budget, human resource development and general administration. We want to give greater flexibility to institutions, allowing them to be more responsive to the needs of students and their communities, as well as pro-active in finding ways to guarantee the quality and relevance of educational provision.

I must confess that the road to decentralization is not an easy one. ESA administrators themselves, schools and communities have expressed continuing concern regarding their readiness to assume responsibility for the supervision and development of schools in their area. This has meant that, so far, only a small number of schools have been transferred. This does not mean that the idea of decentralization should be abandoned. On the contrary, it clearly highlights the direction we should move. Strengthening capacity, preparing people for change, and identifying and enhancing leadership skills among those who play a critical role in the reform process is crucial.

In our pursuit of excellence, I believe that issues related to the enhancement of leadership skills should be given very careful consideration. To facilitate the process of decentralization, continued support for the empowerment of key figures at central, provincial and institutional level is essential. We must enhance the role of those individuals who have a clear understanding of the vision and goals of reform; who can contribute innovative ideas on how to go about realizing our objectives; and have the skills to facilitate change.

Training and development activities in change management have already been set up. Around 20,000 people have been identified as lead agents for change and innovation. These include local authorities, educational administrators at ESA and school level, supervisors, teachers and teaching personnel. 600 public schools and 75 private schools are participating in the pilot study which aims to build capacity in identified schools so that they can become autonomous institutions.

Wider participation from all stakeholders can only benefit educational development in Thailand. To this end, the introduction of School Based Management (SBM) is helping to promote a sense of ownership through the development of a mutually supportive relationship between schools, parents and wider community. To give just one example, when it comes to decision-making regarding the relevance of curriculum in a particular local context, it is the community who are best informed. They know what needs to be taught and who could act as resource persons. Thus SBM promotes the development of both social and intellectual capital through initiatives focused on the creation, dissemination & utilization of knowledge.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In terms of monitoring and evaluating the progress of reform in schools and among our student population, and independent organization has been set up. The Office for National Standards and Quality Standards (Onesqa) became operational in November 2000. It was tasked with developing an efficient external assessment programme and a standardized quality assurance system to measure performance in all educational institutions nationwide, as well as the training of personnel to carry out this task. Regular surveys have been conducted in schools since 2001.

I will not go into great detail here as I know my distinguished colleague, Prof. Emeritus Dr. Somwung Pitayanuwat, Director of Onesqa, will be talking to you later today, and I am sure will mention the standards and KPI used in the appraisal process. In brief, however, in line with government policy, basic education appraisal focuses on: overall vision and leadership; the school's ability to develop both cognitive and non-cognitive skills and to cultivate honesty, integrity, and morality in students; the qualifications of teachers and pedagogy adopted; at whether the school maximizes its use of available resources; and finally whether a cooperative relationship has been established with the community.

Regular surveys have been conducted since 2001 and individual school appraisals are combined in a single annual report that represents the collective health of Thailand's schools. Since reporting is transparent and results are available to the general public, it is no secret that some of our schools still do not perform well in the assessment. This should not be taken in a negative light but as a prescriptive measure which will help us to address problem areas more effectively.

One strategy we have adopted is the innovative "I See You" project, launched in partnership with private sector to help raise standards in 100 schools selected by OBEC. The Ministry of Education and Matichon Public Company Limited are focusing on team work within the schools as a means to motivate staff at every level and networking between schools is encouraged. Support is also given for the development of an internal assessment plan.

There is still much scope to expand this project and to develop other partnerships in the future. Education is a shared responsibility and it is only by mobilizing the various partners and pooling our resources that we will manage to reach all schools and bring about significant improvements.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Cambridge Education for their contributions to education in Thailand over the past three years and in particular their involvement in the assessment and evaluation process. This three day interactive conference will, I am sure, provide many useful insights into the external evaluation process and its link to school improvement.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I now declare open the Cambridge Education Conference on **“From External Evaluation to School Improvement”**.

Thank you.