

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rationale and the Significance of the Problem

The development of the curriculum with consistent learning contents to the local contexts and conditions is a very important issue that has been identified in Section 29 of the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999). The Act emphasizes the supports for the community strength by arranging the learning process within the communities in such ways that the communities can participate in the management of the education, the students' training, the knowledge building, the learning through popular information and news, the selection of the knowledge, and the recruitment of trainers. These attempts increase the correspondence between the education and the communities' problems and needs of the communities, including the supports for the communities to exchange their experience of educational development with one another. Section 30 of the National Education Act of B.E 2542 (1999) has also stipulated that the educational institutions must develop the teaching processes efficiently. The Act also encourages the teachers to be able to do research to develop their learning methods appropriately to the students in each educational level (Bureau of Policy and Educational Planning, Religion and Culture, 1999: 15 - 16).

Such important issues explained above guide the practitioners to see that the learning processes arranged consistently to the communities' contexts and needs through local knowledge known in the communities. This is the guideline that leads to enhance the strength of the local communities. Such guidelines are relevant to the process of developing the local curricula that emphasize on the contextual conditions, communities' participation, and the needs of the locals especially in the communities in Northern Region of Thailand with their rich varieties in cultures deserving conservation and inheritance. The guidelines for conservation and inheritance of local knowledge are necessarily related to the encouragement for the community teachers to develop their abilities in research and development of local curriculum. These abilities will influence the sustainable inheritance of the valuable local knowledge. Furthermore, at present most of the community teachers in the Northern Region are also the practitioners who work closely with the local communities. Unfortunately they still lack the basic skills for conducting research and development to build local curriculum. Proper local curriculum is worthy of some supports for their development that the community teachers in the Northern Region are becoming increasingly capable to launch research and development for better local curriculum. The locally relevant and appropriate curriculum would lead to the learning process arrangement through the involvement of the communities as the base of education. Besides, the importance of the proper inheritance of the unique and valuable local knowledge, ways of life, and culture of the locals of the Northern Region by the younger generation necessitates their conservation. This purpose also adheres to the intention of the National Education Act of B.E 2542 (1999).

The study of Chalong Khumueang et al. (2003) showed that the development of local curriculum lacks the attention to the potentials and cooperation between the schools and the communities. This is the main obstacle for the proper development of local curriculum.

Therefore cooperation between the schools and the communities is an important issue to which the teachers in the communities should pay attention during the curriculum development. Piyaporn Chumchan (2003) conducted a research and found that the proper use of the participatory research process is one of the methods deserving to be a guideline through which all relevant sectors can be mobilized into the development of local curriculum. This finding confirmed the findings of Narongsak Srivilai (2002) who studied the development of a local curriculum on Karen cloth weaving subject for the Lower Secondary Classrooms at Mae Tuen Wittayakom School, Omkoi District, Chiang Mai Province. The study showed that such local curriculum development not only enhanced the students' learning achievement (mostly in "good" level) but also increased the parents' satisfaction (in "high" level) to the perceptible changes among the students. Similarly, the study of Anurak Panyanuwat et al (1999) found that the educational personnel who passed the process according to the participatory action research could produce positive changes in their knowledge, ability to perform, attitudes, and experience. Furthermore, these positive features could lead to the acceptance of the personnel of the state institutions and the committees of the relevant educational clubs by the community members. Such findings correspond to the principles of the participatory action research that after the application of the process according to the participatory action research the relevant people would make the linkage and build cooperation in solving problems together. In addition, a study by Jirachai Booranariththawee (2003) integrated the participatory action research process with the theory of constructionism and implemented it in the development of abilities to conduct research among the voluntary teachers in the non-formal education learning centers. These teachers worked the local communities. The findings showed that such integrated process not only enhanced the abilities of the voluntary teachers to launch educational research but also encouraged the better process of participation in solving the problems together with the communities.

From the presentation above, it is clear that the problems of lacking the attention to the potentials and the cooperation between the schools and the communities to develop better local curriculum are solvable. This solution is possible through the development of the community teachers working in the communities to practice research and development of local curriculum. The integration of the participatory action research process with the theory of constructionism is important because local curriculum must have reliable bases to build the students and the local knowledge (Department of Non-Formal Education, 2000:3, 14) It is necessary to select the processes that are consistent with the basis of such thought. The theory of constructionism emphasizes the students' own creation of the knowledge. It can be stated that the theory of constructionism is a learner-centered theory (Suchin Petcharak 2001: 15–30) and it can be integrated into the participatory action research process for the enhancement of the teachers' abilities to conduct research in the local communities (Jirachai Booranariththawee, 2003) The important Thinking Base of the participatory action research process is emphasis on the participatory processes in

seeking for knowledge in all steps (Supang Chantavanich, 1997: 67-62). There is a possibility and appropriateness to create the constructionism theory learning process to be integrated with the participatory action research. This integration can be used to develop the teachers' abilities in research and development of local curriculum of northern community teachers communities to solve their problems.

Therefore this study is developing a model for developing the ability in research and development of local curriculum of the community teachers in the Northern Region through the integration of constructionism theory learning process with participatory action research. Development of a proper model to develop the teachers' research and development ability is very important and worthy of study. The study's results would lead to better knowledge about the development of abilities in research and development of local curriculum of northern community teachers further.

Objectives of the Study

This research has the following objectives:

1. To study a model for developing the ability in research and development of local curriculum of northern community teachers through the integration of constructionism theory learning process and participatory action research.

2. To study of the results of the model for developing the ability in research and development of local curriculum of northern community teachers through the integration of constructionism theory learning process and participatory action research as the followings.

- 2.1 The results of development of the abilities in research and development of local curriculum of the community teachers.

- 2.2 The results of the research and development of local curriculum that arise from the development of the ability in research and development of local curriculum of the community teachers.

- 2.3 The participants' opinions and feelings toward the participation in this research.

Limitation of the Study

Limitation of Population

The population of this research is the community teachers in the Northern Region who are the voluntary teachers in the non-formal education learning centers in the communities surrounding Mae Fah Luang District, Chiang Rai Province (studied between March 2006 and July 2008) including the learners, the local wisdom practitioners on the cultural practices, on the medicinal herbals, on the environment, and on the agricultural practices.

Limitation on the Contents

The limitation on the contents can be classified into two aspects according to the objectives of the research as the followings.

1. Limitation on the contents of the model

This research utilizes a model emphasizing the development of the ability in research and development of local curriculum of northern community teachers through constructionism theory learning process integrated with participatory action research. The research context is related to the works of the non-formal

education center in Mae Fah Luang District, Chiang Rai Province, the Upper Northern Region of Thailand. The majority of the communities are located on the highlands. They are composed of some ethnic and tribal groups.

2. Limitation on the contents on the results of implementation of the model

This research also emphasizes on the study over the results of the implementation of the model for developing the ability in research and development of local curriculum of northern community teachers through constructionism theory learning process integrated with participatory action research.

2.1 The results are those of the development on the ability to launch research and development of local curriculum of the community teachers through a design of the integrated methods of constructionism theory learning process and participatory action research. The contents of the development of the teachers' ability in research and development of local curriculum are composed of five issues as the followings. First, the research studies and analyzes the local contexts to bring forth the identified issues for research and development of local curriculum. Second, the research sets up basic preparation to implement or to apply research and development on local curriculum. Third, the research prepares the methodologies of the research and development of local curriculum. Fourth, the research implements the steps of research and development of local curriculum according to the plan and/or the prepared timeline. And fifth, the research plans the steps of publication and distribution of the research results.

2.2 The results are those of the research and development of local curriculum after the development of community teachers' ability in research and development of local curriculum according to the limitation of the contents in Item 2.1.

2.3 The participants' opinions and feelings toward their participation in the learning process following the constructionism theory learning process and participatory action research to develop the ability in research and development of local curriculum are gathered through the study of opinion and feeling of the participants of the research. This study is gathering the followings: (1) Opinion of the community teachers, (2) opinion of the local wisdom practitioners, (3) opinion of the learners, (4) opinion of the researcher, and (5) opinion of relevant people.

Definitions

Northern Community Teachers means the teachers who perform duties in the communities in the Northern Region of Thailand. In this research these are the voluntary teachers under the non-formal education center. These community teachers work in the communities surrounding Mae Fah Luang District, Chiang Rai Province. This research terms them shortly as "**community teachers**".

Local Wisdom Practitioners means the people staying in the communities where the community teachers work. These locals have knowledge about their own localities that are already accepted by the other members in the communities. In this research, wisdom is composed of the wisdom on the culture, on the medicinal herbals, on the agricultural knowledge, and on the environment.

Learners means the students under the Non-formal Education Service Centers, Mae Fah Luang District, Chiang Rai Province who reside in the communities where the community teachers in this research are participating in the research.

Facilitators means the persons who stimulate and support the learners to learn at their full potentials under the constructionism theory learning process.

Relevant People means the persons in local communities who are composed of the village leaders, and the personnel of the local organizations related to the communities where the community teachers participate in the research and development of local curriculum.

Constructionism Theory Learning Process Integrated with Participatory Action Research or CLIPAR means the methodology constructed by the researcher, which integrates the constructionism theory learning process with the participatory action research by first analyzing the components of the constructionism theory learning process as well as the components of the participatory action research. The important components of the constructionism theory learning process are twofold. The first one is the series of components on the process that is composed of the followings: exploration, experimentation, learning by doing, doing from the learning, and contemplation with wisdom to construct new knowledge. The second component of the constructionism theory learning process is composed of the learning environments and the learning materials that facilitate the learning along the steps of components on the processes stated above. The important components of the participatory action research are also twofold. The first one is the components of the process, which are composed of the steps of surveys, planning, implementation, follow-up and evaluation, and revision of the plan for future implementation. The implementation is proceeding continuously in cycles. The second component, which is the participation process, is done in the steps by the relevant people, the persons who receive the results of development, the curriculum developer and the researcher. The analysis of such components enables the participants to see the common points and other connected points that can be synthesized to integrate into the CLIPAR. Thus the participants can set together a simple and efficient development model. The production steps of the model can be classified into four steps which are

Step 1 Exploration for studying about the problematic conditions,

Step 2 Planning for developing the abilities in research and development of local curriculum of northern community teachers,

Step 3 Implementation of the plan for developing the abilities in research and development of local curriculum of northern community teachers, and

Step 4 Supervising, monitoring and evaluation of results of the implementation of the plan to develop abilities in research and development of local curriculum of northern community teachers.

The implementation plans throughout Step 1 to Step 4 share similar ways of implementing the cycles. For example, the implementation cycle that occurs after getting the information from Step 4 is used as the guideline to improve and develop the implementation plan in the next cycles. In all steps, the researcher arranges the environment, climate and media to facilitate the learning together continuously.

In all steps of implementation the community teachers and the researcher prepare the learning environments and the learning materials into the learning process

for support and promote the teachers to construct the local curriculums, and in this research the researcher as the facilitator stimulates and supports the fulfillment of the knowledge and techniques in doing research and development of local curriculum for the community teachers continuously.

Abilities in Research and Development of Local Curriculum of Northern Community Teachers means the community teachers' abilities to implement the research and development of local curriculum into a curriculum that is consistent with the contexts of the communities in the Northern Region where the community teachers work. This set of abilities can be evaluated through a comparison of the scores derived from the criteria to evaluate the abilities in research and developing local curriculum of the community teachers during, before, and after completion of the CLIPAR. After the completion of such process the community teachers have higher scores on their abilities in research and development of local curriculum than those before the beginning of the process. This achievement shows that the community teachers have shown increasing abilities in research and development of local curriculum. The scores on community teachers' ability in research and development of local curriculum can be traced through the learning processes and the implementation of the research and development of the curriculum practices the community teachers. This ability could be evaluated by a comparison between the evaluation criteria on abilities in research and development of the local curriculum of the communities created by researcher (as well as the participatory process between the community teachers and researcher). The specialists or experts would provide advisory about the criteria of scoring used in the evaluation criteria on the abilities in research and development of curriculum of the community teachers (refer to Appendix E).

A Model for Developing the Ability in Research and Development of Local Curriculum of Northern Community Teachers means the process to enhance the teachers' ability in doing research and development of local curriculum for the teachers who work in the communities in the Northern Region through the learning process according to the CLIPAR. The steps and components are identified in the definition of CLIPAR. If such process enables the community teachers to launch research and development of local curriculum, it means that the model can be used to developing the ability in research and development of local curriculum of northern community teachers. This research studies and develops the model from the actual situation during the research implementation after a study from the conceptual framework of the research.

Benefits Gained from the Research

The research on "A Model for Developing the Ability in Research and Development of Local Curriculum of Northern Community Teachers Through the Integration of Constructionism Theory Learning Process and Participatory Action Research" in this research will create the following benefits:

1. The research would create a model for developing the community teachers in the Northern Region to build their capability in research and development of local curriculum that is consistent with the contexts of the communities in the Northern Region of Thailand.

2. The research would be a guideline to apply the constructionism theory learning process integrated with Participatory Action Research (CLIPAR) to develop the community teachers' ability in research and development of local curriculum in other regions and places of Thailand as well.

3. The research seeks for the alternative processes for the organizations and relevant institutions in developing the teachers' abilities in research and development of local curriculum especially for the teachers who perform their works in the local communities.

4. The research constructs a new knowledge in arranging the teaching and learning that is related to research and development of local curriculum through the integration of Constructionism theory, which is the learner-based learning theory, constructed by Prof. Dr. Seymour Papert who is an extension of the theory of Constructivism of Jean Piaget, and modified with the Participatory Action Research or PAR, which was used for on-the-job training for the learners or practitioners. With this method the learners can learn along the research process related to the development of local curriculum in the actual situation, which consistent to the community contexts where the community teachers perform their tasks.