

CHAPTER 5

Regenerated Indigenous Knowledge and Constructing Knowledge Space

FAL negotiates with diverse people to implement the MTB-MLE program and particularly spends a lot of time with local people. Many local indigenous people don't agree with teaching their indigenous language in public school because Thai indigenous people have been dominated and intimidated by the public education system for a long time. However, after they accept the MTB-MLE program as a mean towards improving their children's education, local people tend to gradually change their perceptions by participating in FAL's diverse activities. FAL usually remarks that indigenous culture and identity preservation are one of the impacts of the MTB-MLE program. While local people are participating in the trainings and material development activities, they are aware of the value of regeneration of the community's indigenous knowledge, particularly in terms of the education field. They actively participate in producing education materials based on their knowledge or environment and want to sustain them. The local teachers, especially, are empowered by FAL's trainings and play a key role in contesting the dominant discourse about public education and in redefining their indigenous knowledge. In this process, local indigenous people construct new knowledge space based on indigenous knowledge for their children's education and FAL efficiently advocates for their voices to be heard in Thai society.

5.1 Impact of Teacher Trainings

In a room, nine teachers and I sat in a circle. A staff member said something then one of them stood up and started singing. Everyone except me sang together and I found out that it was not a Thai language song. After singing the song, she instructed us to make a shape by following her finger she acted shy when leading us. We tried to follow her but the other teachers pretending to be students also felt a little bit shy. Some finger plays were

tried and she suddenly stopped teaching with some words and others clapping. Meanwhile, two of the FAL staff members sat to one side and talked to each other. I thought they were discussing the previous teacher's instruction. Then, the other teacher spoke and I recognized that she might be rehearsing her teaching by using colored pencils. She distributed one colored pencil to each of us. Everyone had a different color. She also spoke in the Karen language so I couldn't understand. Sometimes, they raised their colored pencils and repeated a word together. So I guessed that she told a story about the colors and, whenever she mentioned a specific color, she instructed the student who had it to raise the colored pencil and repeat the word of the color. Compared with the previous teacher, she was more proficient; maybe she was a more experienced teacher. Suddenly, I thought that if a teacher taught and spoke only in the Thai language to indigenous students, they might feel just like me now! (pre-service training, participant observation, 11 May 2015).



Figure 5.1 Rehearsals for the New Class in Pre-Service Training

In the Khun Tae School case, the local teachers participated in pre-service trainings four times from February to May. It meant that after the school was selected to implement the MTB-MLE program in February, FAL opened training sessions to prepare for a new class and to improve the local teachers' capacities before a new semester began in May. The training sessions covered the following topics – developing a primer, developing lesson plans for the first semester of KG1 level, producing materials and, improving teaching skills.

Moyo (2008) pointed out that most NGOs working at the local level have a

tendency to ensure some knowledge from experts is passed on local participants and they persuade the government or outside agencies to teach this knowledge not once but repeatedly. This repetition allows the local participants to adopt a skill, technology or idea better. FAL also tries to empower the main participants as much as they can so they allocate much of their time and budget for teacher trainings. During my data collection period, I joined in two pre-service trainings in March and May and found out how much FAL set a premium on improving local teachers' capacities and confidence. Ortiz asserted that the IBE program is not developed by state educational policy or state efforts, rather by "individual efforts of the individual schools or individual teachers" leading the results (2007: 109). This aspect is applied to FAL's case, too.

The major purpose of teacher trainings is to empower them as teachers. Khun Tae School had three local teachers even before implementing the MTB-MLE program but two of the teachers at the kindergarten level were unstable in their positions and salaries. Even though they taught students, they didn't seem to be "real" teachers with a good career path and their salaries didn't reach the standard level. After their involvement the MTB-MLE program, these two teachers improved their teaching skills and their salary was supported by Child's Dream. All of the local teachers said they benefited and enjoyed from the trainings, while "improving my teaching skill and producing educational material by myself." This confidence in their teaching skills naturally led them to try the new methodology in their practical classes without any outside pressure. Min, teacher for KG2, proved this impact by saying,

"Even I don't start teaching through the new developed curriculum and materials yet anyway I try to urge students to think more through using Karen more. For example, I show a big picture and ask them like... 'what are there in the picture? what they are doing? what for?' in Karen language. But I also try to make them practice Thai language too. I repeat the sentences in Karen at first and speak again in Thai" (personal conversation, 11 September 2015).

Her class, in practical terms, will not start applying MTB-MLE based lessons until next year because they haven't been developed yet. Nonetheless, she was passionate about teaching her students in a new way because she already knew the advantages of the program. The previous pilot project school director insisted that this kind of enthusiastic teacher is a key to the program's success and it has been revealed through test results.

When FAL had a special lecture at Chiang Mai University in October, the director of FAL asked university students ‘what is your favorite or worst subject in primary school? And what is the reason?’ Eight of them answered similarly that the reason, both good and bad, was due to a teacher. At that time, the director concluded their sharing by emphasizing the importance of the teacher’s role and how much it influences learning. FAL obviously has a very clear vision regarding teacher training from an educational perspective and expects, local teachers to be key actors.

Secondly local teachers experience ethnic communalism during the pre-service trainings. From three of the start-up schools in 2015, there were together almost 20 local teachers, including bilingual government teachers, divided into three or four groups according to their shared language. Through this group work, local teachers have a chance to meet other local teachers from different communities but with the same ethnicity. They shared their knowledge about the development of the writing system for their indigenous language and helped each other to make better lesson plans and materials. In this process, their ethnic identity and solidarity became stronger while there was also some healthy competition among themselves to do better for their community’s children.

After their involvement with the MTB-MLE program, the four local teachers’ solidarity also became higher at my target school. “We have attended many meetings together and talked about school and students a lot” (Eun, personal conversation, 11 September 2015). This higher solidarity and passion for better teaching has led them to negotiate for the future as well. Discussions about the next stage of the MTB-MLE program process are one example. “We just discuss among us that when the KG1 students who learn by *tawi pasa* become G2 teaching them by me would be good” (Aek, bilingual government teacher, interview, 13 September 2015). Three of the local teachers’ positions have been designated solely at the kindergarten level and at the G1 level; however, the bilingual government teacher is in charge of a different grade every year. Thus, they all together planned to make the bilingual government teacher be in charge of G2 so the MTB-MLE program will be continuous from KG1 to G2. The decision cannot be made now and it’s just one of their plans but they might be negotiating in the future with other government teachers and the principal to make it happen.

Besides, they are concerned about the future of the program, FAL and Child's Dream's support will end in five years; these teachers want to keep the program going for their community's development. They are willing to persuade other people to sustain it because they believe it has had a real good impact on their children. Most educational development projects are facing this sustainability issue but, in the case of Khun Tae School, it is possible that it could be sustained without outside support..

"I will try to help people to sustain this program. If there are no more support then maybe my salary will be decreased like before but I want to keep teaching" (Min, local teacher, interview, 14 September 2015).

"To sustain this program after finishing the support from outside, we need to seek for other external funds. Even the project finish, I will reuse the curriculum and materials for students. I will keep teaching this way" (Eun, local teacher, interview, 14 September 2015).

Notwithstanding that their salary would be reduced in the future, they want to keep teaching their community's students, particularly in the way of the MTB-MLE program. This strong solidarity among the local teachers and passion to improve their students' education is a core element to sustain the education development projects.

5.2 Accumulation of Education Materials

The MTB-MLE program is a kind of alternative education approach because its key characteristic is not only teaching mother tongue but also producing and gathering resources for the class from the community. The director of FAL reified this idea about the program by saying "In our MTB-MLE, there are two parts; language as a subject itself and the subject inquired to use their mother tongue" (Wanna, interview, 24 October 2015). In order to run a MTB-MLE program in the classroom, lesson plans are required to teach both indigenous language as a subject and, at the same time, other subjects through indigenous language and knowledge. Thus, all the materials which are used in each lesson should be prepared with resources gathered from the community. For around ten years, FAL has primarily developed lesson plans and materials for teaching each target indigenous language (language as a subject). Recently, it has also tried to emphasize the teaching of other subjects based on the indigenous language and community environment, too.

There have hardly been any materials developed to teach diverse indigenous languages in Thailand even though many materials and lesson models exist to teach other country's languages - such as English, Chinese, Spanish, and so on. Therefore, in order to implement an indigenous language class, everything must be developed from scratch. FAL has a list in their office stating what needs to be completed in terms of material development; primers and transitional primers, orthography development, oral development (big picture, picture stories, listening stories, song, riddle, saying or proverbs and rhyme etc.), curriculum and lesson plans, reading materials and children dictionaries. What significant is that all these categories need to be developed for each indigenous language. FAL, as of 2015, covers eight indigenous sub-groups; Mon, Hmong, Pwo Karen, S'gaw Karen, Lahu Shi (Yellow Lahu), Lahu Na (Black Lahu), Lahu Shehleh, Lawa. Before expanding the project schools from six to twenty, FAL accumulated all the materials for teaching indigenous language that are listed in as Table 5.1;

Table 5.1 Accumulated Materials Status from Six Pilot Schools (2007~2014)

No.	Category	Level*	Language and Ethnic Groups				Sub-total	Note
			Mon (มอญ)	Hmong (ม้ง)	Karen (กะเหรี่ยง)	Thai (ไทย)		
1	Big picture	PP	11	20	23		90	
		PR	36					
2	Pictures book	PP	29	21	35		181	
		PR	20					
3	Story Telling		36	36	106		178	
4	Small book	PR-L1 (ป.1)	118	108	108	54	437	depending on the student's level *D: developing
		PP-L2 (ป.2)	33	D*	16			
		PP-L3 (ป.3)		40	18			
5	Big book	PP	36	36	36		322	For Mon language, both small and big book use same 18 stories and Hmong, Karen language use 54 same stories. * developed new stories from the seminar have not been printed-out yet
		PR	54	54	54	52		
				*62				

*Level: PP (pre-primary level), PR (primary/elementary level)

Table 5.1 (continued)

No.	Category	Level*	Language and Ethnic Groups				Sub-total	Note
			Mon (มอญ)	Hmong (หม้ง)	Karen (กะเหรี่ยง)	Thai (ไทย)		
6	Lesson for reading & writing		1	1	1		3	Local language lessons are planned as different number of lesson times according to the number of ethnic groups
7	Practice for reading and writing	PP	2	2	2		13	practice for kindergarten level, composed with alphabet writing through dotted letter
		PR	3	2	2			practice for Grade1(ป.1) is focusing on the local language use, practice for Grade2(ป.2) is for picture explanation and composed with lining matching work, for Grade3(ป.3) is with short story and questions in 1 page (1 story for 1 week)
8	Linking-textbook	PP-L1 (ป.1)	1	1	1		11	1 package of lessons has several lessons
		PP-L2 (ป.2)	2	2	2			
9	Lesson Plan	PR-L1 (ป.1)	36	36	36		279	1 package of lessons includes many subjects
		PR-L2 (ป.2)	36	36	36			
		PP-L1 (ป.1)	7	7	7			
		PP-L2 (ป.2)	7	7	7			
		PP-L3 (ป.3)	7	7	7			
10	Dictionary		1				1	not finished yet and being revised now
11	Song		36	58	20		114	
12	Postcard						15	

The notable numbers of accumulated material are big books and small books. These are the basic materials for the KG2 class. At the kindergarten level, these books are written in mother tongue and, after students learn the Thai language from the primary level on, teachers use two kinds: one in mother language and one in the Thai language. A book needs two elements to be produced - a story and drawings are needed for each page. These two elements are developed by the teachers and villagers. Big pictures and picture books are the other significant material. This shows that not only does FAL emphasize helping students feel comfortable through the use of their mother language, they also give students more chances to think and talk. Through the big pictures and picture books (which contain no

writing), teachers can show and give diverse questions to the students so they can practice analyzing, remembering and imagining skills. The pictures mostly describe their community's environment, life style and culture. They are also developed by local people.

A great deal of cooperation between FAL and the local people is necessary to develop all such materials. When I asked about this specific negotiation with local people, FAL explicitly stated that;

“We have a MOU between community and FAL, not real MOU but a kind of statement, agreement. In the beginning, we said that ‘if you want our project then the community must help school for producing materials’ If they don’t help, we cannot run program” (Panne, staff of FAL, interview, 27 August 2015).

The approval and agreement on this point from the local people is counted as a very essential feature in FAL's MTB-MLE program's process. I think this factor can be the foundation or ground that helps identify FAL not only as an educational institute but also as an organization concerned with indigenous people's rights and improving their identity. In the process of material development, FAL has developed some principles to maximize both educational effectiveness and indigenous knowledge preservation. Hillmer (2013) admitted that FAL's MTB-MLE program is designed to incorporate these materials (which include cultural elements or indigenous knowledge of each community) into the curriculum alongside the Thai curriculum standards. As I have previously discussed, in order to carry out the MTB-MLE program in the public school system, FAL necessarily follows the standard curriculum while simultaneously trying to utilize different contents and methodologies in a Thai context. Mahidol University and FAL both refers to Malone's nine activities for strengthening MTB-MLE in this way (see chapter 2.4).

The obvious reason for utilizing community resources in the MTB-MLE class is related to educational theory. FAL understands that many indigenous villages are in remote areas, particularly those in the mountainous areas of Northern Thailand. Students in these remote villages sometimes don't know or have had any experience of the things they see in their national text-books. But in order to improve their learning and thinking skills, children need to start learning and thinking from more familiar things. This idea relates to the 'Fund of Knowledge theory.' Fund of Knowledge theory evinces that when a gap exists between the students' own knowledge and those of their teachers and/or school lessons, students are left at a disadvantage due to a fundamental

lack of comprehension (Irvine, 2003; Rosebery, McIntyre, & Gonzalez, 2001; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992 cited in Hogg, 2011: 667). This idea is further revealed through an episode that happened at Khun Tae School.

“Once I tried to give students an example with *farang* (guava) because it is very usual fruit to Thai people. But nobody understood! I explained its color, size and shape but couldn’t succeed. Finally I asked to other local teachers and used the [S’gaw] Karen word then they could understand. I found out later that in Khun Tae there is *farang* but it was much smaller size and different size!!” (Por, government teacher, interview, 14 September 2015)

Higher grade students enjoy watching television and surely understand more about what they are watching in a general Thai context. They also don’t have much difficulty understanding Thai textbooks and their teacher’s explanations. But, in the lower grades, often times a lack of comprehension prevails. Hence, FLA encourages local people to develop many lesson themes, stories, drawings and songs based in their own community context.

“For example, in the season around November, all the villagers in Khun Tae are busy to do harvest so the theme is about ‘harvest’. [Along with this theme] big book, small book and story-telling are talking about harvest” (Por, staff of FAL, interview, 16 September 2015).

This content is made possible due to the ‘30% local curriculum policy’ allowed by Thai education reforms based on the government’s espoused goal of decentralization. This accumulation of education materials based on the indigenous community can be a good example of how local NGOs have played an intermediating role between government policy and practical needs at the local communities.

5.3 Practical Process of Material Development in Ban Khun Tae School

5.3.1 What is Indigenous Knowledge in Khun Tae?

When a school decides to apply for the MTB-MLE program with FAL, the local people need to put their stories into the educational materials for classes. Then what kinds of things and to what extent are local people aware of their indigenous knowledge and community environment? My research cannot touch on all of the twenty communities involved with the MTB-MLE program so I only analyze the case of Khun Tae.

Khun Tae villagers still maintain to a great extent their S'gaw Karen lifestyle in regards to food, clothing and shelter. Most of the people who remain in the village are farmers like most of the traditional Karen people living in the mountains. There have been changes over time; some new types of cash crops are now raised because they produce more income. Almost all grandmothers wear the traditional Karen style of headscarf, big earrings, woven skirt and sewed shirt in daily life.

“My mom has a full-set of Karen style wearing when she goes to Chom Thong city! It's hot to wear it but she kept the headscarf, too! Once I asked to her why she kept the obtrusive style in the city then she answered that the only she knows as beauty and decoration is that since she was young” (Onn, personal conversation, 17 November 2015).

However, the currents students' parents' generation doesn't wear traditional clothing often; they only put it on when they go to church or temple and for special events. The students and local teachers wear it every Friday like in other Thai public institutions. In the past, most of the girls who are over 13~15 years-old learned how to weave in the traditional way by handloom but, after these children started being sent to school, the next generation didn't learn it at home. Thus, only 20~30 % of the current students' mothers' generation, aged 20~35, can weave by handloom and make their traditional skirts. Whereas, 70~80% of mothers can make traditional shirts that require sewing so it was often possible for me to observe the sewing their shirts in their free time. When they gathered together, the mothers often talked about how to make new patterns.

Each household owns a wooden house where, in the center, the traditional fire system functions for cooking and heating, as Figure 5.2. And if the households are economically stable, they tend to build up an extra house (wooden or cement house) and use the traditional wooden one as a kitchen. This means that most of the villagers still cook using the traditional fire system in the house. Many old people prefer it for indoor heating. In the village, there is only one noodle shop and five other small shops that sell staples necessary for daily living. Thus, the villagers usually cook everyday using the crops they cultivate or the herbs, fruits and vegetables they pick from the surrounding countryside.



Figure 5.2 Traditional Fire System in Wooden House of Khun Tae

Even though they live primarily a traditional Karen lifestyle, many villagers couldn't easily answer easily to what kinds of '*kwam ru thong thin* (local knowledge)' or '*phumi pan ya dang doen* (traditional wisdom)' is present in Khun Tae. When I did the formal interviews, it was difficult to listen to their diverse and detailed answers. Many people, including the leader of village, generally mentioned only a couple of traditional rituals such as *mat mu* (มัดมือ: bundle up the wrist) and *songkran* (สงกรานต์: new year) as representative of their community culture. I necessarily relied on information gathered from personal conversations and observation. My gate keeper enumerated other aspects of community culture (she wouldn't give me these examples all at once but it took some time) that included "weaving (การทอผ้า), herbal medicine (สมุนไพร), folk midwives (หมอตำแย), funeral (งานศพ), calling back souls (เรียกขวัญ) and farming (ทำนา)" (Onn, local teacher, personal conversation, 10 September 2015) She explained that there are now two midwives in the village so some women deliver a baby with their help in an emergency situation but usually people go to the hospital in Chom Thong. Wedding and funeral ceremonies are performed differently depending on the villager's religion so she couldn't explain well what other families' traditions looked like, only what is common to Catholics like herself. For instance, her wedding ceremony was done in the Catholic way.

This confirms what Prasert (2007) has remarked that, among the younger generation and particularly among Christian converts, their traditions have tended to disappear since 1980.

I was able to listen in detail to another key informant whose family doesn't believe in any specific religion and still follows the traditional S'gaw Karen way of wedding and funerals.⁴⁸ He emphasized the funeral ritual of chanting because it is very long but there is no book for it. This means that chanting for S'gaw Karen funerals has been passed down orally and usually only the old people can still do it. This was the case with my informant; he could not do the chanting and he was afraid that it will soon disappear. Like him, many parents who I interviewed thought that Khun Tae village would change a lot in the near future because younger generations have gone out to study or to work. It implies that they have not valued highly the kinds of indigenous knowledge they have in the village until now or how they can preserve it. However, this doesn't mean that they aren't willing to help maintain it for the future or aren't concerned about this issue.

The current students' parents' generation expected their children will be able to keep their identity as Karen, "[Keeping Karen's identity] is not too difficult because children live [with me] until grade six in the village so they can keep it" (a mother no.3, interview, 14 September 2015). But they didn't mean that maintaining the same identity means their children will live the same lifestyle as their parents. Most of them would prefer their children have "a better job" which implies both at higher income and more comfortable work in the city. Then what is the identity which Khun Tae people have a will to preserve for next generation? According to Yang's ethnographical research (2005: 175) which examined the life histories of nine Karen women (aged from twenty one to forty three) who were either resettled or immigrated to the USA, Karen's identity is exemplified by cultural aspects categorized with "symbols, characteristics, and

⁴⁸ When he married, he had a ceremony lasting four days and three nights. People celebrated for two days in his wife's village then some of her family members moved to his village to celebrate for two days. During this celebration, the bride and groom changed their previous shirts to new, different colored ones because the shirt's color is a symbol of a married man and woman. For funerals, people spend different time period, from the two days to seven days. During night time, one group is composed of the older generation and they do chanting from 6 to 9 PM and then the younger generation sits with the body while singing songs from 10 PM to 5 AM. (Aek, personal conversation, 11 September 2015)

values.”⁴⁹ These categorized identities are also relevant to Khun Tae villagers today. Even though people didn’t always recognize these characteristics by themselves, they still maintain their symbols, characteristics and above all, believe that such wisdom should be kept in the village for “respecting old people” (a villager no.6, interview, 17 November 2015). This is one of the ‘values’ that is viewed by Yang’s informants as one of the most important elements needing preservation.

In conclusion, the current students’ parents’ generation, particularly interviewees in this research with age spectrum from 25 to 35 years old, tends not to clearly recognize their indigenous knowledge in Khun Tae village. They don’t particularly care where their children will live in the future either (some parents prefer to let them live in the city because their village might be uncomfortable for them due to the lack of facilities, infrastructures). But all of them hope that their culture and identity can be maintained into the next generation. Prasert (2007: 28) described Karen people as those who “have a strong sense of identity related to place, the village in particular, as both the social and cultural fulcrum of existence.” This, however, does not seem to apply every community and every generation. The Khun Tae case shows that Karen people, particularly the younger generation in their twenties and thirties, are of two minds about their community as it relates to their children’s education issue. And this factor influences the MTB-MLE program’s implementation at the local level.

5.3.2 Process of Material Development

To carry out the MTB-MLE program in the classroom, many preparation steps are required. The following process is based on a FAL staff interview (Por, 16 September 2015);

- Stage 1. Developing primer using Thai alphabet: by local teachers
- Stage 2. Developing weekly themes based on community schedule or events and adopting it to lesson plan and curriculum for 38 weeks : by local teachers

⁴⁹ These three categories are; “The symbols include the drum, flag, horn, clothes, and language. The characteristics ascribed to being Karen are: shy, compliant, peaceful, innocent, pure, and honest”. The most important values are appreciating and showing respect to the elders and together, these are the “defining factor in being Karen” (2005: 175).

Stage 3. Developing materials such as big pictures, big books, small books etc.
: by villagers and local teachers

The first developed materials for the MTB-MLE class were primers for S’gaw Karen language using the Thai alphabet. Sometimes, there is a debate about developing the primer based on the Thai alphabet; FAL usually has had to ask for the approval of those communities that they have their own writing system. The development of the primers is conducted with the help of linguists but the local people’s exact speaking sound is fundamental to this effort. Usually this process is done by the local teachers group but, if the same ethnic group had previously initiated this program, then it can be developed faster. Even within the same ethnic group there are often differences depending on the region; thus. FAL does this process very sensitively in order to produce what is most apt for the children. In the case of Khun Tae School, four of the local teachers and the local teachers at the other start up school, Huai Nam Khao, developed twenty three primers of consonants from February to May as Figure 5.3.



Figure 5.3 Primer for S’gaw Karen Language Using Thai Alphabet

Next, weekly themes and lesson plans based on the community's schedule or events for 38 weeks need to be developed. The 38 weeks covers the two semesters for one grade so this process is repeated every year until the school completes all lesson plans for KG1 to G3. Since the MTB-MLE class begins for the children entering the KG1 level, teachers need to prepare for the inaugural class's next level curriculum in advance of the new semester. In this process, FAL gives as a sample curriculum of an existing one from the previous school cases but this curriculum is seen as only an example and isn't fixed. This is because the context of each school and community is different and needs to be developed by themselves. "We just show them some examples. Every material is all done by them. Schools which are newly involved refer to already existed lesson plan and curriculum by pilot project schools" (Por, staff of FAL, interview, 16 September 2015). After Khun Tae School joined in this program, the four local teachers spent their term break time on developing materials. In March and May, they made 38 weekly themes and lesson plans for the first semester of Kindergarten level one and in October they completed the second semester lesson plan for KG1. Although technically there is only one teacher for KG1, the other three local teachers worked with her to make them. When I visited the school in November, the teacher of KG1 ran her class based on the new lesson plan which includes learning the Karen alphabet and listening to Thai basic words based on the Total Physical Response (TPR)⁵⁰ methodology. There are some local teachers who have never learned about such special education, but they also try to make their own lessons.

During the third stage, the local villagers' cooperation is absolutely necessary to make materials such as big books, small books⁵¹ and big pictures, etc. In this year, a team from FAL visited Khun Tae School and had three meetings with the local people while the class for the inaugural children was running in the KG1 classroom. When they had a meeting for developing stories for KG2 for the next year, local teachers invited

⁵⁰ Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method developed by James Asher, a professor emeritus of psychology at San José State University. It is based on the coordination of language and physical movement.

⁵¹ Small books are to be handed out to each student, 6~8 pages with simple sentences and drawings whereas big books are used for showing and reading together in a class with colorful drawings and are not distributed.

the parents, particularly those whose children were KG1 or KG2. It encourages more active participation by the parents of the fourteen students of KG1 class and consequently, eight mothers participated in developing stories activities during the first semester of 2015 (May ~ November). One of the mothers who was involved in the work of developing materials said, “I’m happy for that my child will learn through the materials which I made” (a mother no.1, interview, 13 September 2015). In the second semester in 2015, there will be more meetings to complete the 38 stories for big books.

When I attended the second meeting for Khun Tae School material development on 10th and 11th August with three FAL staff members, on the first day there were five mothers present and, on the next day, three more mothers participated. The four of local teachers also attended. The meeting’s focus was searching subjects for the big book stories. When it started, one of the FAL staff briefly explained again about the MTB-MLE program. It seemed that this same message was repeated every time in order to improve the local people’s understanding. Before starting to make stories in earnest, the S’gaw Karen staff showed one sample big book made in the S’gaw Karen language based on the Thai alphabet to help the mothers understand the methodology. There are 38 categories and the mothers and the local teachers discussed which item was most appropriate for each category for making stories. For instance, when the topic was ‘(a) fruit(s) in my village’, they selected ‘strawberry’. In this process, it was obviously revealed that the principle of material development based on community environment and culture was realized when a mother remarked, “we don’t have that [sample book mentioned] fruit, instead of it we grow strawberry or persimmon!” (a mother, material development meeting, 10 August 2015).

Though the FAL staff explained what they thought was the best way to make stories, it was not easy for the group to immediately write stories. After all the items were selected, they didn’t begin writing actual stories right away. Many of the participants had difficulty to write in Thai so the FAL staff and the local teachers helped them individually. For this reason, during the two days, they made up few stories. More works needed to be done before the start of the next semester. The mothers who participated were often hesitant and had difficulties doing the work, but most of them seemed to enjoy it.



Figure 5.4 Meeting for Developing Big Book Stories with Khun Tae People

The other important element for developing materials is drawing. Actually, the stories for children in the lower grades are quite simple since they learn only basic words. The drawings, however, on each page must show extensive background features and the teachers need to be able to give diverse explanations or ask diverse questions through their use. The drawings can be done by any local person who has good drawing ability and, in the case of Khun Tae School, one of the local teachers is responsible for it. The artist mentioned that “when I’m drawing, I try to keep in mind that main characters are Karen with our clothes and background is our village. It is quite tough work but very interesting” (Onn, local teacher, personal conversation, 16 November 2015). According to the FAL staff, when students read books developed by local people, they easily understand the contents and even though they cannot read letters, they can attempt to make similar stories because they are familiar with the background in the books.

5.3.3 Difficulties and Limitations: Lack of Gender Balance and Barrier of Educational Background

In terms of participation in the development of materials, there is a lack of gender balance - all of the participants at Khun Tae School are mothers. It doesn’t mean that the fathers don’t know or care about the MTB-MLE program. From the first official meeting with FAL at the school to the orientation meeting that followed at the FAL office last May,

some of the fathers attended.⁵² Three of the fathers and two of the mothers joined in the study trip to Ban Pui School, one of the pilot schools, in November. The general gender ratio of participation for MTB-MLE implementation seems balanced; however, the activities for developing materials have been done only by the mothers group. When one takes into account the activity times, this fact is a natural situation because developing materials is done in the day time when most males in the village are working. There also some mothers who work in the day time too and who cannot attend.

The other limitation of this process is the barrier of Thai language ability which is deep intertwined with educational background. “I don’t want to rejoin in the meeting because I am not useful. I cannot write Thai” (a mother no.2, interview, 13 September 2015). One of my interviewees who used to participate in meetings for developing small book stories expressed that she didn’t want to join again. She doesn’t have any educational background in terms of the public school system so she has difficulty using the Thai language. Even while being interviewed, she kept asking my gate keeper in Karen about my questions so the interview was conducted in triple translation. The process of material development doesn’t require any particular eligibility to participate and is open to anybody from the village but, since most of the activities are related to creating stories or drawings, it’s a problem when a participant doesn’t have much ability for doing it. This discourages some from being actively involved. From my observation, the FAL staff both kindly explained and helped those people who couldn’t understand. But local people felt pressured to produce results so some participants were left feeling depressed.

Wide and active participation in the production of materials was limited by, in my opinion, a lack of consideration. If meeting times were expanded or changed to evening time, then people who worked during the day would also be available to express their ideas in this process. And not only mothers but also some of the local elders and specialists could have been invited. Then the production of materials could include a wider variety of indigenous knowledge from the community that was more specialized than just what the young mothers were cognizant of. Furthermore, even when the activities are related to story

⁵² Among the fourteen fathers of KG1 students, four fathers attended the first official meeting with FAL at the school and the other fathers of students in the other grades students’ were also there (Eun, local teacher, interview, 18 November 2015).

making, there are diverse methodologies for collecting stories and ideas; for example, recording an oral storyteller or typing their words when they are speaking. This more active and open approach could solve these limitations, I think.

5.4 Regenerated Indigenous Knowledge

While there are strong arguments against MTB-MLE, as mentioned in chapter 4.2, the Khun Tae community's people generally accepted the use of the Thai alphabet for teaching their mother language. Most of the parents who I interviewed wanted Khun Tae School to provide better education of English and Thai language for their children but they also agreed for the school to teach the Karen language. The primary reason is definitely due to the information from FAL that teaching using the Karen language is more effective and efficient for their children's learning ability in school. Another reason is that many of the adults in the village don't know how to read and write so they want to give the children opportunities which they didn't have when they were young.

The Ethnologue (2015) classified S'gaw Karen language as a 'developing language status (level 5)'⁵³ used by 200,000 in Tak, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, Kanchanaburi, and Kamphaeng Phet provinces, near the Myanmar border of Thailand. It means that the "language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form, being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable" (Ethnologue, 2015). The language status of Khun Tae community, however, seems not to reach this level because their standardized form of literature is not unified. Again, there are two kinds of writing systems - one in the Roman alphabet and one using the Burmese alphabet - and institutional or community supports were not visible before the involvement of the MTB-MLE program.

The first stage of the educational material development process is developing or reorganizing the primer of each indigenous language. In this process, the FAL staff and

⁵³ According to Ethnologue (2015), there is a standard named as Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) and it consists of 13 levels to indicate the status of each language. And the developing label indicates that the language "brings into focus the degree to which the ongoing use of the language is supported and reinforced by the use of the language in education. This largely focuses around issues of standardization and literacy acquisition and the degree to which those are institutionally supported and have been adopted by the community of language users."

other linguists guide the local teachers so local teachers wholly understand their language structure, feature and the system based on the Thai alphabet. According to one of my interviews, it inspires them a lot because they used to feel lacking in their education from never having had a chance to learn reading and writing in Karen.

“Learning Karen language, it was the most impressive to me because I couldn’t write Karen language correctly. FAL helped me to correct my Karen language, how to use our language exactly. I wish other people in our village can read and write our language properly” (Min, local teacher, interview, 13 September 2015).

Thus, the MTB-MEL program ultimately leads to the regeneration and sustainability of indigenous language in the community. FAL is a linguistics discipline-based organization so its mission is to not only help disadvantaged indigenous students improve their learning process through the use of their mother tongue but also prevent diverse languages from extinction. This effort to prevent indigenous languages’ extinction comes from the Mahidol University’s groundwork, carried out as the ‘Chong language revitalization program’ in 2000. It notably showed the impact of “maintaining their language and culture” (Suwilai and Malone, 2003: 6). It denotes that even though the MTB-MLE program was initially suggested to improve indigenous students’ learning abilities, it is also deeply linked with the issue of indigenous language preservation. A local teacher’s comment underpinned these aspects when she said;

“For Khun Tae, a NGO is the key group to try preserving our language. Actually there wasn’t any effort from the community. Not only about the language but other things like culture which should be passed from one generation to other generation is not obvious these days” (Aek, bilingual government teacher, interview, 13 September 2015).

Some people have started noticing the possibility of indigenous language preservation through the MTB-MLE program. Most of my interviewees thought that indigenous language is a representative element or container for other indigenous knowledge. Gradually people have seen the correlation between the MTB-MLE program and their indigenous knowledge.

The MTB-MLE program has had another substantial impact as well – it has helped regenerate community culture, indigenous livelihood etc. which is conceptualized as

indigenous knowledge in this research. According to my analysis of the stories and drawings developed during this year for KG2, it shows that even the young adults' generation cannot always recognize their indigenous knowledge but it has not been forgotten. Most of the stories for KG2 are very simple because they were developed for the very first level of language learning. They show how Khun Tae people generally live in daily life with very ordinary ideas expressed like friendship, family affection, farming, and so on. But there are some significant stories that elucidate the values held in the community that speak to their general life philosophy, the ways to behave or solve problems in specific situation, the characters of Karen people and livelihood based-skills (as Figure 5.5 and Appendix B). It reinforces the fact that the MTB-MLE program is a tool to regenerate IK. Above all else, this regenerated indigenous knowledge is developed in the forms of books, drawings, songs etc. Therefore, the MTB-MLE program helps to store the indigenous knowledge, too.



Figure 5.5 A Sample of Picture Book for KG2, Developed by Khun Tae People

The research about the MTB-MLE pilot projects of Hmong schools declared that this program offers the opportunity for children to “be proud of their dual identity as Thai citizens who are also Hmong, beginning from their familiar surroundings” (Dooley,

2013: 27). It can be assumed that Khun Tae students will receive similar benefits soon. However, in the first year of the program's implementation, this phenomenon was observed most prominently in the adults who participated in the material development activities because they came to reconsider their indigenous knowledge and ethnical identity through this undertaking.

When I asked the mothers who had ever participated in activities about some of the stories that they had made, then they enthusiastically explained the most impressive one with some shyness. It is not a very special story, a quite ordinary story about their daily life, but they were excited when they answered. As one mother mentioned, "I feel so good for using our life story but I don't know whether it would be good impact or not" (a mother no.1, interview, 13 September 2015). Even though they cannot see the impact now, they know that what they are developing is about their own life. Most of the participants felt satisfied and proud because they perceived that their children will learn through what they developed and it will be helpful for their children's learning. This experience made them willing to help in material development activities again.

FAL gradually emphasized the purpose and benefit of the MTB-MLE program from the perspective of inclusion of the local culture and the intention of letting students learn about the value of their culture through diverse activities (Min, local teachers, interview, 14 September 2015). People who were exposed to these activities several times readily, accepted this point. The intensive relationship between educational materials and indigenous knowledge is observed in other contexts. Estrada's research (2012) about Guatemalan education which tries to include indigenous Maya knowledge through the Maya Tzolk'in calendar showed that, Guatemalan educators needed to discover many stories with the help of local participants. In this process, most of the participants recognized that their "identity is passed down through stories" (2012: 29) and the stories "hold part of Maya indigenous knowledge" (2012: 68) which is still valuable to them.

Herein, the local teachers' conception about this activity is crucial because they take the role of both motivator and convener. Their understanding and thought processed on this subject became very clear in November compared with the first time I had conversation with them in May. In May, they perceived the impact of the MTB-

MLE program was related only to the language issue and mentioned that “the language will be sustained by FAL’s help in this chance but other things like culture which should be preserved are not ok and I don’t know its future” (Aek, bilingual government teacher, personal conversation, 19 May 2015). However, after experiencing the program for six months, they understood the MTB-MLE program in the following two ways;

“one is teaching mother language based on new materials is benefit for students’ better and active learning in school and another is developing materials process is benefit for preservation of our community culture and wisdom” (Aek, bilingual government teachers, interview, 18 November 2015).

This clear understanding formed through the frequent trainings and meetings with FAL has led to the fruitful products containing the indigenous knowledge of Khun Tae. Castellano (2000) pointed out that indigenous knowledges and their contemporary applications are fluid and can adapt to changing contexts (cited in Estrada, 2012: 23) and this applicability is realized through this education program in Thailand.

To sum up, the MTB-MLE program has impact not only for students’ better education in school but also for regeneration of indigenous knowledge, especially indigenous language. When FAL negotiates with local people to initiate the MTB-MLE program, they mainly use the strategy of educational impact for children in school. However, in the procedure of the program’s implementation (through their participation in its related activities), the local people have come to both recognize and re-identify with their cultural and ethnical features and want to pass them down to the next generation. Since the developed materials such as stories, drawings and songs etc. contain each local community’s indigenous knowledge, the MTB-MLE program can be assessed as a tool for regeneration of indigenous knowledge.

5.5 Constructing Knowledge Space from Local

The MTB-MLE program can be seen as the kind of case which is designed and promoted by outside experts and implemented through a NGO-led project. However, it is also characterized by extensive participation by local people whose cooperation is an essential prerequisite for practical program operation. Local people take a role not only in accepting and approving the program through negotiation with the NGO but also by playing their own role in regenerating their indigenous knowledge. The driving force of

this active participation is due to their children' and community's future. In the Khun Tae case, even though they have just embarked on this adventure (not even a year has passed yet), some of the active local people appear to have been sufficiently, motivated and empowered as to voluntarily develop IK for their community. Moreover, there are a couple of significant reactions and interpretations from local people, dispelling the oppositions or worries to the MTB-MLE program expressed before its inception.

The first issue is the program's sustainability. The MTB-MLE program as applied to public school, the six pilot project schools and the three start-up schools, have economic sponsors i.e., PCF, Child's Dream and OBEC. Hence, like many other educational development projects, MTB-MLE can be terminated when this support is withdrawn or when FAL faces other difficulties. Most of the local people have never thought about future plans or the issue of the program's sustainability but some of them have already considered it. Among the participants that developed materials, some admitted that the MTB-MLE program is a valuable tool which should be sustained into the future. "Without FAL support, our village can support and extend it. I heard that if we can complete all materials then they (FAL) will give all to us so we can use it for a long time" (a mother no.8, interview, 17 November 2015). Some parents showed hesitation and were uncertain about whether all the villagers would support this program after the outsiders' help finished, especially the economic mobilization required to sustain it. However, my interview with the head of the village and *sor tor* explicitly showed that they do have the will to keep it going as long as it proves to have a good impact on the students. This phenomenon was observed in other study; Moyo contends that giving "the power (authority) and responsibility to manage themselves" (2008: 135) makes any program geared by NGOs sustainable and, if the indigenous knowledge and their own resources are emphasized, then their power and responsibility are increased.

On the other hand, four of the local teachers strongly believe that they will keep this program going until they realize fully the positive impact and improvement from the students, even after the support from FAL and Child's Dream ceases after five years. They are willing to help develop their community and they agree that educational development is a necessary part of community development. From their experience,

they don't expect a big change from the nation-state to improve education, particularly for indigenous students. Therefore, they want to utilize this chance to make a change their school and try to make full use all trainings and developed materials that have been produced in conjunction with FAL. The most notable fact observed in the second semester at Khun Tae School is that now the local teachers have a collective plan to teach their own writing system from G1 level. Until now, the MTB-MLE program in Thailand has been developed to teach indigenous language through using the Thai alphabet and the indigenous writing system is usually taught from G4 to G6 once or twice a week in the 'local curriculum' class. As I have demonstrated several times, the original program doesn't acknowledge that it is even necessary to use the second language writing system to foster better adaptation. For reasons of national security, this is an unique case in Thailand. When I met the local teachers in November, they fully understood about the MTB-MLE program and they wanted to teach their own alphabet, too. It dispels some of the concerns of the MTB-MLE program's contesters. One local teacher confessed that this has required people to think separately between the issue of language usage from a conservative perspective and the issue of language use for improvement of indigenous students' education.

This active interpretation of the program verifies a case of creative compromise in the practice of NGO-led development. Delcore's life history research (2004) illustrates the leaders' role and capacity in the process of NGO-led projects between a NGO and local farmers in an agriculture development project in Nan province of Thailand. He gave an example of a leader as a significant case and depicted him as "occupying a middle ground between the NGO workers and the farmers involved in NGO projects; at times they approximated sustainable development ideals, yet they also retained some typical farmer sensibilities" (Delcore, 2004: 38). I think that this aspect is found in the local teachers in the Khun Tae case.

However, the highly recommended local people's participation has another side to be considered. As I argued in chapter 3, the MTB-MLE program is situated in the third space and this knowledge space is created by the NGO's intermediating action. During the implementation of the MTB-MLE program, indigenous knowledge should be utilized as a key element as it exists in the indigenous community itself. However, the

indigenous people in Khun Tae community showed uncertain attitudes about their indigenous language and even what remains of their indigenous knowledge isn't valued properly in terms of their children's education. This situation reminds me Hayami's claim that even in Karen communities, the opinions about indigenous knowledge is "neither uniformed nor shared" (1997: 576) and there is a gap among the diverse ethnicities.

Of course, there is one more big point to consider: that is the powerful and broad institutionalism of the public school system and indigenous people's mainstreaming in public education. It might lead indigenous people away from the integration of indigenous knowledge and active participation in the issue of their education. In this regard, it is necessary to redefine indigenous knowledge in the education field for the people who always practice and hold it. After people redefine their indigenous knowledge, they then become active subjects to "reinvent, resist and recreate it in diverse way" (Wright, 2005; 918). As it was observed from the farmers in the Puno of the Philippines, I conceptualized this new alternative way of debate based on a certain knowledge as 'knowledge space'. I analyzed the concept of knowledge space and tried to find some strategies to create a new knowledge space through distinct examples previously outlined in chapter 1.6. According to that analysis, to construct a knowledge space, there are three necessary elements: clear collective identity, a process for redefining and reproducing cultural images and a NGO's articulation. Surprisingly, these factors are very significantly revealed in the case of the implementation of the MTB-MLE program in Northern Thailand, represented by the Khun Tae community.

It cannot be judged if people sharing the same ethnicity and living in an isolated place always have collective identity but most of the schools and villages which have applied the MTB-MLE program still retain their communal character. And, as I previously mentioned, after they were exposed to the MTB-MLE program, they redefined their indigenous knowledge related to the education issue. Even though they haven't reproduced cultural or social images in the education field by themselves yet (this part has been FAL's responsibility), they have gradually begun promoting its impacts and advantages. The last factor is the NGO's articulation, co-working with diverse actors and it has thoroughly been demonstrated in this whole study. Furthermore,

FAL believes that to make a real social movement and to form a new knowledge space, it is necessary to raise local voices.

“local communities, they really need to see the value of [MTB-]MLE project. It is really helpful to their students so I hope that the communities also advocate by themselves. Maybe someday, their voice will be louder to talk to Ministry of Education. As a partner, we also keep working with the government and with them” (Por, staff of FAL, interview, 16 September 2015)

As a staff member of FAL stressed, FAL knows that their advocacy and lobbying activities should integrate the local people’s voice, too. Therefore, I argue that creating a knowledge space based on indigenous knowledge requires redefining the existing knowledge space which has become vague in the education field as Figure 5.6. The process of redefining their own indigenous knowledge should take precedence. And then, this new knowledge space is constructed, not only by NGOs, but by the local people’ integration from within.

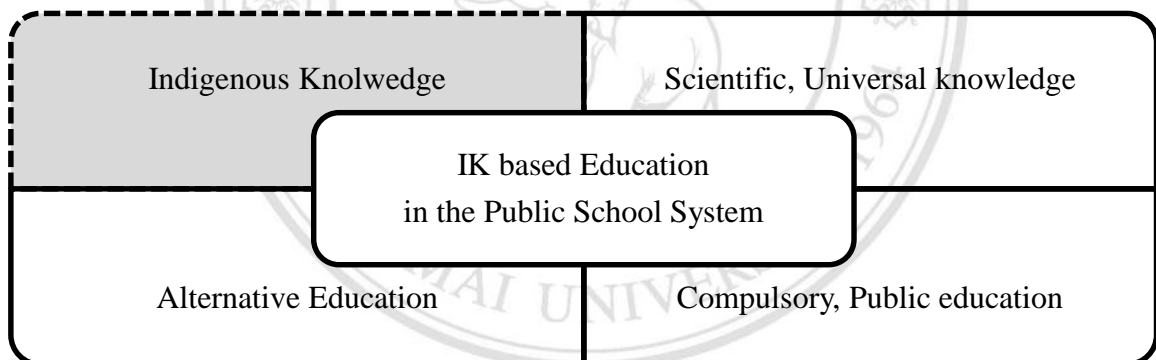


Figure 5.6 Creating New Knowledge Space of IK Education among the Existing Spaces

5.6 Summary

After the final approval of the program’s application to a school, FAL spends much time and makes great effort to do teacher trainings and material development activities. In order to implement the MTB-MLE program, local teachers should know how to teach in the classroom and new materials must be prepared such as lesson plans, books, drawings and so on in each indigenous language. FAL does much of this works because there are no developed educational materials for teaching indigenous language in Thailand, and at the same time, there are so many different kinds of indigenous languages.

In the process of training and material development, the case of Khun Tae School showed that the local teachers were able to fully understand MTB-MLE. FAL empowered them to become key actors in its promotion, development and sustainability. Local people who were deeply exposed to this program through the material development or pilot project school visiting activities, also discarded any doubts or concerns they may have previously suffered about teaching their first language to their children. They cooperated and actively participated in these activities. Besides this, they started regenerating their indigenous knowledge themselves after revaluing the use of their indigenous language in the education of their children.

FAL, which aims to create new knowledge space of indigenous language-based education methodologies (MTB-MLE program) in Thai society, also makes an effort to simultaneously regenerate the existing indigenous knowledge. It means that even if indigenous people want to preserve their indigenous knowledge, it can become vague and sometimes it is just too difficult for them to find a way to do it by themselves. Above all else, they hope to pass it down to the next generation but don't know how to utilize it for their children's education. For a long time, assimilation to mainstream education was seen as the only way for indigenous people to succeed; they simply didn't value highly their indigenous knowledge in societal terms. However, the practical implementation of this new program requires utilization of indigenous knowledge and without producing real materials which contain IK is impossible.

Hence, FAL needs to help them redefine and revalue the existing knowledge and regenerate it in terms of education for the next generation. It can be interpreted as that even though indigenous knowledge remains in some indigenous communities and at the same time, is an emerging and contesting concept in specific fields, it cannot be placed in a specific space as a clear and active concept in local reality. It has been unrecognized to date but new activities geared by NGOs for improvements in indigenous education reaffirm the existing space. Moreover, through this process, they construct a new knowledge space among the existing ones.