The School as a Learning Community: A National Survey of Primary, Secondary Schools, and Vocational Colleges in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Most research on schools as learning communities has been conducted in Western countries. Nevertheless, this Western paradigm drives educational reform policies in many developing countries. In Thailand, for example, several reform mandates call for schools to become “learning communities.”

Within this context, this symposium will present several studies analyzing the extent to which ten dimensions of school learning community characterize Thailand’s system of “basic” education.

Several questions guided the studies:

1. To what extent do the ten dimensions characterize basic education in Thailand?
2. What are the interrelationships among these dimensions?
3. At small, medium, and large primary and secondary schools, does size influence the dimensions of learning community?
4. Are any of the ten dimensions predictive of learning community?

Introduction

Clearly, the ultimate goal of schools is student learning. As such, schools, more than any other organization in our society, should be “learning organizations.” However, Peter Senge (O’Neil 1995, 20) suggested almost ten years ago that schools are not learning organizations:

A learning organization is an organization in which people at all levels are collectively, continually enhancing their capacity to create things they really want to create. And most of the educators I talk with don’t feel like they’re doing this. Most teachers feel oppressed trying to conform to all kinds of rules, goals, and objectives, many of which they don’t believe in. Teachers don’t work together; there’s very little sense of collective learning going on in most schools.
During the last decade, however, there has been a renewed quest to transform schools into learning communities. This quest is based upon the assumption that, ideally, schools would grow and develop so that they can meet the increasingly complex challenges of educating all students during the 21st century. Schools that have been transformed into learning communities would reflect five qualities that Senge (1990) has identified as characteristic of learning organizations: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared values, and team learning.

**Perspective**

Schools as learning communities has been extensively discussed, analyzed, and researched. To date, theories, research, and practice related to schools as learning communities have focused almost exclusively on the United States and other Western countries. Nevertheless, the Western paradigm of schools as learning communities has been used to develop policies for educational reform in many developing countries. Thailand is one such country—mandates contained in Thailand’s National Education Act 1999 and the *Ninth National Education Development Plan (2002-2006)* are based, in large measure, on theories, research, and practice related to schools as learning communities. (Since 1961, Thailand has given focus to educational reform efforts through its “national development” plans [each with a five-year time span]). The *Ninth Plan* is a far-reaching master plan for educational reform throughout the nation. Included in this plan are policy directives designed to transform Thailand’s schools into learning communities.

With reference to the Thai educational context, Sanrattana (2000) has synthesized the research on schools as learning communities and identified the following ten dimensions that characterize schools as learning communities: (1) presence of school effectiveness indicators, (2) professional organization, (3) shared decision making and vision, (4) self-managed group development and communication, (5) creative motivation, (6) transformational leadership, (7) creative organizational culture and climate, (8) change and innovation, (9) authentic curriculum and instruction, and (10) human resource development.

**Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this symposium is to present findings from a comprehensive set of research studies focusing on the extent to which Sanrattana’s ten dimensions of a school learning community characterize basic education in Thailand—i.e., primary and secondary schools and vocational colleges.

Several research questions provided the focus for the study:

4. To what extent do Sanrattana’s ten dimensions characterize Thailand’s system of basic education (primary and secondary schools and vocational colleges)?
5. What are the interrelationships among these ten factors?
6. With respect to small, medium, and large primary and secondary schools, does size influence the ten dimensions?
7. Are any of the ten dimensions predictive of learning community?
Methodology

Identification of Sample

The total target population for this study consisted of all of Thailand’s primary schools (N = 30,453), secondary schools (N = 6,705), and vocational colleges (N = 412). Separate studies were conducted at small, medium, and large primary and secondary schools. At the primary level, “small” = <120 pupils; “medium” = 121-600; and “large” = >601. At the secondary level, “small” = <500 pupils; “medium” = 501-1,500; and “large” = >1,501.

Instrumentation

The researchers developed a Learning Community Assessment Inventory (LCAI) consisting of 80 items based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “not characteristic of my school” and 5 = “very characteristic of my school.” Eight LCAI items were keyed to each of Sanrattana’s ten dimensions of a school as a learning community.

Using a panel of six Thai professors of educational administration, the resultant LCAI was analyzed to determine construct and content validity. In addition, the LCAI was pilot tested at 30 primary schools. Using Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha, an overall reliability of .8965 was obtained for the LCAI.

Data Collection

The research team used a simple random sampling technique based on an Internet-based list of schools maintained by Thailand’s Ministry of Education (www.moe.go.th). At each school, the school administrator randomly selected one teacher to respond to the LCAI.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by computing basic descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. Inferential statistics were used as well. A one-way ANOVA and multiple comparisons were used to test the mean differences for each pair of statistically significant items according to Scheffe’s method. In addition, a correlation coefficient analysis was used, and significance was tested by use of t-tests. Also, a multiple regression analysis and F-test were used. Lastly, a linear coefficient analysis and significance testing by t-test was used.

Educational Importance

As the nations of the world become more interdependent, the cross-national study of schools as learning communities can play an essential role in the development of educational administration policies and practices in all nations of the world. This symposium will extend our knowledge base regarding how various within-school
factors contribute to (or detract from) the school as a learning community. Moreover, it will increase our awareness of the importance of international exchanges of information on issues and problems associated with transforming schools into learning communities.

Symposium Papers


The target population for this study was 10,735 small primary schools. Using Krejcie and Morgan’s table for selecting a sample at a significance level of 0.95, a sample of 375 small primary schools was obtained. After follow-ups at each school, 347 usable LCAIs were returned, for a return rate of 92.53 percent.

The salient findings for this study indicate that, overall, the schools reflect a “high” degree (mean = 3.94) of learning community. The strongest of the ten dimensions was Creative Motivation (mean = 3.94). The weakest of the ten dimensions was Shared Decision Making (mean = 3.57).

Among most of ten dimensions that were present at a “moderate” level or higher, the correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive relationships. In addition, there were statistically significant relationships between learning community and the following dimensions, in rank order: Self-managed Group Development and Communication, Presence of School Effectiveness Indicators, Authentic Curriculum and Instruction, Creative Motivation, Human Resource Development, Creative Organizational Culture and Climate, Transformational Leadership, Change and Innovation, Professional Organization, and Shared Decision Making and Vision.

The multiple regression analysis revealed that each of the ten dimensions could predict 56.30 percent of the learning community. For the predictive equation, there were four dimensions that affect learning community at a statistically significant level: Presence of School Effectiveness Indicators, Professional Organization, Self-Managed Group Development and Communication, and Creative Organizational Culture and Climate. The predictive equation was: $Y' = 0.268 + 0.432X_1 - 0.134X_2 + 0.305X_4 + 0.152X_7$

Paper # 2 : The School as a Learning Community: A National Survey of Medium- Sized Primary Schools in Thailand. Sathaporn Yongen, and Siri Theeasana, Khon Kaen University, Thailand

The target population for this study was 18,381 medium-sized primary schools. Using Krejcie and Morgan’s table for selecting a sample at a significance level of 0.95, a sample of 377 medium-sized primary schools was obtained. After follow-ups at each school, 370 usable LCAIs were returned, for a return rate of 98.14 percent.
The salient findings for this study indicate that, overall, the schools reflect a “high” degree (mean = 3.94) of learning community. The strongest of the ten dimensions was Authentic Curriculum and Instruction (mean = 3.94). The weakest of the ten dimensions was Shared Decision Making (mean = 3.67).

Among most of ten dimensions that were present at a “high” level, the correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive relationships. In addition, there were statistically significant relationships between learning community and the following dimensions, in rank order: Self-managed Group Development and Communication, Presence of School Effectiveness Indicators, Authentic Curriculum and Instruction, Creative Motivation, Human Resource Development, Creative Organizational Culture and Climate, Transformational Leadership, Change and Innovation, Professional Organization, and Shared Decision Making and Vision.

The multiple regression analysis revealed that each of the ten dimensions could predict 73.69 percent of the learning community. For the predictive equation, there were seven dimensions that affect learning community at a statistically significant level: 1) presence of school effectiveness indicators 2) professional organization 3) self-managed group development and communication 4) human resource development 5) authentic curriculum and instruction 6) creative organizational culture and climate and 7) transformational leader. The predictive equation was: \[ Y' = 0.8062 + 0.4198X_1 + 0.1903X_2 + 0.2688X_8 + 0.2638X_{10} + 0.2361X_7 + 1.071X_6 \]

Paper #3: The School as a Learning Community: A National Survey of Large Primary Schools in Thailand. Sutep Boonterm, and Jamlong Nontpala, Khon Kaen University, Thailand

The target population for this study was 1,377 large primary schools. Using Krejcie and Morgan’s table for selecting a sample at a significance level of 0.95, a sample of 297 large primary schools was obtained. After follow-ups at each school, 267 usable LCAIs were returned, for a return rate of 89.89 percent.

The salient findings for this study indicate that, overall, the schools reflect a “high” degree (mean = 3.77) of learning community. The strongest of the ten dimensions was Professional Organization (mean = 4.26). The weakest of the ten dimensions was Shared Decision Making (mean = 3.54).

Among most of ten dimensions that were present at a “moderate” level, the correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive relationships. In addition, there were statistically significant positive relationships between learning community and the following dimensions, in rank order: self-managed group and communication, creative organizational culture and climate, presence of school effectiveness indicators, authentic curriculum and instruction, professional organization, creative motivation, change and innovation, human resource development, shared decision making and vision, and transformational leadership.

The multiple regression analysis revealed that each of the ten dimensions could predict 56.70 percent of the learning community. For the predictive equation, there were five dimensions that affect learning community at a statistically significant level:
1) self-managed group and communication, 2) presence of school effectiveness indicators, 3) professional organization, 4) change and innovation, and 5) human resource development. The predictive equation was: \[ Y' = 0.400 + 0.368X4 + 0.150X1 + 0.385X3 - 0.269X8 + 0.201X10 \]

**Paper # 4 : The School as a Learning Community: A National Survey of Small Secondary Schools in Thailand.** Chaiya Pawabutra, and Waro Phengsawat, Khon Kaen University, Thailand

The target population for this study was 920 small secondary schools. Using Krejcie and Morgan’s table for selecting a sample at a significance level of 0.95, a sample of 330 small secondary was obtained. After follow-ups at each school, 310 usable LCAIs were returned, for a return rate of 96.06 percent.

The salient findings for this study indicate that, overall, the schools reflect a “high” degree (mean = 3.96) of learning community. The strongest of the ten dimensions was Creative Motivation (mean = 4.31). The weakest of the ten dimensions was Shared Decision Making (mean = 3.75).

Among most of ten dimensions that were present at a “moderate” level, the correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive relationships. In addition, there were statistically significant positive relationships between learning community and the following dimensions, in rank order: self-managed group development and communication, authentic curriculum and instruction, creative motivation, human resource development, creative organizational culture and climate, professional organization, presence of school effectiveness indicators, transformational leadership, change and innovation, and shared decision making and vision.

The multiple regression analysis revealed that each of the ten dimensions could predict 56.50 percent of the learning community. For the predictive equation, there were six dimensions that affect learning community at a statistically significant level: 1) presence of school effectiveness indicators, 2) shared decision making and vision, 3) self-managed group development and communication, 4) transformational leadership, 5) creative organizational culture and climate, and 6) change and innovation. The predictive equation was: \[ Y' = 0.302 + 0.171X1 - 0.190X3 + 0.898X4 - 0.242X6 + 0.362X7 - 0.280X8 \]

**Paper # 5 : The School as a Learning Community: A National Survey of Medium-Sized Secondary Schools in Thailand.** Subunn Ieamvijarn, and Arkom Eung-Puang, Khon Kaen University, Thailand

The target population for this study was 4,600 medium-sized secondary schools. Using Krejcie and Morgan’s table for selecting a sample at a significance level of 0.95, a sample of 355 medium-sized secondary was obtained. After follow-ups at each school, 303 usable LCAIs were returned, for a return rate of 85.35 percent.
The salient findings for this study indicate that, overall, the schools reflect a “high” degree (mean = 3.96) of learning community. The strongest of the ten dimensions was Creative Motivation (mean = 4.31). The weakest of the ten dimensions was Transformational Leadership (mean = 3.51).

Among most of ten dimensions that were present at a “high” level, the correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive relationships. In addition, there were statistically significant positive relationships between learning community and the following dimensions, in rank order: self-managed group and communication, authentic curriculum and instruction, creative motivation, creative organizational culture and climate, professional organization, human resource development, presence of school effectiveness indicators, transformational leadership, change and innovation, and shared decision making and vision.

The multiple regression analysis revealed that each of the ten dimensions could predict 56.50 percent of the learning community. For the predictive equation, there were six dimensions that affect learning community at a statistically significant level:

1) presence of school effectiveness indicators, 2) shared decision making and vision, 3) self-managed group development and communication, 4) transformational leader, 5) creative organizational culture and climate, and 6) change and innovation.

The predictive equation was: \[\hat{Y} = 0.262 + 0.151X_1 - 0.161X_3 + 0.883X_4 - 0.317X_6 + 0.351X_7 - 0.292X_8\]

**Paper # 6 : The School as a Learning Community: A National Survey of Large Secondary Schools in Thailand.** Nakaporn Surai, Kanoung Saikaew, and Amnaj Chanawongse, Khon Kaen University, Thailand

The target population for this study was 585 large secondary schools. Using Krejcie and Morgan’s table for selecting a sample at a significance level of 0.95, a sample of 290 large secondary was obtained. After follow-ups at each school, 280 usable LCAIs were returned, for a return rate of 96.55 percent.

The salient findings for this study indicate that, overall, the schools reflect a “high” degree (mean = 3.8967) of learning community. The strongest of the ten dimensions was Organizational Culture and Climate (mean = 4.0403). The weakest of the ten dimensions was Transformational Leadership (mean = 3.4937).

Among most of ten dimensions that were present at a “high” level, the correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive relationships. In addition, there were statistically significant positive relationships between learning community and the following dimensions, in rank order: self managed group development and communication, curriculum and instruction, creative motivation, human resource development, creative organizational culture and climate, professional organization, presence of school effectiveness indicators, transformational leadership, change and innovation, and shared decision making and vision.

The multiple regression analysis revealed that each of the ten dimensions could predict 66.40 percent of the learning community. For the predictive equation, there were two dimensions that affect learning community at a statistically significant level:
Self-managed Group Development and Communication and Presence of School Effectiveness Indicators. The predictive equation was \( Y' = 0.644 + 0.357X4 + 0.304X1 \).

**Paper #7: The School as a Learning Community: A National Survey of Vocational Colleges in Thailand.** Anand Ngamsa-ard, and Sithisak Chumpati., Khon Kaen University, Thailand

The target population for this study was 197 vocational colleges. Using Krejcie and Morgan’s table for selecting a sample at a significance level of 0.95, a sample of 132 vocational colleges was obtained. After follow-ups at each college, 132 usable LCAIs were returned, for a return rate of 100.00 percent.

The salient findings for this study indicate that, overall, the colleges reflect a “high” degree (mean = 3.55) of learning community. The strongest of the ten dimensions was Human Resource Development (mean = 3.87). The weakest of the ten dimensions was Shared Decision Making and Vision (mean = 3.38).

Among most of ten dimensions that were present at a “high” level, the correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive relationships. In addition, there were statistically significant positive relationships between learning community and the following dimensions, in rank order: school effectiveness development, creative organizational culture and climate, curriculum and instruction, self-managed group development and communication, professional organization, human resource development, creative motivation, professional organization, change and innovation, and transformational leadership.

The multiple regression analysis revealed that each of the ten dimensions could predict 71.90 percent of the learning community. For the predictive equation, there were two dimensions that affect learning community at a statistically significant level: Presence of School Effectiveness Indicators and Creative Organizational Culture and Climate. The predictive equation was \( Y' = 0.644 + 0.357X4 + 0.304X1 \).

**References**


