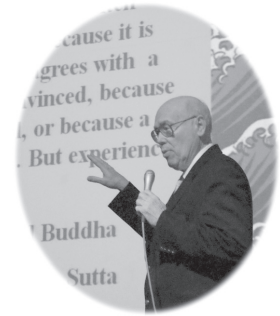


# “Improving Local Education: The Quest for Empowerment and Equity, a Thai Case Study”

**Gerald W. Fry**

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Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and  
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My Key Value Premises and Assumptions:

Black Gold (social justice, equality, equity, access for all)

Yellow Gold (cultural preservation, cultural democracy; development of cultural intelligence, competency; development of “software of the mind”)

Blue Gold (sustainable development, sufficiency economy, clean air and water)

Green Gold (preservation of forests, social forestry, development of green campuses, Mahidol, e.g.)

Quality education and human resource development are central to a nation’s international competitiveness.

There is much unrealized human potential in Thailand’s Northeast and remote rural localities; talent not being discovered.

Some Key Conceptual Frameworks Related to the Role of Local Communities in Improving Education

James Scott’s “seeing like a state” and “weapons of the weak”

Ben Anderson’s “imagined communities”

Ramírez & Casteñeda (cultural democracy)

Vavrus & Bartlett (vertical case studies)

Geertz’s local knowledge

Genres of Local Communities:

Parents of students

Local political bodies (TAOs)

Local politicians

Government officers

Religious communities

People with local wisdom (e.g., Association of Elders of Pimai, ancient architectural site in Korat area)

Local power brokers (Jaw Por)

Community members without school children

Local business interests (e.g., contractors)

Key Principles

Fiscal neutrality: educational quality should not depend on where you live.

Equity (Rawls): systems should be fair; there should be no differential treatment

Equality (Rousseau): educational quality should not depend on the socioeconomic status of your family  
Empowerment (Freire): the voices of those in local areas need to be heard  
Putting the last first; listening to voices in remote disadvantaged areas (Chambers); H.R.H. Maha Chakri Princess Sirindhorn's identification of 15 most disadvantaged groups in Thailand  
Background on Thailand

Siam never colonized; diverse external influences  
History of centralization starting with major educational reforms of the Chulalongkorn era  
"The Five Faces of Thailand"  
Persisting regional inequalities with the Northeast (Isaan) lagging behind; issue of "internal colonialism"; high V (coefficient of variation) for regional inequalities  
1998 National Education Act guiding reform; an elegant statement of progressive educational ideals and principles  
Recent Developments and Issues

Dr. Thaksin's controversial policies and his innovative populism (Thaksinomics); popularity in north and northeast, especially among local rural populations. Dr. Thaksin as a polarizing figure.  
Dr. Thaksin's program neither stressed education nor targeting.  
Assessing educational reform after 12 years; how much actual implementation at the local level? Rashomon effect (Kurosawa; Akutagawa): look at the same data and see different things  
Case Studies of Local Communities' Engagement to Improve Education

Islam Lam Sai Environmental School  
Community-school collaboration in addressing deforestation issues (MOE-Michigan State University project, McDonough, Wheeler, 1998)  
Role of Wat Suanmokk (in Chaiya)  
UNDP/Florida State project emphasizing role of school boards  
Integrated Pest Management (IPM) case study  
Various *setakit popieng* (sufficiency economy) cases; e.g., school gardens  
PDA innovative project to link corporations with local communities to enhance local capacity and reduce rural-urban migration

Potential for university (especially Rajabhats), community, and school collaboration, but universities must be mindful not to dominate and not to be patronizing  
Major Issues Related to Local Communities Role in Improving Education

Critical issues of quality and relevance  
Fiscal versus budget decentralization  
Local educators' resistance to giving TAO's control of local education  
Local Education Areas (LEAs): recentralization at the local level?  
Development of local curricula (NEA); 33% of curriculum can be local  
Promotion and preservation of local cultures and languages  
School-based management; involvement of parents in school management; parents' awareness of what their children

need; do parents really know what their children need? role of parents in school oversight; role of community in fund raising

Gamage and Pachrapimon's survey of Thai school board members

World Bank Indonesia study of community participation in schools (SBM best practices)

Tetrahedron Model of Genres of Educational Decentralization

Four genres of decentralization:

Fiscal decentralization

Budget decentralization

Fiscal and budget decentralization differ in important ways. In fiscal decentralization local areas are expected to fund education, but with budget decentralization national funds are allocated to local areas to manage. The former tends to lead to great inequality in countries with serious regional disparities

Personnel decentralization

Curriculum decentralization

Major Problems in Northeast (Isaan) Education

Low levels of cultural, human, and intellectual capital (Bourdieu, Lin) (cf. Bangkok or Korea)

Inadequate incentives for being a teacher in a remote disadvantaged area (Khamman, "The Rural School Teacher")

Lack of targeting most disadvantaged areas for compensatory funding; need incentives for local communities to become engaged with education

Limited educational and life chances

Debt burden of teachers

New Policy Developments

Aphisit government's commitment to increase decentralization (increase in percent of government budget going to local level) and improve education

Articulation of the *pracha wiwat* (people's agenda) philosophy; responding creatively to people's needs

National Reform Assembly (chaired by Dr. Prawase) key recommendations:

land banks, community land ownership, community justice, welfare measures to assist the elderly, migrant workers...

Promotion of financial literacy (could lead to more investment in human capital rather than material consumerism)

Critique of social rice-roots activist, Ms. Krarok Pongnoi

Excessive top down control

Money driven development

Need to make localities bigger and central government smaller

The Future of Community Involvement in Improving Education

Need for genuine government commitment to both *empowerment and equity*

Need for effective *compensatory* targeting to give disadvantaged local communities resources with which to work

Need for genuine commitment to human resource development as the key to the nation's future

Need to foster effective *partnerships* among diverse stakeholders such as corporations, universities, local pools of wisdom, religious communities, schools, and communities to realize the ideal of "all for education"

**“Improving Local Education: The Quest  
for Empowerment and Equity,  
a Thai Case Study”**

by Gerald W. Fry  
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Paper Presented at the  
Japan Educational Forum, Tokyo  
February 3, 2011



Yes, you may well doubt, you may well be uncertain... Do not accept anything because it is the authoritative tradition, because it is often said, because of rumor or hearsay, because it is found in the scriptures, because it agrees with a theory of which one is already convinced, because of the reputation of an individual, or because a teacher said it is thus and thus... But experience it for yourself.

The Lord Buddha  
The Kalama Sutta

**“And words are only words unless  
they transcend monologue and  
provide for dialogue. Dialogue  
between real people is the seed of  
action.” (Somsak, p. 135)**

**“Centralization of power is a major  
obstacle to development.”**

Seksan Prasertkul  
December 19, 2010

**The Critical Need to Make Value  
Premises and Assumptions Explicit  
(Gunnar Myrdal, Nobel Laureate  
from Sweden)**

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## My Key Value Premises and Assumptions

Quality education and human resource development are central to a nation's international competitiveness.

There is much unrealized human potential in Thailand's Northeast and remote rural localities; talent not being discovered.

## Some Key Conceptual Frameworks Related to the Role of Local Communities in Improving Education

James Scott's "seeing like a state" and "weapons of the weak"

Ben Anderson's "imagined communities"  
Ramírez & Casteñeda (cultural democracy)  
Vavrus & Bartlett (vertical case studies)  
Geertz's local knowledge

## Genres of Local Communities

Parents of students  
Local political bodies (TAOs)  
Local politicians  
Government officers  
Religious communities  
People with local wisdom (e.g., Association of Elders of Pimai, ancient architectural site in Korat area); example of social capital formation  
Local power brokers (Jaw Por)  
Community members without school children  
Local business interests (e.g., contractors)

## Key Principles

Fiscal neutrality: educational quality should not depend on where you live.  
Equity (Rawls): systems should be fair; there should be no differential treatment  
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## Background on Thailand

Siam never colonized; diverse external influences  
History of centralization starting with major educational reforms of the Chulalongkorn era  
"The Five Faces of Thailand" (need for "meso" thinking)  
Persisting regional inequalities with the Northeast (Isaan) lagging behind; issue of "internal colonialism"; high V (1.30) (coefficient of variation) for regional inequalities; 42% of country's money deposits belong to just over only 25,000 people and 70% of country's assets belong to 20% of population (Seksan); Peter Warr's research: Northeast adversely affected by recent global economic crisis  
1998 National Education Act guiding reform: an elegant statement of progressive educational ideals and principles



### Recent Developments and Issues

Dr. Thaksin's controversial policies and his innovative populism (Thaksinomics); popularity in north and northeast, especially among local rural populations. Dr. Thaksin as a polarizing figure.

Dr. Thaksin's program neither stressed education nor targeting.

Educational corruption

Assessing educational reform after 12 years; how much actual implementation at the local level? Rashomon effect (Kurosawa; Akutagawa): look at the same data and see different things



### Case Studies of Local Communities' Engagement to Improve Education

Islam Lam Sai Environmental School  
Community-school collaboration in addressing deforestation issues (MOE-Michigan State University project, McDonough, Wheeler, 1998); SFEP (Social Forestry, Education, and Participation)

Role of Wat Suanmukk (in Chaiya)

UNDP/Florida State University project emphasizing role of school boards

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) case study

Various *setakit popieng* (sufficiency economy) cases; e.g., school gardens



### Case Studies of Local Communities' Engagement to Improve Education

PDA innovative project to link corporations with local communities to enhance local capacity and reduce rural-urban migration (T-BIRD) Thai Business Initiative in Rural Development

Potential for university (especially Rajabhats), community, and school collaboration, but universities must be mindful not to dominate and not to be patronizing



### Major Issues Related to Local Communities' Role in Improving Education

Critical issues of quality and relevance

Fiscal versus budget decentralization

Local educators' resistance to giving TAO's control of local education

Local Education Areas (LEAs): recentralization at the local level?

Development of local curricula (NEA)

Promotion and preservation of local cultures and languages





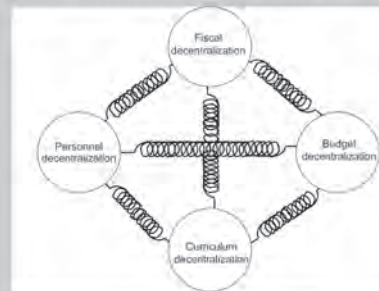
### Major Issues Related to Local Communities Role in Improving Education

School-based management; involvement of parents in school management; parents' awareness of what their children need; role of parents in school oversight; role of community in fund raising, 33% of funds for schools now not from government budget (Waraiporn, 2011)

Gamage and Pachrapimon's survey of Thai school board members

World Bank Indonesia study of community participation in schools (SBM best practices)

### Tetrahedron Model of Genres of Educational Decentralization



### Major Problems in Northeast (Isaan) Education

Low levels of cultural, human, and intellectual capital (Bordieu, Lin) (cf. Bangkok or Korea)

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Articulation of the *pracha wivat* (people's agenda) philosophy; responding creatively to people's needs

### New Policy Developments

National Reform Assembly (chaired by Dr. Prawase) key recommendations:  
land banks, community land ownership, community justice, welfare measures to assist the elderly, migrant workers...

Promotion of financial literacy (could lead to more investment in human capital rather than consumerism and excessive personal debt); relates directly to *setakit popieng* (sufficiency economy)



**Critique of social rice-roots activist, Ms. Krarok Pongnoi**

**Excessive top down control  
Money driven development**

**Need to make localities bigger and central government smaller**



**The Future of Community Involvement in Improving Education**

**Genuine government commitment to both empowerment and equity**

**Effective *compensatory* targeting to give disadvantaged local communities resources with which to work**

**Genuine commitment to human resource development as the key to the nation's future**

**Fostering effective *partnerships* among diverse stakeholders such as corporations, universities, local pools of wisdom, religious communities, schools, and communities to realize the ideal of "all for education"**



**Thank you for your attention!**

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