

EDUCATION & KNOWLEDGE
IN THAILAND

THE QUALITY CONTROVERSY

Alain Mounier and Phasina Tangchuang, *Editors*

Education and Knowledge in Thailand

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Foreword

Education and Knowledge in Thailand: The Quality Controversy represents a valuable contribution to both Thai studies and our understanding of Thai educational policy and practice. Though there are numerous books available in English on various aspects of Thai society such as history, politics and religion, little is available on Thai education. This lack of publications in English reflects an important theme of this book: commodification. Publication decisions in the centres of market power are driven by financial forces. There is simply an inadequate market in the Western world for specialised books on Thailand. Thus, Silkworm Books in Chiang Mai, a major regional publisher, is to be commended for publishing this important work, to enable readers across the globe to learn about the current status of Thai education and related reforms being undertaken, which have significant implications reaching well beyond Thailand.

This edited volume has been produced by a multicultural team of Thai and French scholars. Two of the contributors are former or current directors (respectively Achan Annop and Achan Phasina) of the Centre for Education and Labour Studies (CELS) at Chiang Mai University. There is impressive balance among the team of contributors: three from France, including one woman, and three

from Thailand, including one woman. The authors have a strong background in the economics of education, political economy of education and the philosophy of education, which contributes to the valuable interdisciplinary perspectives of the volume.

The volume is comprised of four major parts with eleven chapters. The book is comprehensive in its analysis of Thai education, including important historical material and a valuable discussion of the evolution of the Thai educational system. Parts 3 and 4, which cover the complex relationship between education and work and the adverse effects of credentialism, are particularly important.

While the authors document the dramatic quantitative expansion of Thai education, particularly in the past four decades, the major theme of the volume relates to *quality issues* in Thai education at all levels. The authors identify four fundamental dilemmas of Thai education: 1) quantity vs. quality, 2) perennialism-postmodernism vs. progressivism, 3) work vs. education and 4) diploma vs. knowledge. Related to these four dilemmas seven important flaws in the Thai educational system are noted: 1) inequality, 2) commodification, 3) localism, 4) vocationalism, 5) credentialism, 6) conformism and 7) pedagogism. In their discussion of the important issue of localism, for example, the authors clearly make the important distinction between genuine decentralisation and the Thai devolution approach. They also question some naive assumptions about the benefits of both decentralisation and devolution.

Given this highly *critical* approach to the study of Thai education, the book clearly reflects the spirit of Buddhist epistemology articulated by the Lord Buddha in the *Kalama Sutta*, a lucid and brilliant statement of the need for critical thinking written several millennia before Vygotsky, Illich and Freire. Reflecting the current era of globalisation and the growth of the knowledge society, the authors of this volume draw upon the scholarly work of important intellectuals across the globe such as Ted Lewis (Trinidad and Tobago) who has done excellent critical work on technical and vocational education; Nobel

laureate Kenneth Arrow's important work on learning by doing; the British scholar Ronald Dore's caustic critique of the diploma disease; the Russian scholar Vygotsky's creative work on thought and language; and the French sociologist Bourdieu's important work on forms of capital.

"Controversy" is most appropriately in the title of the book. Actually there is broad consensus about quality as a desired educational outcome both in Thailand and globally. However, there is complex controversy, as demonstrated so well by this volume, about the extent to which quality exists and how to move toward greater quality. Given the highly critical nature of this volume, it will contribute valuably to the public discourse around key educational policy issues in Thailand. There will be those, including myself, who may disagree with some of the conclusions and findings of this important study. However, this volume needs to be studied carefully by policy makers, educators, students and concerned parents. Hopefully, the enhanced level of policy discourse fostered by this volume will help Thailand move toward the achievement of a major goal articulated in the book: "making quality more even across the country". Realisation of that vision is critically important for Thailand and its future.

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Preface

Education and Knowledge in Thailand: The Quality Controversy is a comprehensive and critical account of current debates over the state of the Thai education system. Using contributions from philosophy and sciences of education—sociology, psychology and didactic in particular—it focuses on the issue of the quality of education in Thailand, engaging especially with the National Education Act of 1999. The purpose is to contribute to the vivid and enduring national debate on this major and crucial issue for the nation. It is an attempt to identify clichés that disguise a lack of careful thinking, to expose ideas that are merely fashionable and to unearth implicit or hidden postulates and premises. It is also an attempt to bring into the national debate a spirit of scientific inquiry by examining the results of careful and extensive research in this area. The aim is eventually to improve and disseminate tools—theoretical, methodological and documentary—that will aid the further and deeper analysis of the quality of education by scholars from all parts of the world and of all persuasions who are concerned with the major social issue of the quality of education. The authors propose establishing a forum to discuss educational issues on the CELS blog (cels-thailand.blogspot.com), with a view to refining and affirming the diagnosis made in the

present book on the state of education in Thailand. The forum would allow us not only to continuously reflect on this diagnosis but also to broaden our perspective by incorporating the views of other scholars.

There is not, as is commonly believed, a best and unique path for the development and improvement of Thai education. Rather, there are various dilemmas to take into consideration that arise from individual prejudices and preferences, from historical traits of Thai society, and from Thailand's present social structures and cultures. Consensus must be reached on how to resolve these dilemmas, which is why the focus of the present book is on how best to define the quality of Thai education and on the real and major problems that are hampering the achievement of this quality. Our diagnosis is based on fine-tuned analytical frameworks and on in-depth studies of the real situations in educational institutions and the courses they offer. The main conclusion of our analysis is that the low quality of education in Thailand cannot be overcome except by delivering a "knowledge-centred" education. The supposed dilemma of the choice of a teacher-centred versus a child-centred education is beside the point. Unfortunately, most protagonists of Thai education have endeavoured to avoid the steep and painful path of establishing a knowledge-based education, ignoring the glaring signs that it is essential to the country's progress.

This volume is a collective undertaking of the Centre for Education and Labour Studies (CELS), an international research centre located in the Faculty of Education at Chiang Mai University, Thailand. It gathers important results of an ongoing and comprehensive research programme on education which started about six years ago.¹ Many more researchers and research assistants than the six authors of the chapters in this book have contributed to this programme. We want to

1. More results of this research programme are presented in various papers. Material from some of the papers has been used in this book. The papers are listed on the CELS blog and some are available for downloading.

thank them all here. We want also to thank the French Universities of Paris, Montpellier and Lyon, as well as the French research institutes, particularly the Institut de Recherche pour le Developpement (IRD). They all made this book possible by their constant and substantive support of CELS. Our special thanks go to two distinguished Australian scholars from the University of Sydney, Dr Ian Watson and Dr Gavan Butler, for reviewing the book throughout, for offering deep and constructive comments, and for undertaking the very difficult and demanding task of editing the writings of authors from non-English-speaking backgrounds. We express our gratitude to Marilyn Bryce from the same University for training CELS librarians and for helping to identify and gather the important and pertinent documentary material listed in the Sources at the end of the book. In the same spirit, the editors want to thank Silkworm Books for their understanding of the exigencies of making scientific writings readable and for bringing to the public at large the present contribution to a demanding question. Of course, responsibility for the opinions and statements, the information and data, as well as any errors found in the book, is the authors' alone.

Author Profiles

ANNOP PONGWAT is a senior researcher. He was director of the Centre for Education and Labour Studies (CELS) from 2004 to 2009. He is an Associate Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Education, Chiang Mai University. As a specialist in educational policy and administration, he has conducted research on the Thai education reform of 1999. He has worked intensively to disseminate in Thailand foreign writings on education, in particular American, in the interests of comparative analysis, and has translated several books from English to Thai.

SANDRINE MICHEL is an associate researcher at CELS and a researcher at the Laboratoire de sciences économiques de Richter in France, focusing on public policies. She is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Economics at the University of Montpellier 1. As an economist, she has written extensively on the relationships between economic growth and education in Europe.

ALAIN MOUNIER is director of research at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD). He is an economist specialising in economic and social development, labour and education. He

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XAVIER OUDIN is a senior researcher at IRD. His research interests as an economist are economic development and labour. He has conducted research and taught in Europe, Africa and Asia.

PHASINA TANGCHUANG is a senior researcher and has been the director of CELS since 2009. He is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, Chiang Mai University. Specialising in adult education, he has conducted and coordinated extensive research on education and work in Thailand as well as comparative studies of education in countries of Europe and Asia.

PHETCHAREE RUPAVIJETRA is a senior researcher at CELS and an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education, Chiang Mai University. Her specialities are adult education and the training of business managers. She has conducted extensive comparative analyses of vocational education and multicultural management in Northeast and Southeast Asian countries and in Europe.

Introduction: Thai Education in Transition

*The educated person is not the person who can answer the questions,
but the person who can question the answers.*

—Schick and Vaughn (2002)

The main purpose of this book is to try to stimulate an urgently needed national debate on education in Thailand. In the following chapters, we offer insights into current trends in education within Thailand that we believe to be of great concern. Today, after decades of debate and analysis by national and international institutions, as well as the implementation of a variety of strong policy measures that are often presented as education reforms, it is the duty of Thai scholars to scrutinise the state of education in Thailand. The last and most comprehensive of these policy measures was taken following the passage of the National Education Act of 1999, and its implementation is still underway. While these measures are frequently presented as systematic reforms, they may in fact be little more than piecemeal efforts that simply reflect political tussles.

Thai education is in the midst of rapid and dramatic changes that together will establish its character for years to come. Among these changes, some have been purposefully designed and carried out, while others are unintended but have occurred in response to the interplay of social actors. In our view, some of the observed changes are desirable and some are not. In all, the changes raise as many questions about education as they answer them, as the various chapters of this

book point out. On the basis of our analysis, we have come to the conclusion that Thailand is in urgent need of a new and systematic education reform. Such a conclusion is bound to be controversial. However, it has been drawn from a comprehensive and scientific analysis of recent developments. The analysis identifies a need for social and public choices regarding education that are made with full knowledge of the facts. We hope this book will contribute to this knowledge.

Thailand's education has evolved along the same path from pre-modernity to modernity as has any other country. In Europe, prior to the modern era, schools as we know them now did not exist. Children lived and learnt with adults and shared their work and games. Households were open to members of the surrounding community and did not enjoy any privacy or intimacy. In particular, children learnt mores and values as well as arts and crafts through living and working with the adults, sometimes by going to church and often through apprenticeship. In eighteenth-century Europe, the development of the modern family and the recognition of childhood coincided with the development of schools. For the first time in Europe since the Middle Ages, children were separated from adults and confined to schools (Ariès 1962). Schools were disciplinary institutions comparable to convents, barracks, prisons, hospitals and workhouses. Their purpose was to maintain and transmit a sense of social order by imparting rules of behaviour and values of society. The methods were those of military discipline and command. Skills and crafts continued to be delivered on the job and through apprenticeship.

In the nineteenth century, the development of mass education had another purpose—that of strengthening the nation and society by disseminating common knowledge and values. It was then that education became the affair of professionals and a matter of systematic and scientifically based methods. The organisation of the teaching and learning process became a recurrent question. In Thailand, the modern history of education started with the reforms of King Chulalongkorn

at the turn of the century. While the principles of a national education were set at that time and enshrined in law in 1921, mass education became a political objective only about five decades ago.

In the last five decades—the recent historical period under scrutiny in this book—education has been affected by three main developments: the replacement of the social role of education with a supposed economic role; the expansion of private education in an attempt to ensure that high quality education is provided for those who can afford it; and the growing emphasis on credentialing at the expense of educational quality as traditionally understood.

The Social and Economic Roles of Education

The first development in Thai education history is of a political nature. It concerns the social role of education. Historically, modern education, born in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) at the turn of the twentieth century, was mobilised to dispense social mores and scholarly knowledge, largely borrowed from the West, in a successful attempt to organise the country under the rule of a centralised political organisation and to protect the country from the avarice of British and French colonial powers. Since then, whether during periods of military rule or democratic government, modern education has been seen as a crucial device for socialising the individual by building a national identity, by developing the feeling of belonging to the nation and an identification with its values, principles and rules, and by building a sense of citizenship. The success of this endeavour is obvious in Thai society, leading to international recognition and social stability for the nation, although there continues to be political support defending the diversity of local cultures that together add texture to the national identity.

However, this political role of education is fading, giving way to economic concerns. Today, education is seen as playing a major

economic role, whether by permitting the individual to climb the social ladder or by fostering economic growth for the benefit of the whole society. In particular, education is perceived as delivering the skills and technology needed by economic activities, and as essential to maintaining international competitiveness. This view has become so pervasive that economic concerns seem to have become the only educational concern of the people and of successive governments over quite some years. From this perspective, Thailand is adopting the same utilitarian and short-term view of education as have the majority of countries around the world. It is one of our theses that education does not have the economic role that most analysts suggest it has, such that the national education system is adopting an unachievable objective while abandoning its once prevailing social role.

Private Expansion

The second development is of an institutional nature. It concerns the public or private character of educational institutions. It is of course closely related to the political development mentioned above. When a nation-state wants to extend education to the whole population in order to erase local differences in cultures, norms, values and behaviours, it promulgates the principle of a public and free education. The public and free character of education is required to prevent vested interests from fashioning education for their own ends and from discriminating children based merely on their parents' ability to pay for educational services. All over the world, this principle has been adopted and applied as a strong basis for enhancing citizenship and for strengthening the nation and the nation-state.

The decline of the nation-state under the pressure of globalisation, the now prevalent thinking that individuals rather than society benefit the most from education, and the search by capital for new spheres of profit making all contribute to fostering the belief that a public and

free education is obsolete, inefficient and costly. The door is wide open to private and profit-driven education. This trend is accelerated by the rapid retreat of the state from education, in particular by the relative decline of state financial support and commitment, defended by the rhetoric that the sustenance and furtherance of education requires the mobilisation of all sorts of resources—private as well as public. Ideology sporting the gloss of scientific discourse, as well as the financial pressure faced by education systems confronted with the new parsimony of the state, offers the space for the development of private educational institutions from kindergarten to university.

This transition is particularly marked and rapid in Thailand. It raises, firstly, the concern about discrimination based on income inequalities and the loss of equal educational opportunity for all segments of society. It brings up, secondly, the question of the content of education, determined less by broad, long-term social concerns than by narrow, short-term personal goals. It raises, thirdly, the issue of the internationalisation of education—through the import and export of educational services—which supposes that education is not culturally and socially dependent and that the content of knowledge transmitted by education is “culture-free”. A further thesis which we advance in this book is that the national education system will be split up to serve different segments of society, or, more broadly, to provide private education of good quality to the affluent and public education of mediocre quality to the poor. The private segment of education will adopt an international culture, while the public segment will preserve national and local cultures. Thai society will suffer social division with higher social classes eventually seceding from the rest of society. The concept of a nation, and social and political stability, will be severely jeopardised by this development.

Credentialing

The third development is of an educational nature. Educational enrolment in Thailand has risen very rapidly in the last four decades. This trend is promoted by several factors. For a long time, national education policies were aimed at increasing the rate of enrolment as an indication of the state's effectiveness in extending education throughout society. Subsequently, the rhetoric in favour of education and the structural transformation of Thai society—where defining social status according to educational qualifications has prevailed over the past system of inheriting social positions—has produced a national frenzy for education, or, more precisely, for diplomas. As a result, educational institutions, be they public or private, traditional or open, are facing nowadays a buoyant demand from families and individuals for their services.

The obsession with certification and the concern with social and workplace positions tend to lengthen schooling and lead to “dumbing down”—the lowering of requirements to move up the educational levels. In fact, the country is facing a general inflation of credentials, with an increasing number of diploma holders being produced, regardless of social needs and of the progress of knowledge. Yet another of our theses is that the national enthusiasm for enrolment figures and for diplomas endangers the quality of education across the board. In other words, quality of education is bartered for quantity of education. This is probably the biggest issue that Thai education has to face from now on, an issue which is extensively addressed in this book.

Addressing the Question of Educational Quality

Many commentators concur that the main problem of Thai education is its low quality. What does this diagnosis really mean? Does it mean

that education does not effectively transmit knowledge? Does it mean that education does not serve well enough one or another of its political, social or economic purposes? Or does it mean that students' performance is below international standards? Clearly, accurate answers to these questions are needed in order to establish a correct and useful diagnosis of the state of Thai education.

It is unclear whether the education reform undertaken within the framework of the 1999 Education Act was intended to improve the quality of education in the sense of raising the quality and scope of the knowledge transmitted within a didactic concern or in the sense of better satisfying the need of the economy for a "ready to work" labour force. Probably both objectives were intended at the same time, as indicated by the declarations of the reformers and by official texts on the implementation of the reform.

Some commentators attribute the low quality of education to the alienation of Thai education from its own culture in favour of foreign educational principles and material, while for other commentators it is the fault of the defenders of traditional and outdated educational objectives—namely the subordination of individuals' goals to society's needs—which has led to education policies being anchored in the past and unable to face contemporary challenges. On the other hand, there are also numerous commentators who argue that the main flaw of Thai education is that it does not prepare students for the future workplace. Even for reformers who previously agreed with the view that the problem stems from didactic flaws, they have eventually adopted a vocational orientation. In so doing, they have given away too much educational ground to the dominant economic forces.

It is our contention that, if this last orientation is the direction that education in Thailand is taking, the quality of education will worsen. This book intends to unearth the roots of this educational stalemate—and suggest ways out of it—while highlighting the risks that it may entail for the country. The findings should command the attention of social actors and policy-makers who are concerned about

the future of Thai society. Hopefully, this book will contribute to the development of a new educational orientation involving social actors and policy-makers.

The book explores four major dilemmas that Thai education is facing today. These dilemmas concern the focus on quantity versus quality of education, the adoption of old versus new philosophical foundations in crafting education policies, the mismatch between educational curricula and workplace demands, and the pursuit of knowledge versus diplomas. These dilemmas represent major crossroads where the fate of Thai education will be decided by the choice of which road to take. All four issues will impact the quality of education. This book is conceived to help decision-makers take the right road for the well-being of all citizens and the country. Each of the four parts of the book ends with a description of the theoretical and analytical frameworks used to carry out the analyses in the preceding chapters. These theoretical chapters are more particularly written for students, scholars and academics with the aim of enhancing educational research in Thailand. The concluding chapter explores some research directions that would best contribute to improving the quality of Thai education.

PART I

THE QUANTITY–QUALITY DILEMMA

1

The Burgeoning of Education in Thailand: A Quantitative Success

SANDRINE MICHEL

The first studies on the contribution of education to Asia's economic growth pointed to rapid expansion of national education systems as well as surging public educational expenditure (Tan and Mingat 1989; Psacharopoulos 1991; Warr 1993). Gradually, the supposed success of Asian education systems was recognised (World Bank 1993; UNESCO 2004). Today, after forty years of almost continuous economic growth, it is possible for researchers to re-evaluate the developmental process of a country's education system (Sirilaksana 2000) and thus to assess the role that education policies have played in this process.

From an historical point of view, the development of the Thai education system has been shaped by two key factors, one political, the other economic. At the end of the nineteenth century, in response to threats of colonisation from the United Kingdom and France, dominant Thai social groups, particularly the leading and cosmopolitan aristocracy, began a process of modernisation. This process was inspired by the European Enlightenment movement, and based philosophically on individualism and economically on capitalism. However, it faced obstacles in the form of the pre-existing social relations, which were based on local and community

membership. Education became a key element within this process of modernisation, as King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910) sought to establish a new social relation between himself and his subjects. This new relation was characterised by links between the monarch and the people as individuals and was forged at the expense of former social relations. Education was to play the role of creating a common culture while also producing the social elite needed to perpetuate the new social order. As a result, education became a very powerful device for forging homogeneity and identity at the national level. Individualism, on which the new social relation between monarch and subjects was established, was essential to the rise of a market economy (Wyatt 1969; Ministry of Education 1976).

While this political factor continues to have a role in education, it has now been joined by another factor based on economics. Within this framework, economic productivity, particularly the productivity of labour, is seen to depend upon education. In turn, higher productivity is considered as essential to increased personal income and, more generally, to economic growth. In this view, the performance of an education system, benchmarked against international standards, is central to the country's international competitiveness. Based on its benchmarked performance, the Thai education system is backward.

The political and economic factors have shaped the development of the education system during the last forty years. This duration is usually recognised as necessary for the full realisation of educational investment, which is by nature long term. In Thailand during this period, a complete transformation of the educational landscape has occurred. Children have followed in the footsteps of their parents into schools and thus there are now two educated generations within one family. Increasingly, the children reach initial educational levels which are higher than those attained by their parents, and yet their job status and income level are often similar to their parents' at the same age.

In this chapter, our analysis is based upon quantitative data spanning a long time period. A new time series, from forty up to one hundred years, was constructed following the tried and tested methodology of quantitative history (Marczewski 1961). In the next section, we draw a broad picture of the growth in enrolment, as a whole and by educational level. We identify different periods or stages in Thai educational history. These stages were the result of periodic structural reorganisation of the education system. We then analyse the impact of demographic changes on the structure of the education system, exploring the concern about inequality as a way of understanding these reorganisation efforts. We make use of a longitudinal analysis to study the educational trajectories of successive generations. Finally, we consider the link between the quality of education and public spending on education.

Nobody would deny that the Thai education system today performs well in quantitative terms. However, the system itself is being sharply criticised, in particular for the poor quality of education and for the inability to significantly raise the educational level of the population beyond compulsory education. Our analysis will throw light on these criticisms.

A Panorama of the History of the Thai Education System

The rapid development of Asian education systems, including Thailand's, can first of all be explained by the introduction of mass education. Elitist at the beginning, education was extended to the masses within a few decades in Thailand. In seeking to understand the process of the country's educational development, we first present an aggregate series of all enrolments of students aged 3–25 years between 1911 and 2007 without taking into account the level or the type of education (general or vocational). The purpose of this exercise is to

distinguish the major periods in the developmental process. Then we further analyse the data by educational level to identify the main long-term changes and trends.

A Global View of Educational Development

At the end of the eighteenth century, when the Ayuthaya period ended and the Chakri era began, the central Thai state developed markedly. The Chakri kings introduced an education system to foster national identity. Education was aimed at simultaneously strengthening the state apparatus and providing the nation with the means for active involvement in the international arena. Not surprisingly, the history of Thai education is one of state involvement.

Following decades of nearly uninterrupted growth in enrolment, there are about 14 million students in the Thai education system today. In the new millennium, enrolment appears to have stabilised. The growth in enrolment was closely related to the evolution of the legal framework of education, as shown in fig. 1.1.

Within one century, two comprehensive laws on education were enacted: the 1921 Act and the National Education Act of 1999. The first state intervention in education goes back to the 1921 Act governing primary education. By making three of the seven years of primary education compulsory, this law led to the first significant rise in school enrolment. At various other times during the century since then, other pieces of legislation were introduced to reorganise the education system, in particular the national schemes of education, which provided the policy frameworks for formulating five-year national education development plans. The first National Scheme of Education (NSE) was adopted in 1951, which was to be implemented over three five-year development plans. The third NSE in 1977 eliminated grade 7 of primary school and extended compulsory education to grade 6; it also reorganised secondary education. The 1992 NSE further extended compulsory education

to nine years, and the 1999 Education Act proposed another increase to twelve years.

All government initiatives—from Acts to educational schemes down to the smallest decrees and directives—appear to accelerate enrolment growth, leaving little doubt about the reaction of educational administrators to political directives. However, each time, after an initial spurt, growth would slow down.

In fig. 1.1, two different periods in the development of the education system can be distinguished. From 1921 to 1962, the growth in enrolment stayed below 7% per annum, with student numbers growing steadily from a few thousand to nearly 4 million. From 1962 to 2007, education became increasingly universal, and enrolment rose from 4 million to 14 million students, averaging about 12% per annum in growth. These two periods also reflect shifting focuses in the development of the different educational levels. We call them the “political age” and the “economic age” of education.

The political age of education (1900s–1962)

The first era, the political age, spanned the first half of the twentieth century from the early 1900s to the early 1960s. During this period, the main movements in enrolment, up or down, were due to the introduction of education laws and regulations (1921 Act and NSE 1951), which were aimed at the construction of a modern state through the organisation of the public school system.

Enrolment initially increased slowly, and then from the 1920s until the end of the 1940s it grew steadily, although with fluctuations. With the 1921 Act stipulating compulsory education of three years out of seven years of primary school, all children were to be enrolled from age 7 up to 11–12 years for boys and up to 9–10 years for girls. In practice, however, neither the starting age nor the length of compulsory schooling was enforced; in fact, children were able to start at between 6 and 9 years of age. The main reason for this laxity

was the lack of schools. From the 1930s, this shortage was temporarily resolved by systematically incorporating Buddhist temples into the education system. Such pragmatism remains an enduring characteristic of education policy in Thailand.

Before the state stepped in to build public education, Buddhist temples were in charge of educating children. The 1921 law integrated the temples into the education system but provided financial support for only a few of them, those which taught the full curriculum, a requirement which was monitored by the “government schools” created on this occasion. In less than thirty years, an education system was established in which Buddhist schools lost their prerogatives to “local schools”. Such local schools were financed by the central government and municipalities together with moderate contributions from families.

In 1951, the first NSE extended compulsory schooling to four years. It also specified the pedagogical methods to be employed. Besides reaffirming the requirement for compulsory education, this NSE went much further. It organised for the first time the curriculum for the post-primary years, introducing a lower secondary level to follow four years of compulsory primary education. However, this new provision was not successful in stimulating enrolment growth. After a rapid rise between 1920 and 1947, school enrolment slowed down. Obviously, there was difficulty implementing universal education at the primary level, but introducing lower secondary education was not the best solution. This new level probably did not meet the needs or the abilities of children after four years of primary school. With characteristic pragmatism, the 1960 NSE reform, while maintaining the lower secondary level, introduced a three-year upper primary level to the four compulsory years. This new structure meant a return to standard curricula and proved to be much better adapted to the needs of society

During this political age, the laws and regulations governing public schooling represented a pillar of the modern state. The era was

succeeded by what we call the economic age, although without being supplanted, with both political and economic factors coexisting and exerting their influence throughout this second period.

The economic age of education (1963–present)

In the 1960s, Thailand's economy entered a period of virtually uninterrupted structural growth. Various shocks that occurred, such as the 1997 Asian financial crisis, were quickly overcome. During this period, employment in agriculture slowly decreased, while that in the manufacturing and service industries increased sharply. Economic growth became increasingly export-led and foreign investment soared, reflecting the country's integration into the world economy. In this context, the notion of universal primary education became well entrenched and a "social demand" by families for education arose. These outcomes coincided with changes in public education policy. In short, economic growth generated major social changes that constituted the educational matrix of this second era (Lopez et al. 1998).

In the forty years from 1964 to 2003, school enrolment increased rapidly, jumping from 4 million to 14 million. In the meantime, the national population increased from nearly 28 million to 60 million, which means the proportion of the schooling population rose from 14% to 23% of the total population. While important in aggregate terms, this progress in education must also be evaluated demographically.

The economic age of education was the result of rapid economic growth coupled with population growth and demographic change. A closer look shows that this era can be divided into three sub-periods with distinct characteristics in enrolment. Each sub-period corresponds to the development of a particular educational level, but the different levels did not develop in the conventional order. During the first sub-period, from the early 1960s to the early 1980s,

universal primary education for all children was attained. During the second sub-period, an unexpected growth in higher education took place that had started in the late 1970s. The third sub-period, which began in the early 1990s and continues to the present, saw growth in secondary education and, in the most recent years, renewed growth in higher education.

Sub-periods of Enrolment Growth

The growth of elementary education, 1960s–1980s

In Thailand, primary education, which was established in 1921, and pre-primary education constitute elementary education. As shown in fig. 1.2, primary school enrolment peaked in the early 1980s with around 7.5 million students, while pre-primary enrolment then was less than 0.5 million.

Primary school enrolment peaked in 1981, after which it fell steadily at an average rate of 1.8% per annum. This decrease was due entirely to the demographic decline of the age group of 6–11 years. The impact of this decline on public education spending was positive. At the same time, a surge in pre-primary enrolment compensated for the loss in primary school enrolment. The lower enrolment in primary schools allowed some of their resources to be diverted to pre-primary as well as lower secondary education.

Although enrolment growth at the elementary level was impressive, it needs to be remembered that the achievement of universal primary education took forty to fifty years (Tunsiri 1994; Tan and Mingat 1989). An 80% enrolment rate had already been achieved by the early 1960s, but attaining 90% took another ten years, reflecting the difficulty of reaching children living in remote areas. In the last twenty years, fluctuations in primary school enrolment have remained significant, even though primary education has become universal and irreversibly compulsory.

The development of primary education has been promoted by the legal requirement for compulsory schooling. NSE 1960, in particular, stimulated enrolment growth. NSE 1977 substantially modified the structure of elementary education when it introduced pre-primary education and raised compulsory schooling from four to six years, up to the end of primary education. Once again, the process of educational development was determined by a state directive, confirming our point regarding the institutional character of educational growth in Thailand. The 1977 NSE also established one year of compulsory pre-primary education. This level, hitherto restricted to private provision and financed by families, was suddenly strongly promoted. The enrolment rate for the three- to five-year-old cohorts, which was about 10% in the 1980s, soared to 70% today, with the number increasing from half a million in 1980 to two million today. The latest figures on pre-primary enrolment show a slight decline since 2000, indicating difficulty in achieving full enrolment. Nonetheless, effort towards the achievement of universal pre-primary education, originally envisaged for the end of the eighth development plan in 2001, is still underway. The state has gradually increased financial support for pre-primary education in order to reach this goal. In the early 1980s, private financing was still dominant (56%). In the following decade, it was equally split between public and private funding. Since then, public financing has continued to increase (World Bank 1998).

The growth of higher education, 1970s–present

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw enrolment in higher education soar, particularly with the introduction of open universities (fig. 1.3). Higher education had taken the baton from primary education in maintaining the growth in total enrolment.

Higher education has been a well-established component of the education system since the creation of the first university,

Chulalongkorn, as early as 1917. Its mission was to train higher level royal civil servants. In 2008, there were 2.5 million tertiary students attending 79 public universities (including 2 open, 41 Rajabhat and 9 Rajamangala universities) and 63 private institutions. Some 80% of the students were in public institutions. However, since 2002, higher education is no longer a mission of public education.

Up to 1970, students mainly attended academic studies in ten universities. During the 1970s, amidst an overall unfavourable economic and political climate, the number of tertiary students increased suddenly and unexpectedly. This can be attributed to two developments: the creation of open universities and the diversification of higher education into technical education and teacher training. The first factor was responsible for the strong enrolment growth between 1977 and 1982, while the second factor was decisive in promoting the subsequent evolution of higher education.

The creation of open universities was a “response” to the social unrest that shook Thailand in the early 1970s. Originally organised on the basis of evening courses, and subsequently correspondence courses, open universities were distinctive in that no entrance examinations were required. The two open universities in the country, Ramkhamhaeng (established in 1971) and Sukhothai Thammathirat (established in 1978), are located on the outskirts of Bangkok. A few traditional universities were also created outside the capital to compensate for the lack of a public university in some regions, such as Khon Kaen University in the Northeast, but they are statistically not very important in terms of enrolment. Open universities focus on academic curricula and do not provide vocational training. The success of open universities was immediate, stunning and durable. In 1976, five years after its establishment, Ramkhamhaeng University had 100,000 students, as many as the combined enrolment in the traditional universities. Enrolment in open universities reached a peak of 700,000 in 1982 before stabilising. At that time, open universities were undergoing a rationalisation exercise, which included building

campuses, hiring professors and adopting approved standardised curricula. As they became more similar to traditional universities, enrolment began to decline. As with other institutions of higher education, the open universities enjoyed a second phase of enrolment growth in the 1990s.

Over the same period, technical education grew significantly. In 2004, Rajabhat teachers' colleges and Rajamangala technical colleges were converted to universities. This milestone is reflected in a break in the series of enrolment data for the academic and technical streams in 2005.

The second period of growth in higher education enrolment during the 1990s exhibited a more classical pattern due to the continued expansion of secondary education. However, total enrolment stopped increasing after 2002, as the growth in the academic institutions could not compensate for the slowdown in the technical institutions and open universities.

The growth of secondary education, 1990s–present

After the implementation of six years of compulsory education with the 1977 NSE, secondary education rose in importance. The growth in secondary school enrolment accelerated in the 1990s, and it continues to rise today (fig. 1.4). This growth benefited from the completion of primary education, and it in turn promoted higher education enrolment. In fact, the growth in the 1990s was more “classical” in that it followed the logical sequence of education, from the lowest to the highest level.

In the early 1960s, secondary education covered 300,000 students, 84% in lower secondary and 16% in upper secondary. Today, there are about 4.7 million students distributed more evenly between the lower secondary (59%) and the upper secondary level (41%).

Until 1977, secondary education consisted of four years of lower secondary and two years of upper secondary school, but there was

very low enrolment in the upper level. However, acceleration in fourth-year enrolment in the early 1970s led policy-makers to eventually reorganise secondary education by allocating three years to each level. In addition, the elimination of the seventh year of primary school, and the integration of these students into the lower secondary level, resulted in a spurt in lower secondary enrolment in 1977 and 1978. These structural changes explain the break in the data series in 1981.

Between 1964 and 1977, secondary school enrolment jumped from 300,000 to 1.5 million students. In the 1980s, growth slowed down despite the fact that full compulsory primary education was supplying more candidates for secondary education. At the beginning of the 1990s, enrolment picked up again. Between 1988 and 1998, it doubled from two million to four million. These fluctuations in the 1980s and 1990s deserve closer examination.

The stagnation of enrolment at a low rate prior to the 1990s led to the conclusion that the reach of Thailand's secondary education was lagging behind countries at a similar level of development by about twenty years. This lag was diagnosed at the time of assessment of the sixth development plan of 1987–1991 and was based on international comparisons. Such was Thailand's situation that 83% of its working population had no more than primary education in 1996 and only 3% in the age group of 25–64 years had completed secondary education.

The twenty-year lag was seen as posing multiple risks for the Thai economy. Concerns were raised that its less efficient labour force would lead to a loss of international competitiveness. In particular, it was feared that further technical and organisational development of productive sectors might be restricted by the lack of a suitably educated labour force. The lag reflects for the first time that economic factors have strongly influence the evolution of the education system. A sharp rise in secondary school enrolment began in 1989 and benefited from the rapid changes in educational legislation

in 1992–1993. This was evident in the introduction of a vigorous policy to boost secondary school enrolment. Indeed, compulsory schooling was extended from six to nine years, up to the completion of the lower secondary level. This meant that students would need to complete their primary as well as three years of secondary education before they could start working. As had occurred before with primary education, the new regulations stimulated enrolment initially, but at some point growth became more difficult to sustain. The 1999 reform acknowledged that public education could not realise the goal of accelerating enrolment, either because of resource constraints or systemic inefficiency, and conceded the need for private initiatives.

Distinguishing the three sub-periods of educational development by the educational level leading the growth reveals certain patterns. The growth at each level depends firstly on internal determinants and then on various cross-sectional factors, which will be explored in the next section.

Educational Development and Structural Changes: Demography and Dynamics

The first of the cross-sectional factors is demography, which defines the structural context for the evolution of education. This context can be described with data such as gross enrolment ratios or school-age dependency ratios. It can also be illuminating to extend the analysis to the educational trajectories of cohorts of students.

The Demographic Context

In the early 1970s, the Thai economy began a process of structural change which paralleled a period of demographic transition following a rapid decline in fertility. As a consequence of the transition, Thailand

benefited from a favourable demographic structure¹ that spurred economic growth. From the educational perspective, enrolment should theoretically increase in tandem with the increase in the school-age population.

Schooling rates

The statistical indicator which links enrolment with demography is the schooling rate. The gross enrolment ratio² for young people aged 3–18 years is the total enrolment in a given year of 3- to 18-year-olds as a ratio of the total population in this age bracket (fig. 1.5). This indicator shows the rise or decline in schooling.

In 1972, less than one out of two Thai children aged 3–18 years was at school. In 2003, the ratio was more than three out of four children. At first glance, there appears to be progress in the schooling rate. However, to understand this quantitative phenomenon more fully, we need to place this growth in the demographic context. There are two ways of looking at this. We can view the growth as the work of the internal dynamics of the education system itself, using the theoretical maximum enrolment of the entire population of the reference age group as the benchmark. Or we can view it as external in

1. The demographic transition is a time characterised by a decline in the death rate followed with a time lag by a fall in the fertility rate. In Thailand, this transition started during the 1960s and ended in the early 1990s. The demographic transition has the appearance of changing the ratio of the school-age population to the total population.

2. The gross enrolment ratio is the total enrolment at a given educational level as a ratio of the theoretical population of the age when they are supposed to attend this level. For instance, children are supposed to attend the third year of primary school at nine years of age. If there are children who are younger or older than nine years attending this grade, the gross rate may exceed 100%. The net enrolment ratio would include only nine-year-olds attending this grade. However, the net ratio is rarely calculated, except in micro-studies, because most statistics do not provide the required data.

nature, reflecting changes in the reference population itself. Because both factors can be at work simultaneously, each must be analysed separately.

Schooling rates can rise as the school-age population—the denominator in the schooling rate—declines. In this case, demography boosts the schooling rate. Moreover, the relative cost of financing the increase in the schooling rate drops because no additional investment in resources or infrastructure is needed. The opposite situation, when the school-age population grows faster than the present enrolment rate, would necessitate additional investment just to keep the schooling rate constant (Diouf and Fontvieille 2002).

In Thailand, schooling rates seem to be independent of demographic changes, as they rise in periods of demographic expansion as well as in periods of demographic decline. Moreover, at high levels, schooling rates are no longer responsive to demographic changes. It is evident that the extension of compulsory education to nine years was facilitated by the demographic decline of the age group of 12–14 years. However, this decline had started much earlier without boosting the schooling rate at the lower secondary level. The period when the greatest effects of the demographic transition were felt on schooling rates was relatively short: from 1993/94 to 1996/97.

Except for this short period, the demographic decline was not a strong determinant of schooling rates. Instead, surging enrolment was the major factor. From 1972 to 2007, the schooling rate rose from 86% to 104% at the primary level, from 17% to 82% at the secondary level and from 2% to 67% at the tertiary level.³ These figures offer a clear picture of the development of mass education over this period. It would appear that, while public planners had anticipated a drop in the

3. This exceptional enrolment figure for higher education is misleading, as it calculates the total number of students as a proportion of the population aged 17–21 years, whereas half of the students were working and studying part-time and/or were under 17 or over 21. When adjusted for these biases, the enrolment rate is halved to around 30%, which is comparable with that of developed countries.

school-age population, they had not foreseen the soaring schooling rates, in particular at the secondary level (Janjaroen 1985).

School-age dependency ratios

The school-age dependency ratio is the ratio of the school-age population (5–14 years) to the active population (15–64 years), and it is useful for estimating the potential “burden” of providing full schooling on the country. The choice of age boundaries for computing this ratio must reflect reality as much as possible. Our choice here is based on data availability, generally in five-year age cohorts. These ages are conventionally adopted for international comparisons, but they lose meaning as the length of studies increases, which is mirrored by the rise in gross enrolment ratios. Using the above definition of the school-age dependency ratio, Thailand experienced a rapid drop—by more than half—in school-age dependency between 1970 and 2007. In actual fact, defined this way, this ratio measures only the effect of the demographic transition, which changed the ratio between these two populations.

A more useful definition of the dependency ratio, however, is the ratio of the total number of students to the size of the working population. This would give quite different results from those above. Over the years, with children staying longer in school, smaller age cohorts reach the working age and so the number of working people supporting the school-age population tends to decline. Indeed, the school-age population is now more likely to be 3–17 or 18 years old than 5–14 years, and the working population is more likely to be 18–64 years old than 15–64 years. Therefore, the school-age dependency ratio tends to rise. The ratio of the population aged 3–17 years to the working population was about 30% in 1990 and 40% in 2001. Moreover, the increase in gross enrolment ratios accentuates this rise. The increasing burden of educational expansion may be felt acutely by the population in terms of the unfavourable ratio of the working

to the non-working population and in terms of the public and private costs of education.

Beyond demographic factors, the development of the education system has its own dynamics so that each generation of the population has its own educational patterns. Let us examine the dynamics by a longitudinal analysis.

Educational Trajectories: The Educational Destinies of Different Generations

We will analyse the educational trajectories of students in order to see the educational destiny of each generation. These trajectories reveal the way in which educational developments influenced the educational path of each generation. This approach differs considerably from the earlier analysis in which the indicators reflect different rates of schooling during different periods of time. Moreover, the study of trajectories allows us to discern the impact of extending the duration of schooling upon a single generation.

Unlike the earlier analysis, which was based on cross-sectional data, this analysis makes use of longitudinal data to explain the present situation based on events in the past. We might, for instance, examine in one cohort who started school in a given year the percentage who completed primary school. That is, instead of comparing the schooling situation between different years (cross-sectional analysis), we will compare the educational progression over time of different cohorts distinguished by the year they started school (longitudinal analysis).

The consolidation of primary education

As noted earlier, the extension of six years of primary education to all children was to have been achieved in the late 1970s. It was not.

The rate of survival of one cohort of students to the next grade (for primary school, from grade 1 to the completion of grade 6) is

the percentage of students in the cohort who reached the next grade. Among those who entered grade 1 in 1963, 82% survived into grade 2 in 1964, 77% into grade 3 in 1965, 68% into grade 4 in 1966, 21% into grade 5 in 1967, and eventually only 19% completed grade 6 in 1968–69. By way of comparison, if we turn to the cohort who entered grade 1 in 1981, we notice a quite different picture: 81% of them completed primary school. Then among those who entered grade 1 in 1997, 93% survived into grade 2 and 91% into grade 6.

The survival rate is also influenced by a number of factors other than the progressive rise in schooling rates. Three factors can also explain its rise: mortality, dropout and grade repetition. Demographic data show that, on average, mortality explains only about one percentage point of the survival rate. Dropouts have almost disappeared with the extension of compulsory education and the drastic reduction in the number of children who work. Students repeating grades have also rapidly diminished because of the general practice of lax performance assessment, educational democratisation and cost considerations. In other words, full primary education for children has become a norm, which is reflected by the very high survival rates of recent generations.

Upward educational mobility

In analysing educational trajectories, a very useful indicator is the ratio of access to the next level of education, which is the percentage of each cohort who completed one level and moved to the next level, or the ratio of the number of students in the first year of a given level to the number of students in the last year of the previous level. For example, in 1958, out of 100 students who completed primary education, 68 took advantage of their access to the lower secondary level.

Our earlier discussion showed a steady consolidation of primary education, as a greater proportion of students completed primary school. However, figures suggest that access to lower secondary

education actually declined over the same period. The access ratio fell from 75% at the beginning of the 1960s to less than 40% in 1979–80. Indeed, when those who completed primary school rose, most students who finished primary education did not enter secondary school. From 1980, it rose again rapidly and stabilised at nearly 90% after 1989.

The access ratio measuring the movement between the two levels of secondary education reveals two quite distinct periods. For cohorts of the 1950s and 1960s, around 40% continued from lower to upper secondary school, which means about 60% dropped out after lower secondary school. From 1970 onwards, the access ratio exceeded 80%, so that by the early 1990s most of the people in that generation had completed secondary education.

As for access to higher education after secondary school, the ratio hovered around 40% before the open universities came on the scene. It increased significantly thereafter.

The advancing educational career

We are now in a position to consider the full educational career of each generation. This can be done by considering the probabilities for each year and for each cohort of completing primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education and accessing higher education. Taking the cohort of children who entered primary school in 1963, 19% completed primary school (in 1969), 14% lower secondary (in 1972) and 3% upper secondary (in 1975). By way of contrast, for the 1990 cohort, the probability of completing primary school was 80%, lower secondary was 62% and upper secondary was 42%.

Until the early 1970s, Thailand was a society where few children pursued education beyond four years of primary school. Until the 1972 cohort entered primary, completion rates at the primary and secondary levels were close. In societies where only a lucky few could access education, inequalities regarding educational achievements

were generally not pronounced. When primary schooling increased from the 1973 cohort to the 1980 cohort, completing primary school was the educational horizon. From the 1981 cohort onwards, this pattern changed: both primary and secondary schooling grew together. From this last cohort onward, growth at the upper secondary level started to be linked with that of lower secondary

Longitudinal data suggest a different picture of the educational “lag” at the secondary level. Taking into account the number of years it took for students to reach the secondary level, the stagnation of secondary education did not last the twenty years which the cross-sectional data suggest (Jones 2003), but rather about eight years, at most ten. Indeed, the ‘lag’ concerns only those cohorts who entered primary school between 1973 and that completed mainly primary level. For later cohorts, the percentage of students who completed secondary school rose rapidly so that it tended to be as high as for primary school. For the cohorts who started school after 1980, educational inequalities narrowed progressively, because of improvement in the completion rates at all levels. A greater proportion of recent cohorts had access to higher education. However, allowing more and more people to access higher levels of education raises the issue of educational quality, and particularly of how to finance education of the same or better quality. As the educational career progressively lengthens, huge resources are required just to maintain the existing level of funding per student. Quality cannot be maintained, let alone improved, without additional financial resources.

Funding the Development of Education

We have seen, through enrolment data, that education policy has been the main contributor to the building of the national education system. This is evident, for example, in the close relationship between enrolment figures and the introduction of regulations governing

compulsory education. We have also noted that the surge in enrolment induced by education policy has been difficult to maintain. We now consider how education has been financed and what choices have been made by the state in this regard.

So far, we have focused on the quantitative development of the Thai education system in terms of the rapid growth in enrolment at different levels. In this section, we introduce some indicators which, arguably, measure the quality of education, such as public spending on education and the student-teacher ratio.

Education Budget

State financing of education can be traced back to 1905 in Thailand, showing a long involvement of the state in education, although with some variations over time. As one may expect, there is a close relationship between the education budget and enrolment.

During the political age (1900s to early 1960s), there were already sustained financial commitments to education from the state prior to the 1921 law on compulsory education. During the 1930s, considerable increases in public educational expenditure led to a decision to make use of existing Buddhist schools. From the 1960s, education became the largest item in the national budget.

During the economic age (1960s onwards), the growth in public educational spending showed two distinct periods which matched those of enrolment growth. From the late 1950s up to the mid-1980s, it grew slowly and moderately against a backdrop of fast enrolment growth, mainly in primary education. In the late 1970s, when large cohorts completed primary school, the problem of meeting the large demand for secondary education arose (Watana 1976). The demand was met initially by reallocating resources from primary to secondary education, as at that time the cohorts starting primary school had begun to shrink, a result of the demographic transition. But this transitional solution was quickly exhausted. After a period

of budgetary restraint between 1983 and 1989, spending began to grow strongly from 1990 onwards, until the 1997 financial crisis put an end to it. This period of growth between 1990 and 1997 was partly financed by inflation. The 1997 crisis led to the devaluation of the currency and the imposition of structural adjustment. While public educational spending resumed within the first few years following the crisis, between 2000 and 2003 growth flattened, indicating perhaps structural changes in the education system.

In Thailand, public expenditure on education increased rapidly from 1990 onwards, representing 2.8% of gross domestic product in 1967 and 4.2% in 2007, and 15% and 23% of the national budget for the same years. The 2007 figures appear to match international levels. As elsewhere today, the share of the budget allocated to education roughly matches the proportion of the student population in the total population. In 1970, this was not the case; while students represented about 50% of the total population then, the education budget represented only 18% of the national budget. Both the end of the demographic transition and increasing public financial support for education allowed the country to catch up with international levels. From then on, the education budget would match enrolment

As total enrolment will probably continue to increase, in particular in secondary and tertiary education, the education budget may continue to expand, requiring more and more of the taxpayer's money. Whether this trend will continue will depend on the balance between public and private funding. It is interesting to note that the education budget reached almost 26% of the national budget in 2000 and then went down to less than 23% in 2007. In recent years, governments worldwide have tried to shift more of the burden of financing education to private sources. The problem remains of knowing where the money put into education is going.

Public Spending by Educational Level

Increases in budget allocation to education can be used for enrolling more students and/or for raising the spending on each student. Let us briefly consider the budget allocation to each level of education by assessing the public expenditure on each student at each level.

Fig. 1.6 shows interesting patterns. Between 1980 and 2006, expenditure per primary school student increased 373%, while enrolment fell by 23%. The government took the opportunity of decreasing enrolment to substantially increase the funding for primary education. This higher allocation could have led, of course, to quality improvement at this level, although it is not a sufficient condition for improvement. In secondary education during the same period, expenditure per student almost doubled, while enrolment increased by 188%. In tertiary education, including open universities, expenditure per student rose from 6,000 to 10,000 baht, or over 60% (although it had reached and then retreated from a peak of 15,000 in 1997), while enrolment increased fourfold. The convergence of the curves in the figure reflects, most of all, the drop in spending on tertiary education, as well as more balanced government investments in the three levels. This trend could signal that structural changes are in progress for the whole education system.



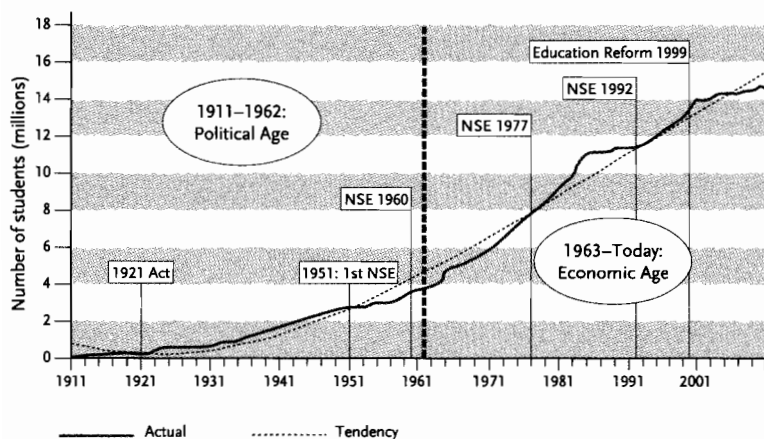
In less than three decades, the Thai education system has been able to accommodate successive cohorts of children for increasing duration of schooling, extending from four years in 1976 to almost twelve years by 2007. This massive growth of the education system was facilitated by favourable circumstances. Firstly, the demographic transition saw a progressive decline in the cohort size, which allowed earlier investments to be spread further. At the same time, economic growth permitted higher expenditure on education. In fact, Thailand

has financed the expansion of its education system through sustained economic growth, and demographic changes have allowed it to go beyond the limits permitted by the growth of the economy. The result was an impressive rise in enrolment at all levels. The achievement of nine years of compulsory education is particularly noteworthy, ranking the country in a good position by international standards.

However, there are dark sides to these remarkable accomplishments. Mass education has been achieved at the expense of quality. In particular, there is a noticeable increase in the student-teacher ratio at all educational levels since the early 1990s. This increase is an indication of declining quality. In this new situation, the emphasis of education policy should now shift to elevating the quality of education across the board.

Available data do not allow us to establish clearly if the government has made a choice to concentrate its efforts on compulsory education—that is, primary and lower secondary—and let families and private funds finance a growing share of educational expenses beyond the ninth year of education. However, household resources and the private sector are increasingly being drawn in so that the state's financial burden of education can be alleviated and confined to compulsory education. This evolution is taking place through the mobilisation of private sources to fund both public and private educational facilities. However, this reorganisation of public education—euphemistically referred to as “autonomy of educational institutions”—is in actual fact rampant privatisation of the education system. This choice—which became quite obvious with the 1999 Education Act and even more so with NSE 2002–2016—will have huge consequences, some negative, in particular the loss of educational equality as well as quality. This strategy nurtures credentialism and vocationalism. These negative consequences are extensively explored in the chapters that follow.

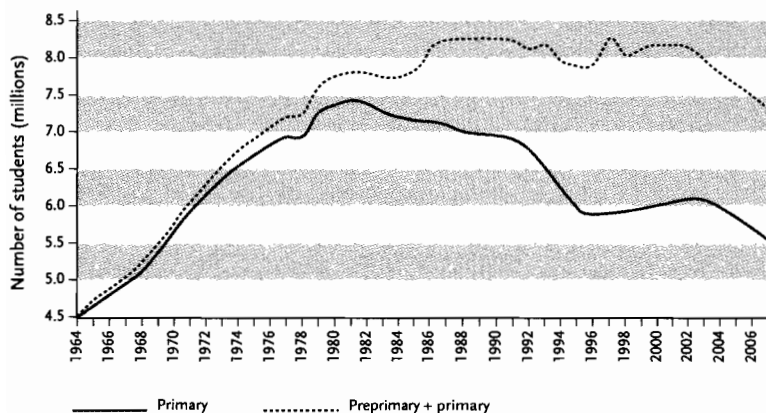
Fig. 1.1. Total enrolment by school year, 1911–2007



Source: CELS database on education

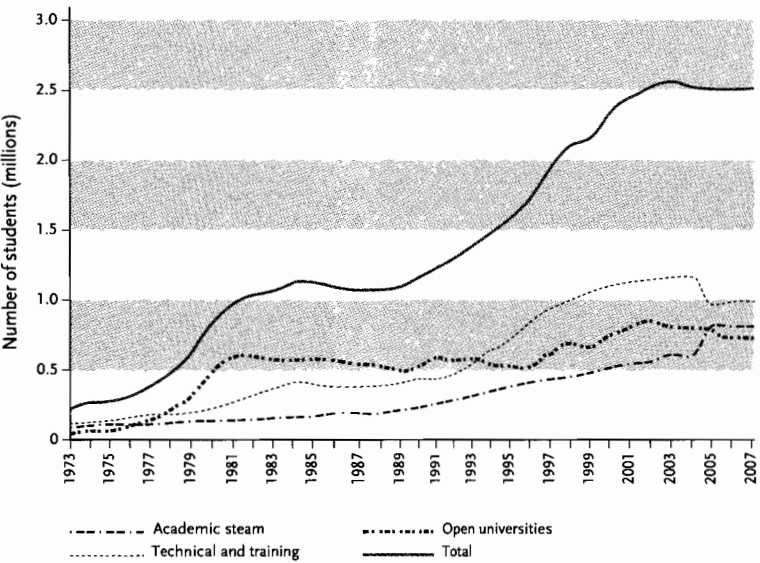
Note: NSE = National Scheme of Education

Fig. 1.2. Elementary school enrolment by school year, 1964–2007



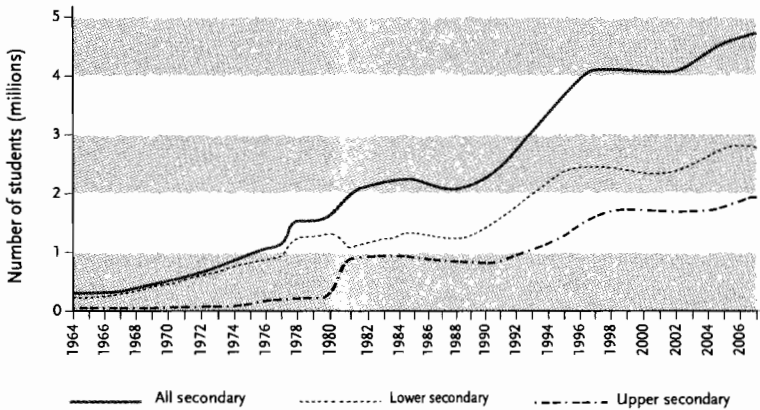
Source: CELS database on education

Fig. 1.3. Higher education enrolment, 1973–2007



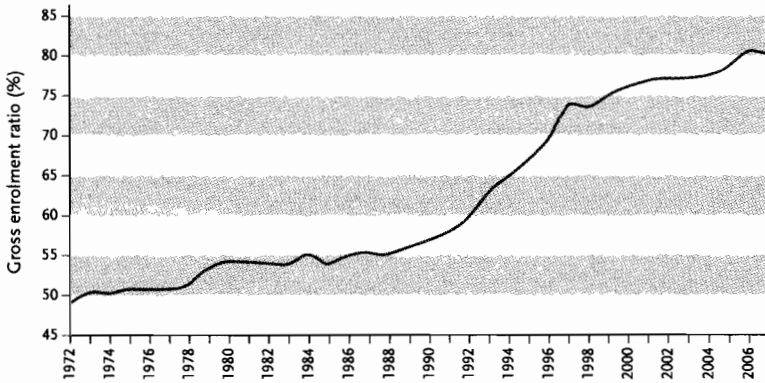
Source: CELS database on education

Fig. 1.4. Secondary school enrolment by school year, 1964–2007



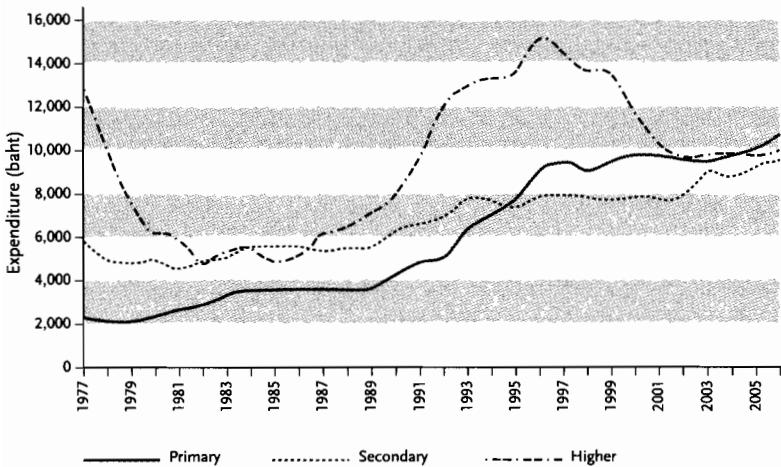
Source: CELS database on education

Fig. 1.5. Gross enrolment ratio of the population aged 3–18 years, 1972–2007



Source: CELS database on education

Fig. 1.6. Public expenditure per student by educational level, 1977–2006 (1988 constant price)



Source: CELS database on education

2

Quality: The Major Issue in Thai Education

ALAIN MOUNIER & PHASINA TANGCHUANG

The present chapter is an introduction to the difficult question of educational quality, which is examined from different perspectives throughout this book. There is no clear-cut conceptual definition of quality of education and consequently there is no satisfactory measurement of it. Actually, no assessment of the quality of education is really objective and impartial; any assessment is debatable, at least to the extent that an assessment reflects what the assessor intends to show and to legitimate.

Let us explore what we can and cannot learn from available assessments of the quality of education in Thailand in particular. In our view, measuring educational achievements does not adequately reflect the conceptualisation of quality of education, notwithstanding that it is generally held to do so. Looking at changes in quality over time offers a much better way of understanding what quality of education means.

Measuring the Quality of Education

Quality of education is usually defined as, and measured by, expected outcomes relating to the acquisition of knowledge. These outcomes

are equated to educational achievements of the teaching-learning process. Educational achievements are themselves defined very narrowly so as to make them easily measurable on the basis of scores obtained in tests of knowledge. Today, this method of measurement is in use in most countries worldwide in the form of international and national tests.

International Studies

It soon became obvious to educators that assessing the quality of education could only be relative and requires international comparison. Comparative studies originated in the desire to improve students' performance. Since very early in the history of educational evaluation, educational achievement has been compared across countries through the assessment of students' cognitive abilities. Such comparative studies can be traced back to 1908 when the International Commission for Mathematics compared students' performance in mathematics. Surveys in mathematics have been conducted for a long period of time by the International Study Center of Boston College and are today, on a much larger scale, renowned as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Comparisons of educational performance in other disciplines have also developed rapidly with surveys conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) since 1964.

Today, the most comprehensive assessment is carried out by the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which has been done in 2000 and 2003. The 2003 PISA survey collected information on the performance of fifteen-year-olds in mathematics, science, reading and problem solving through paper-and-pencil tests (OECD 2003). It was a very comprehensive survey of 250,000 students in thirty-two countries who completed the two-hour test. The PISA survey assesses students' literacy in three

domains. The first domain is *reading literacy*, defined as the capacity to understand, use and reflect on written texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society. The second one is *mathematical literacy*, which is the capacity to identify, to understand and to engage in mathematics and make well-founded judgements about the role that mathematics plays, as needed for an individual's current and future private, social and working life. The third is *scientific literacy*, defined as the capacity to use scientific knowledge, to identify questions and to draw evidence-based conclusions in order to understand and help make decisions about the natural world and the changes made to it through human activities. These definitions of literacy are probably among the more accurate definitions of quality of education (even if they do have severe limitations, as we will see later), since they focus on the major expected outcomes of education systems.

Through the use of questionnaires, PISA 2003 also collected information from students regarding their approaches to learning and their family backgrounds, and from school principals information on the way schools were managed.

The survey produced some interesting results regarding the sociological and organisational factors affecting educational achievements and regarding the quality of education. The surveyed variables assume that cognitive achievements may depend on sociological and organisational factors such as students' motivation and behaviour, their family backgrounds, and schools' management and leadership. The survey also calls into question certain deeply-held beliefs by showing in particular that (1) late or no streaming or selection of students by abilities leads to better educational achievements than aggressive selection and early streaming; (2) repeating grades is inefficient and has to be replaced by personalised tutoring of weak students; and (3) educational equality does not indicate an inefficient education system, but, conversely, the best results are obtained by education systems where inequalities are the smallest.

These conclusions are very important, as they contradict common sense and opinion. They show in particular that democratisation of education and equal opportunities in education are not detrimental to the quality of education as is generally believed (Welch 2000). We will return to this crucial question later.

However, PISA has faced criticism on various grounds. Firstly, this programme, as do others, greatly overestimates the capacity of tests to measure the acquisition of knowledge and cognitive abilities. Secondly, the conception and design of the tests are flawed in that they are culturally biased. It is supposed that the implicit objectives of education that the Western test designers have selected are socially legitimate for any country. Additionally, the tests are partial and focus on few disciplines to make international comparisons possible. Another criticism is that the programme overestimates science and mathematics as ways of understanding and making sense of things. Narrative knowledge, such as literature, history and social sciences, is another way—and better anchored in the cultures of learners—of developing the ability to learn, understand and make sense of things. By virtue of their construction, international comparisons cannot estimate narrative knowledge, and this is their most problematic limitation. Finally, a criticism that does not concern the programme itself is that the results are interpreted and presented by users superficially and carelessly, often cited only for legitimating education policies and reforms (Cyterman 2007).

Citing TIMSS and PISA in contemporary studies of educational quality is quite fashionable, and is witness to the influence of the education policies that four Anglo-Saxon countries—namely the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and New Zealand—and their neo-liberal governments have adopted since the beginning of the 1980s. In the United States, for example, evaluation of educational quality has been based chiefly on cost-efficiency principles. Particularly since the release in 1983 of the report to the US Department of Education titled *A Nation at Risk* (National

Commission on Excellence in Education 1983), the catchphrase has been to “raise the standards of education”. Subsequently, we have seen schools’ performance rated according to measurements of students’ performance. The aim has been mainly to enhance performance without increasing the cost to the public sector—or, more precisely, to reduce public expenses without affecting performance. This has been described as a policy to achieve excellence, and it has promoted the establishment of norms for content and achievement through the definition of *content standards* for specific subject material and *performance standards* measured against real achievements of students. The practice of setting norms and standards under the banner of quality improvement has spread throughout the world, in particular through the development of quality assurance institutions and codes.

Despite its limitations, PISA provides at present the only comprehensive tool for the analysis of education systems.¹ It is useful for research on some aspects of comparative evaluations and for highlighting certain strengths and weaknesses of national education systems and the effects of their organisation. To mitigate their main limitations, international tests can be complemented by national tests.

Thai Studies

National and international assessments have diagnosed Thai education today as being of low quality at all levels compared with international standards. This would have to mean that the education reform prescribed by the National Education Act of 1999 has failed, as its main objective was to improve the quality of education across the board.

1. The country profiles allow the user to obtain specific information from the PISA 2003 database for a particular country or group of countries. The system can provide the data in Microsoft Excel and also generate graphs in either HTML or PDF format.

Tests of educational achievement have multiplied in the past decade. They have been organised since 1999 for the final year of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school (respectively, grades 6, 9 and 12) by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development of the Ministry of Education. Analysis of those tests shows that, while overall performance is good, there are still about 20 per cent of students who lag behind and have difficulties particularly in mathematics, science as well as Thai and foreign languages. It also shows differences in achievement particularly between the sexes, between urban and rural areas and between geographic regions (ONEC 1999–2003).

The Report on Evaluation of Learning Reform at Basic Education Level published by the Office of the Education Council (OEC 2004) is less indulgent and less optimistic as far as quality is concerned. From cognitive tests carried out on students of grades 6 and 9, the report concludes that (1) except for the social sciences, academic achievements in Thai language, English language, mathematics and science were not satisfactory; (2) evaluation of thinking skills, knowledge-seeking skills and work skills, such as teamwork, planning and utilisation of learning resources, also revealed unsatisfactory results; and (3) evaluation of qualities of good citizenship, such as discipline, honesty and etiquette, yielded satisfactory results. There is almost unanimous agreement today on the diagnosis of low educational quality. In our view, however, it is based too narrowly on current tests and does not take account of the evolution of education over the past two decades. The recent history of Thai education shows that great progress has been made in terms of quality, although there is much room for further improvement.

Thailand participated in TIMSS surveys in 1995 and 1999 (Martin et al. 2000) and in both PISA surveys in 2000 and 2003. The 2006 study of Thai secondary education carried out by the World Bank is based on these surveys. That study reveals the same problems of quality as those pointed out by national and other international

tests, despite impressive progress and an honourable ranking among countries at the same level of development (World Bank 2006). All the same, compared with other countries with the same level of income per capita—particularly those of Latin America (such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile), educational achievements seem to be more evenly distributed between social classes in Thailand.

In 2006, a comprehensive national assessment was organised through the O-NET (Ordinary National Educational Test) to measure the educational achievements of some 250,000 students from about 2,500 schools all over the country. It confirms the results of the 2006 World Bank study. Supplemented by the PISA data for Thailand, it shows that educational achievements vary according to students' family characteristics, their school characteristics, and their attitudes and motivation. It reveals in particular that scores are positively correlated with household resources (income and wealth), the educational level of the head of family and the size of the school, and negatively correlated with the size of the classroom and the student-teacher ratio (Kobsak et al. 2006). However, the analysis is very general and cannot explain what these correlations mean exactly.

From 1999 to 2008, all studies—including those mentioned above, as well as comprehensive studies carried out in 2002 for the Asian Development Bank and the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC) as part of the 1999 education reform and its implementation (Fry 2002)²—find the same factors contributing

2. Professor Fry's report is a synthesis of six sectoral reports published in 2002, which are available on ONEC's website (www.onec.go.th): Sumon Amornvivat, *Learning Process Reform of the Pilot Schools: The Selected Models*; Rie Atagi, *School Reform Policy*; Boonmee Nenyod, *School-based Management: Thai Ways and Methods*; Hitendra Pillay, *Teacher Development for Quality Learning*; Laeka Piya-Ajariy, *Learning Reform Situation in the Pilot Schools: Lessons and Policy Recommendations*; John Stamper, *ICT for Direct Instruction and In-service Training*; Nonglak Wiratchai, *Reforming Process for Learning Quality Development: Assurance and Assessment*.

to educational quality. These factors, summarised in *Education in Thailand* (OEC 2004–2008), are budget endowment, number and quality of teachers, academic equipment (information and communication technology, libraries) and school management. There is no doubt that these factors are important, but they constitute a minimalist and superficial basis from which to improve educational quality. Actually, there are very few in-depth and well-informed studies of these factors and their relationships with educational achievements, not to mention that these factors are generally expressed in official and conventional language, which conceals the nature and size of the real problems. Scientific research into the quality of education has to go far beyond this superficial level. We believe that in-depth studies of factors determining the quality of education in a sociological and a didactic perspective have to be undertaken on a large scale. This is a necessary condition if we are to make any real contribution to improve the quality of education across the board throughout the country.

The concern with the qualitative outcome of the 1999 education reform was translated into the development of a system of standards and quality assurance along with the creation in 2000 of the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment. External assessments carried out by this agency are based on quality objectives set out in a list of “standards” defined by the type of education (basic, vocational, higher). These standards are norms of quality which education is supposed to reach. The progress of educational institutions towards the relevant norms is measured by “key performance indicators” (Ministry of University Affairs 2000; Somwung 2008). Introducing procedures for international and external assessment of educational institutions is certainly a necessary and decisive move, but the “quality” of quality assessment is often doubtful. In fact, the purpose is really to check if educational institutions are zealous enough in implementing education policies, as if any education policy implementation can be counted as an improvement in educational quality. Moreover, as the model of

quality assurance is borrowed from Britain and the United States, it concerns policies relating to accountability, total quality management and development of private funding (Rowley 1996). These policies have endeavoured chiefly to reduce public expenditure on education without inflicting too much damage on educational achievements. They are based on the belief that competition in the education market is the cheapest way to improve quality (O. S. Tan 2007; Quality Assurance in Education 2008). Their focus is actually much more on improving the governance and efficiency of educational institutions than on the quality of education.

International surveys of educational achievements show that there is a considerable mismatch between the official conception of quality presented by quality assurance agencies and the experience of quality by academic staff (Cartwright 2007). Despite its name, quality assurance in practice encompasses very few of the elements that together determine the quality of education, because the operative concept of quality and of its determinants is too narrow and is applied uniformly whatever the location and circumstances. Moreover, the conception of quality is biased. We do not mean here that quality assurance agencies are biased. They are generally quite objective and independent in their assessments. We mean that the concept of the quality that they have to assess by mandate is of itself biased and blurred. There is a great need to further elaborate the concept of quality.

Elaborating the Concept of Quality of Education

There are two contrasting approaches to the definition of quality of education. The first is a “substantive” or “naturalist” approach. This thinks of quality as having to do with the “essence” of education—or its intrinsic nature—which transcends context and time. But it runs the risk of ethnocentrism, adopting everywhere the sole

perspective of the hegemonic powers, and the risk of chronocentrism, seeing the past through the concerns and values of the present. This approach is normative in the sense that it proposes to bridge the gap between real situations and the essence of education, which is the benchmark for an ideal education. It has inspired the idea that there is one best practice and one best organisation which would ensure the best possible quality of education. This approach has led to the establishment of international standards of quality which have underpinned international tests of educational achievement and structural education reforms worldwide, promoted by, among others, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The second approach takes the historical perspective to show that the objectives of education have been defined in different ways at different times and in different countries and also that the concept of quality of education varies with the objectives. It leads to very different recommendations for improving educational quality.

The Naturalist Approach

According to the naturalist approach, the quality of education cannot be defined per se but only in relation to the objectives of education. And there are substantive educational objectives which can serve as criteria for evaluating the quality of education.

Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives

Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives has been an influential work in elaborating policies of quality assurance, to the extent that educational quality is usually defined only in relation to educational objectives. His taxonomy is a naturalist classification of educational objectives and is aimed at developing a "holistic education" by focusing on three different areas, or "domains", of educational objectives. The first domain is *affective*, which considers

how the attitudes of learners impact on their capacity to learn and how education can forge an ideal learning behaviour. The second domain is *psychomotor*, which focuses on how education can help to develop the practical abilities of learners. The third domain is *cognitive*, which has received the most attention and encompasses six levels:

1. Knowledge: mobilising and recalling existing knowledge when facing new information
2. Comprehension: understanding facts and ideas by some simple mental operations such as organising information, describing, comparing, translating and interpreting
3. Analysis: establishing relationships such as causes and effects
4. Application: using new knowledge for solving problems
5. Synthesis: compiling information and integrating different fields of knowledge
6. Evaluation: presenting and defending one's positions and opinions

This attempt to define educational objectives is very practical and quite simple as far as the process of education is concerned. It is, however, a very narrow and short-sighted attempt. Moreover, it is highly normative in that it attempts to define what education *should* deliver to learners. The knowledge acquisition process of learners is actually much more complex.³ It defies the normative concept of learning processes, since the cultures in which learning processes are embedded are highly varied and human intelligence is multifaceted. Not surprisingly, the substantive approach has increasingly focused on the definition of cognitive skills in order to define standards of educational quality.

3. See chapter 11 for a discussion of the teaching and learning process.

Harvey and Green on defining quality of education

Harvey and Green (1993) put forward a heuristic framework for a definition of quality that is applicable to any field of human activity. Their approach is similar to Bloom's. In their work, Harvey and Green borrow much from practices of quality control in manufacturing and trade. Their scheme has been used quite often for analysing quality in higher education (Harvey and Knight 1996; Lomas 2001; Pari 2006), in particular in debates on quality assurance in higher education. In their foundational article, Harvey and Green define quality with reference to five characteristics: excellence, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation.

Excellence refers to competition with other institutions. The objective is to be simply the best among peers. This objective is stressed particularly in Europe when there are political debates over the quality of education. It has led to the creation of "league tables" of schools and universities that rank educational establishments according to their quality as assessed by a wide range of criteria.

Perfection refers to flawless outcomes. This objective has been used to define quality in manufacturing. As far as education is concerned, it may be understood as meaning the delivery of the same education whatever the gender and social origin of the student or the location of study. It could also mean that each type of diploma certifies the same quality of the holders of that type of diploma regardless of the location of study or the institution which confers it.

Fitness for purpose is the achievement of set goals. This objective, a principle of good management, has prompted educational institutions to come up with statements of mission and to evaluate the achievement of goals. It has also led institutions to design projects or plans of development and very often to adopt the practice of project management, where intermediate results are measured and compared against expected outcomes. To ensure fitness for purpose, both internal and external quality evaluations are required. Quality

assurance means educational organisations must say what they do, do what they say and prove it to a third party (Lomas 2001). Institutions have to tell their students (“customers and clients” in Harvey and Green’s terms) what education they promise to deliver and to show that they fulfil their promises. This would require observance of principles of planning and of good governance. For quality assurance purposes, the standards that reflect fitness for purpose include rationality, efficiency, transparency, reliability, predictability and control. In fact, in the current educational context, fitness for purpose is a prerequisite of the healthy development of education markets, which is, for neo-liberals, the way to improving the quality of education (Gibbs 2001).

Value for money is the economic principle of efficiency: maximisation of the ratio of outcome to cost. This principle has been adopted in the educational field with a view to lowering public expenditure on education and to introducing private sector methods of management into public educational institutions and transforming them into “corporate enterprises” (McNay 1995).

Transformation is defined by Harvey and Green as “doing something *to* the customer rather than just doing something *for* the customer” (customer is the learner in the educational context). Indeed, education transforms learners, particularly their knowledge, their cognitive skills as well as their behaviour and ways of thinking. Quality of education thus tends to be equated with maximum transformation, and transformation can be equated with the acquisition of new behaviours (e.g. social mores in the past and rationality and individual autonomy in the present day) and of new and broader knowledge. This is the ultimate goal of education, by which its quality is generally measured. The quantity of knowledge that has to be acquired by students (in one discipline, in one year or for obtaining a diploma) is in fact delimited by the curriculum. Acquisition of knowledge is allegedly what is evaluated by tests and examinations; and the more and better this acquisition, the better the quality of education. However, there

is no objective measurement of knowledge acquisition as, other than quantity, learning can be more or less deep and “situated”.

To deal with this issue of the depth of knowledge acquisition, some authors apply the *theory of situated cognition*—developed as a result of the preoccupation with distinguishing the human mind from a computer (Clancey 1997; Salembier et al. 2004)—to the educational sphere. Situated cognition means that knowledge which students acquired in a particular discipline and in a singular context (the lesson, the classroom, the school) is difficult to transfer and apply to other disciplines and other contexts and changing circumstances. Outside the classroom, ideas and concepts learnt within the family and the workplace tend to prevail over scholarly knowledge acquired at school (Veillard 2006). At the end of the day, scholarly knowledge may tend to be forgotten, and this partly explains illiteracy among educated people. Achieving a satisfactory quality of education requires the learner to be able to go beyond situated cognition in order to acquire knowledge firmly and to apply it in different circumstances. To meet this requirement, a learner’s understanding must be deep enough to become enduring and capable of being updated by the learner himself or herself without a tutor’s intervention. This is a quality of education that Luria, Leontief and Vygotsky (2004) in particular have emphasised (see also chapter 11).

The Historical Approach

Throughout history, educational objectives have generally been forged by social forces and crystallised in education policies and practices. Historically, education has always served, successively or simultaneously, three major social objectives (Bowen 1986; Lowe 2001).

The first objective is political, which steers education towards the building of the nation-state. Nation building is a phase during which education has served, and been reserved for, the elite constituting the

ruling class of nation-states. This objective has endured until today with the preparation of the workforce for public administration. In the case of Thai education, this objective dominated from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1990s—the period known as the political age in chapter 1.

The second objective is economic, which steers education towards economic development. It has become a major objective, with neo-liberal policies, globalisation and global economic competition driving education towards vocationalism and the delivery of productive skills. Education is shaped to serve corporate economic interests in the name of sustaining economic growth (Halsey et al. 1997; Ford 2002; Cobb 2002). This was the dominant objective during the economic age elaborated in chapter 1.

A third social objective of education has prevailed for some time: the creation and dissemination of knowledge. This was the major objective of German research universities in the nineteenth century, and it was also the objective around which other universities all over the world have been structured until as recently as the 1980s. In reality, however, and despite the much-touted coming of the “knowledge society”, the advancement of knowledge itself has hardly been the real objective, with few exceptions over time and across countries (see chapter 4). In fact, education has always been conceived and structured for a social end, and its quality has mostly been defined in ways that have little to do with scholarship.

With this third objective of knowledge advancement in mind, Kantor and Lowe (2004) sought to reveal the historical reality of quality education in the United States by comparing historical observations against an allegedly contemporary ideal of quality which involves “a strong academic curriculum taught by engaged, engaging and well-educated teachers in schools committed to the promotion of intellectual development” (p. 6), and, we might add, attended by hardworking students motivated by their desire to satisfy their curiosity and animated by their thirst for scholarship, intellectual

development and personal growth. Kantor and Lowe wrote that they “simply cannot locate much of [this quality] in the past” (p. 6) so that complaints about a decline in the quality of education after an alleged golden age of education, as claimed in *A Nation at Risk*, cannot be sustained.

For Thailand, the question is why its quality of education is low. Is it unable to catch up with international standards? Are international standards going up at the same pace or more rapidly so that catching up is like trying to reach a mirage? Are social actors dissatisfied with the outcomes of the education system and in particular with cognitive achievements? Or, as many assert, has education become mass education too rapidly at the expense of quality? This last question has been recurrent in the international literature and merits close examination in the case of Thailand.

Education for All: Is a Decline in Quality Inevitable?

It is a common belief that quality will decline under the strain of surging enrolment and mass education. The naturalist and the historical approaches to the definition of quality answer differently a worldwide concern, as Lomas (2001) puts it: Does the development of mass education necessarily mean the end of quality? As Thailand has already entered the age of mass education, can we say that this could be the explanation for the declining or at least the stagnating quality of education?

In his synthesis report on Thai education, Gerald Fry (2002, 3) observes impressive quantitative accomplishments but no corresponding quality achievements:

Thailand has achieved a number of impressive accomplishments in education. It has dramatically increased the size of its system at all levels. Literacy rates are at an impressively high 95 percent rate and

universal primary education has been basically achieved. Over 80 percent of all teachers have received a bachelor's degree or higher. At the Ministry of Education itself, there are over 400 individuals with doctorates.

Despite these quantitative successes, several key problems persist. The educational system remains over-centralized and bureaucratized, with much duplication in educational services and related inefficiencies. There has been a neglect of science and mathematics reflected in the test scores mentioned above. There have been inadequate incentives to promote good teaching and teacher learning. Problems related to access and equity, particularly at the upper secondary level, persist. Finally, there has been the problem of traditional learning methods and their emphasis on rote learning.

If Fry's observations do not establish an explicit causal relationship between the rise of mass education and the delay in quality improvement, we can infer that a relationship exists, in particular through the persistence of low test scores and outdated learning methods. The question is whether or not the slow improvement in quality (some educationalists would not hesitate to claim a decline in quality) is associated with mass education and saturated enrolment rates.⁴

The expansion of education all over the world has frequently raised the important question of its relationship to quality (Chinnapat 1989; Malkova 1989; Lomas 2001; Keeves and Watanabe 2002; Teese and Polese 2003). There is a need to analyse the factors that determine the quality of education and investigate into the reality of a general decline in quality that parallels the democratisation of education. Perhaps on reaching a certain point in the expansion of education,

4. We define *saturated enrolment rates* as enrolment rates of 100 per cent or more for a given age group, which means that at least all children of school age go to school.

the relationship between that expansion and quality becomes negative (marginal returns to scale in terms of quality become zero). In other words, there may be an optimum point where investment in education should stop. This would invalidate the argument for endless expansion of education and for lifelong learning. The idea of a negative relationship is supported by the social elite with a view to defending their privileges by reversing the trend of educational democratisation. Moreover, education professionals, in particular teachers, have propagated this idea as a means of hiding their own weaknesses and inadequacies as well as stemming the adverse consequences of mass education on their working conditions.

Here historical observations and rational arguments converge when they both show that a causal relationship between quality and educational expansion cannot be proved. To start with, quality assessment by tests and scores is a very poor method. Moreover, comparing scores over time is very difficult, if not impossible and meaningless, as the objectives of education do change with time. People who resist change in educational objectives, for whom education is meant to inculcate social values and norms, would also scorn the measurement of educational achievements by tests in mathematics and science as worthless and meaningless.

Let us examine why the average student performance might decline when enrolment increases. It may occur as democratisation of education incorporates students from poor family backgrounds whose parents were left outside the education system (Filmer and Pritchett 1999; Barro and Lee 2000). As these students tend to perform poorly, for various reasons—as research in the sociology of education has extensively demonstrated—educational democratisation would have a built-in mechanism of decreasing quality.

In that regard, the 2004 *Education in Thailand* report (OEC 2004–2008) cites an interesting development: the number of disadvantaged children (mainly deserted and impoverished children) enrolled in compulsory education increased with enrolment and was about

25 per cent of total enrolment in compulsory education in 2003. It has been a real success of the Thai education system to enrol all children regardless of their social backgrounds. However, as statistics also show, scores in tests are proportional to the income and educational levels of parents (World Bank 2006). By incorporating more and more disadvantaged families (mainly poor and migrant), the democratisation of education has the effect of causing a decline in average scores. However, this by no means indicates that the teaching-learning process is worsening. Quite the contrary.

Moreover, reducing educational inequalities has larger positive social and economic impacts on the country as a whole than the high educational achievements of a few. Improving educational opportunity is a laudable effort, even if it entails a decline in relative scores in international tests! Actually, the idea that the democratisation of education leads inexorably to the deterioration of quality and is the cause of a lost golden age is seriously challenged by historical studies, as Kantor and Lowe (2004) have demonstrated. They show, rather, the opposite.

In order to school more children, education systems have improved their resources and organisation, have trained their teachers better, have adopted better-designed curricula and learning material, and have evaluated more accurately the progress of students. After a phase of quantitative expansion when quality occupies the second row, the next phase puts quality as the first concern. This historical succession has been experienced by the majority of countries, among them Asian countries (Kirpal 1971; Watty 2001), and we may assume that Thailand has entered this second phase with the National Education Act of 1999.

When UNESCO adds to its slogan "Education for All" the complement "The Quality Imperative" (UNESCO 2005), it is well aware that equal opportunities in education means more than just the opportunity to go to school for all. It also means getting the same education regardless of the school enrolled in. If fairness and

efficiency have to be achieved, schools have to strictly adopt the low context-dependent learning process. This means that schooling conditions have to be equivalent wherever the place of study and, for that purpose, have to remain relatively independent of family, neighbourhood, economic power and any vested interests. The quality of the teaching-learning process has to be uniform regardless of the place of study, so that the knowledge acquired can be the same nationwide. The conditions for such equality are rarely met, and we will see that education policies very often take the opposite direction by subordinating education progressively to economic and local powers.



In conclusion, Thailand's education has certainly made outstanding achievements in a relatively short time. Yet, it still has a long way to go to improve the quality of education across the board. A major dilemma has arisen which stems from the parallel implementation of two conflicting goals of the education reform. The first goal is political and economic in nature; it in effect gives to the national education system a vocational mission, subordinating it to society (parents, community, businesses, etc.), opening it to private enterprise, fostering competition between educational institutions and delegating to local authorities a leading role in educational management. The second goal focuses on the improvement of cognitive skills by reforming the teaching-learning process. It is our contention—which is supported throughout this book—that these two goals and the provisions of their implementation are contradictory and incompatible; in particular, the first goal may preclude the second.

The elements of both goals are too often inspired by Western ideas and global trends. They are not built on firm philosophical and political foundations coupled with a profound knowledge of realities. Besides being borrowed ideas, they do not define clear objectives

and principles. In our view, major flaws in these two objectives of the reform, and the causes of their incompatibility, stem from the lack of a profound and scientific knowledge of the reality of Thai education that is based on relevant, in-depth and conclusive studies. As a whole, the reform does not itself exhibit the sound research for which it makes provisions. The following chapters will examine these issues, in particular in relation to the 1999 reform.

PART II

**PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL DILEMMAS
OF EDUCATION**

3

Education Act 1999: A Workable Education Reform?

ANNOP PONGWAT & ALAIN MOUNIER

The National Education Act enacted in 1999, which prescribes an education reform, reflects the political context that produced it and, to some extent, the national state of the educational debate. It is the result of political innovations in this particular period in Thailand's history when, for the first time, democratic forces in the government had remained in office for about a decade. This was a striking period of reforms which arose from political transformations and economic turmoil. The new 1997 Constitution changed the political landscape drastically. It urges political and academic forces to work on an education reform that is able to strengthen democracy through the better education of Thai citizens. The onset of the economic crisis that same year created a new context in which liberals in charge of the government were weakened and had to compromise with the political forces of "civil society" to elaborate and adopt an ambitious reform of the whole education system. This political compromise is clearly mirrored in the contradictory philosophical foundations of the 1999 education reform. Those contradictions left the impact of the reform open-ended and subject to the play of social actors. The result is that, despite the wishes of the reformers, the prospects for national education seem to be increasingly influenced by the elite and the

middle classes. This may lead to the partition of national education between the public and the private sector.

The Historical Political Context of the Education Reform

The constitution enacted in October 1997, the country's sixteenth and dubbed by many "the People's Constitution", is indeed the "education constitution". It contains a larger number of articles with more educational content than all previous constitutions combined. Less than two years after the constitution was adopted, the National Education Act was enacted in August 1999 under a Democrat-led coalition government, launching the latest education reform campaigns. While not all stakeholders appreciated the Act's content, for pioneering and leading reformers the passage of the Act represented the first major victory on a long reform road. Before looking at the political context of its elaboration and implementation, let us summarise in a nutshell the spirit of the 1999 Act as contained in its major provisions.

The Content of the Education Reform

Concrete provisions of the education reform deal with the reform of learning and of the organisation and management of education. These provisions are set out in the foundational texts for the reform and in particular the 1999 Education Act itself. They are also contained in the amended orientations and texts elaborated for its implementation.¹ The main provisions can be summarised as follows:

1. Among them are the Amended National Education Act 2002, the Basic Education Curriculum B.E. 2544 (2001), the National Scheme of Education 2002–2016 and the National Education Plan 2002–2016 (ONEC 1999–2003).

1. Developing a new curriculum. The reform of the curriculum is a twofold task. On the one hand, there is to be a core curriculum for primary and secondary schools that is based on national standards. This core curriculum allows the inclusion of 30 per cent locally determined content to accommodate local needs. In particular, these local additions are legitimated on the grounds of raising students' awareness of local wisdom, that is, local mores and customs, local values, and local crafts and know-how. On the other hand, the curriculum is also to include studies designed to develop more independent and autonomous individuals who are able to think and act independently. At the same time, it aims to discourage individualistic tendencies by raising students' awareness of Thai virtues and social problems and by considering local needs and developing local talents. The new curriculum emphasises the transmission of moral, ethical and aesthetic values. Study materials are to be revamped to try and avoid foreign influence in order to strengthen Thai identity and culture. This initial orientation is in the process of being amended to give more importance to scientific disciplines.
2. Adopting a new pedagogy to promote a child-centred education that focuses on the child's interests rather than on instruction in norms, values and selected knowledge. The new learning process is laid out in a set of recommended "learning methods for Thai people" that are tailored to suit specific age levels. These methods aim to build the reasoning capacity of students and to replace rote learning and conformism by focusing on developing intelligence rather than memory. The new pedagogy aims to raise the quality of education so that students' potential can be realised to the fullest extent.
3. Establishing lifelong learning facilities to provide learning opportunities to those who did not have them when young and to enable the updating of skills and competencies in line with technological advances and increasing job mobility.

4. Developing vocational skills and competencies in line with the needs of production rather than academic disciplines such as the humanities which are seen as less economically useful.
5. Improving the quality and accountability of teachers. Teacher training is to be oriented towards pedagogy and accountability and away from a disciplines-based structure. A systematic evaluation of teachers is to be set up to foster their commitment to teaching and their accountability to students, schools and society. Teachers' status and career prospects are to be enhanced.
6. Decentralising the administration of the national education system by democratising central administration and transferring power to local authorities, which are closer to the people and better informed about local problems, needs, practices and customs.
7. Involving communities, families, social institutions and businesses in education by giving them a say both in the elaboration of the local components of curricula and in the management of schools.
8. Increasing the cost-effectiveness of educational institutions by giving them more autonomy and responsibility in their management while at the same time putting in place procedures for monitoring quality assurance.
9. Mobilising all possible resources for educational purposes, including private funding and development of private educational institutions.

When enacted, the ambitious provisions of the education reform widely raised hopes that the quality of education would indeed be improved. The slow pace of implementation, due in particular to political bickering, has subsequently engendered disillusion and frustration (Waraiporn 2005).

Elaboration and Enforcement: Political Procrastination

By the end of the year that the Education Act was enacted, nine members for the Educational Reform Executive Committee were finally selected and their Educational Reform Office was officially established on 11 January 2000. They and their office, a direct result of Article 75 of the Act, were charged with the crucial responsibility of proposing appropriate systems and structures and drafting the required legislation. They completed their assignment in less than one and a half years and presented it to the government, on 25 April 2001.

Other existing agencies were assigned equally important tasks. The Ministry of Education was to deal with curriculum- and instruction-related matters and to keep its more than half a million personnel all over the country informed of reform content and direction. The National Education Commission, a policy and planning agency attached to the Prime Minister's Office, would work on matters of learning reform as well as on designing the autonomous organisations stipulated in the Act's various articles. And, last but not least, the Ministry of University Affairs was charged with higher-education reform. The most notable responsibilities of this ministry had been, until this time, the university entrance examination, the financing of universities and the controversial autonomous universities campaign. This last initiative involved taking public institutions of higher education out of the bureaucratic system, but thus far it has managed to transfer only a few, although the process was speeded up in 2007 by political directives. Prior to it, reforms inside universities, whether public or private, seem to have consisted mainly of centrally orchestrated and reporting-based quality assurance measures for the benefit of university administrators, along with some frantic attempts to open provincial branches and off-campus graduate and undergraduate classes. The latter caught the public's attention, but it perhaps did not represent to them so much an expansion of educational

opportunities in universities of high repute as commercialisation and the pursuit of private funds.

While, for the most part, no target dates were set for these three bodies to implement the reforms, a target date was set for their amalgamation into the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture. The new body was intended to be in place by 20 August 2002, and to serve as the cornerstone of the most comprehensive and systemic reform since King Rama V's reign during the second half of the nineteenth century.

As August 2002 drew nearer, political pressure mounted for the formation of the new ministry. In the end, the much needed law for its formation was promulgated only on 7 July 2003, almost one year later than originally scheduled. The new ministry retained the name Ministry of Education. However, an important addition to the ministry was the Commission for Vocational Education (stipulated in Article 32 of the new law but not mentioned in the original law), as one of the four pillars within the new ministry. The other three pillars were the Council for Education, the Commission for Basic Education and the Commission for Higher Education.

Over more than eleven years since the adoption of the 1997 Constitution and for more than nine years since the enactment of the Education Act, education reform has proceeded very slowly. It has also been marred by fierce controversies and bitter conflicts, especially during the first government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001–2004). The implementation of the reform was boosted between end 2006 and end 2007 during the period of the Surayud military government, and in particular laws enforcing the autonomy of several public universities were passed. Still, implementation efforts have stumbled over provisions for administrative decentralisation. As decentralisation by way of devolution of powers to local authorities would actually place schools under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Education appears to be quite opposed to this change.

While Article 81 of the 1997 Constitution stipulated that there be a reform of the national education system, it did not set a time frame. In fact, the first education law was promulgated in late August 1999 during the Democrat-led coalition government. Article 43 stipulated in its first paragraph that all individuals are entitled to no less than twelve years of free, comprehensive and quality basic education to be provided by the state. This stipulation did not require the enactment of any law. It required only that some of its provisions be put into effect no more than two years after the date of promulgation of the new educational law. Records show that no royal executive nor ministerial decrees for implementing the provision for a twelve-year basic education were promulgated. The first implementation of the education law took place on 21 April 2003, when the Education Minister signed into effect the Ministerial Decree on Categorization and Classification of Basic Education.

Interestingly, what the constitution did *not* stipulate was enacted as law. This was the Compulsory Education Act of 2002, promulgated on 31 August 2002. What is interesting is the rationale given for the need to have this law. Article 17 of the 1999 Education Act, not the constitution, states that parents or guardians should ensure that children or individuals under their care should undergo nine years of compulsory education. This was given as the prime reason for enacting the Compulsory Education Act. As this provision of nine years' compulsory education was already a major provision of the 1992 National Scheme of Education, the new Act of 2002 may have been underpinned on the fact that until then "parents or guardians" were not ensuring that their children receive the nine years.

On the other hand, other provisions of the Education Act have not always prompted the government to act. For example, Article 39 states that the new Education Ministry should be responsible for the decentralisation of academic, budgetary, personnel and general affairs administrative and management authority. These functions were to be devolved to the local administrations and the schools under them,

according to criteria and methods specified by a ministerial decree. The actual devolution turned out to be a process of de-concentration of central administration and not a decentralisation exercise that would have implied the devolution of decision-making power to local authorities independent of the Ministry of Education. The ministry won temporarily by creating in 2002 educational service areas all over the country, which, numbering 175 today, are in fact local branches of the ministry. However, fierce debate between supporters of de-concentration and supporters of decentralisation goes on (Waraiporn 2005; M. Tan 2007).

Probably more important is Article 73 of the act, which states that stipulations in chapter 5, “Educational Administration and Management”, and chapter 7, “Teachers, Faculty Staff and Educational Personnel” should not be enforced until actions are “taken in accordance with those stipulations” but they must be enforced within three years of the enactment of the Act. This would have made the last date for implementing the provisions of these chapters 19 or 20 August 2002. In fact, the law putting into effect the stipulations of chapter 5 was passed on 7 July 2003, and the chapter 7 law was passed on 24 December 2004, in both cases much later than was specified.

Only some of the constitutional and other legal stipulations relating to the education reform were given priority and implemented during the 2001–2004 period. Those stipulations disputed by rival political parties were either delayed or decisively thwarted. Those deemed to be hostile to the beliefs and practices of conservative elements within the former Ministry of Education were slowed down or stalled. Furthermore, those deemed likely to upset or, worse, to destroy the age-old and embedded power structures and relationships were resisted at all costs. Only those stipulations which had undergone very stringent and careful censoring and purging were approved and promulgated.

That education is a matter of politics is not a new discovery. Nonetheless, it is worth studying the content of the education reform

in relation to the political structure of Thailand. The education reform has to be understood in the context of Thai political traditions, which try to legitimate the country's educational stances on firm philosophical bases.

Education and Political Traditions

The history of Thai education can be understood within the history of the building of a nation-state (Thida 1976). Actually, Thai education has been shaped by its political traditions.

In the postscript to their book *A History of Thailand*, Baker and Pasuk (2005)² present the history of Thailand since the foundation of the nation-state in the nineteenth century. They view this history as the interplay of two political traditions of Thai thought and Thai politics, traditions which have also deeply shaped education policies. The first is called the tradition of the “strong state” and the second is the tradition of the “strong society”.

Historically in Thailand, the tradition of a strong state has been embodied in the absolute monarchy and the military. It originated during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, when absolutism was justified by the need to achieve progress and to promote the “civilisation” (*siwilai*) of the country in order to protect it from external threats (English and French colonialism in the region) and from internal disorder and social segmentation. The people were expected to be unified, passive and obedient. Education was put at the service of this tradition by reserving higher education for the administrative and military elites of the kingdom (law, military academy and civil service). The creation of Chulalongkorn University in 1917 through the unification of different royal schools was intended to serve this purpose and to be the symbol of the royal monopoly and control over education. Later, in 1921, education was also expected to instil in the

2. In the following paragraphs, quotes are from this book if not noted otherwise.

people recognition of the central royal power and to build a national identity. To these ends, primary schools modelled on education in Buddhist temples (*Wat*) were created. Such education focused on Thai language, instruction in “good” behaviour and introduction to the history of a unified kingdom (Wyatt 1969).

From the mid-twentieth century, the strong state was legitimated by its role in fighting communism within the region as well as the Chinese within the country. The developing state and its army and police forces were used to achieve these two tasks and to give to paternalistic officials the role of overseeing and controlling the population. During the cold war and under US patronage, higher education was mobilised to provide the new men required by the developing state in great numbers. This was achieved particularly by the opening of new provincial universities during the 1960s and 1970s. The extension of primary education deeper into the country was an ideological device used to build a unified nation. Planned industrialisation and the development of a service sector in urban areas required a skilled labour force, which was built by adding secondary levels to primary schools and creating Ramkhamhaeng and Sukhothai Thammathirat open universities in the 1970s.

The formula was revived again by the business-oriented party of Thaksin Shinawatra at the start of the twenty-first century in order to overcome the external threat of globalisation and internal disorder arising from democratisation (a task thought to require the concentration of national wealth). In this period, although the government had adopted the role of a strong state, education policy was formulated within the framework of the 1999 education reform, which was inspired by both political traditions.

The second political tradition advocates a strong society as the only democratic and people-oriented alternative to a strong state (Hirsch 1993; Chatthip 1999). For Baker and Pasuk, this “second, opposing tradition emerged in the aspirations of commoner intellectuals in the late nineteenth century, and took firmer shape in the public sphere

of the early twentieth. In this formula, the purpose of the nation-state is the well-being of the nation's members. . . . The enemy is not any threat, internal or external, but the strong-state tradition itself." (p. 264) This tradition promotes principles of government based on the rule of law, in particular political constitutions. This formula was first implemented by Pridi Banomyong and his People's Party in 1932 when they ended 150 years of absolute monarchy in a coup. Thammasat University, literally the "university of moral science and politics", was created to train the new bureaucrats needed for the post-absolutist administration. At the same time, primary education was promoted so as to empower the people. The formula was again implemented for short periods of time in 1946 and 1974 and for almost a decade from 1992 onwards. This tradition sought its models abroad: in the nineteenth century the model was the Meiji era in Japan, between the two world wars it was the European ideals of liberalism and socialism, and during the cold war it was the Western ideals of liberalism and democracy. In the era of globalisation, society adopted the discourse of human rights, civil society, democracy and local development (Reynolds 1993). This tradition has also tried to localise these ideas within the framework of Buddhism (Piker 1975; Brummelhuis 1980, 1984).

While the strong state tradition has been embodied in the absolute monarchy and the military, the strong society tradition is composed of two strands, dubbed "liberal" and "localist or communitarian" by Baker and Pasuk.

The liberal strand, a Thai version of neo-liberalism, accepts globalisation as a modern way of strengthening civil society, promoting human rights and defending the environment. In this perspective, both the individual and globalisation provide a bulwark against an invading central state (Commission on Thailand's Education 1996; Burbules and Torres 2000). The liberal strand is based on updated theories of modernisation where globalisation is seen as the agent of modernity. In Thailand, the liberal strand is articulated in relation to civil society

and the middle class, and as the way of undermining the power of the central state. The individual, freed from patron-client relationships, is able to bypass the old elite. In particular, the peasant class, once the backbone of a strong state and now regarded as an outdated concept, should be integrated into modern society by a vigorous process of individualisation and by being freed from the local patronage system (*Rabop Uppatham*) through prosperity and education. This liberal strand adopts the project of globalisation (Arnone and Torres 2003; Berger 2004), the purpose of which is to promote a “lean state” by reducing the role of the central state to minimal prerogatives.

In the field of education, the liberal vision advocates the end of the state’s involvement in educational matters. This vision has been implemented in education reforms unfolding in English-speaking countries, notably Britain in the 1980s under the rule of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who pioneered a neo-liberal education policy, and later in the United States, New Zealand and Australia (Peters and Marshall 1996; Berman et al. 2003). These reforms are intended to introduce competition into the educational field as the only way to increase efficiency. The stated intention is to offer free choice to parents in selecting schools and studies for their children, to establish a system of continual assessment of students and teachers, to reduce centralisation of public educational administration through school-based management, university autonomy, and competition between educational establishments (notably through the use of “league tables” that rank schools and universities according to their quantitative performance), and eventually to have increasing recourse to private funds. The real intention of this education reform agenda has been to undermine education as a public good, transforming it into a commodity to be bought and sold on an education market and supplied by profit-driven educational institutions. The widespread use of cost-efficiency criteria promotes a utilitarian concept of education whereby the economy is in command and economic needs and rationales are the only ones that matter (Halsey et al. 1997; Cobb

2002; Ford 2002; Bridges and Jonathan 2003). The liberal strand of political tradition in Thailand is supported by businessmen and the urban middle class, who have also espoused the neo-liberal stance on education.

The second strand of the strong society political tradition advocates a society based on localist or communitarian values. Reacting against urban development policies, this tradition emphasises *phumpanya thongthin* (local wisdom) and *watthanatham chumchon* (community culture), both of which draw upon values within peasant society. The symbol of community forms the bedrock for seeking a more participatory and egalitarian society. It also draws upon Buddhist thinking in its rejection of the capitalist value of maximising production and consumption. Within this framework, “true well-being” is to be sought “through moderation, restraint, self-reliance and attention to spiritual as well as material improvement” (p. 251). The localist strand, nurtured by the shortcomings and social inequalities produced by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, adopts an agro-centrist posture by denouncing the urban bias of economic growth.³ This strand has gained strength through the support of social activists, non-government organisations and academics. It has also drawn its political influence and legitimacy from its proximity to the royal philosophy of self-reliance and support of rural development. In the educational field, this strand advocates that ethical and holistic values as well as local knowledge should be recognised as social qualities worthy of transmission to the new generation.

3. The long-lasting controversy between the agro-centrist and the industrio-centrist orientation of development again came to the fore at the end of the 1960s during the green revolution in Asia. In opposition to Byres' (1974) thesis of a rural bias that is accused of hampering industrialisation, Lipton (1983) tries to show that the main problem of contemporary societies is an urban bias which is the cause of agricultural stagnation and rural poverty. On this controversy, see also Harriss (1992). Thai localists found part of their economic arguments in Lipton's thesis, which has been quite influential in the 1980s in international circles and particularly in the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and the World Bank.

As Baker and Pasuk have pointed out, these two strands, although frequently antagonistic, share a common opposition to the strong, overly centralised and all-powerful state. Their shared opposition to a strong state has overcome their differences. They have made an opportunist alliance in order to promote a strong society on the basis of fundamental reforms which aim to end the domination of the old elite and to cement democracy. Their strategic cooperation has generated some novel initiatives in the political, economic and educational spheres of society.

In the political arena, it led to the formulation of a new constitution. The 1997 Constitution was aimed at preventing any return to military government or the advocacy of a strong state. It places people at the centre of the political scene by instituting the rule of law, establishes a greater balance of power within the system and confers constitutional protection on individual human rights. In the economic arena, it gave rise to a new orientation of economic policy as inscribed in the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan of 1997–2001, which aims to shift economic and social policies from an economic growth inclination towards grassroots development through the promotion of community self-reliance and secure community economies, as well as through the advocacy of participatory development.

In the educational arena, the education reform, prefigured in the constitution and stipulated by law in 1999, is meant to strengthen democracy by giving individuals the knowledge necessary for their empowerment (Lavenant 2001). In practice, the education reform exhibits strong signs of a compromise between these two strands of liberalism and localism. The question is whether or not this compromise between the heterogeneous founders of the reform is workable and sustainable.

In 1994, in the aftermath of the 1992 political crisis that ultimately gave power to democrats, the Thai Farmers Bank and an ex-technocrat, Sippanond Ketudhat, created a think-tank whose purpose was

to promote education reform. Their premise was that education should be based on the needs of the population rather than on national objectives determined by the government. The general orientation of the 1999 Education Act is based considerably on the recommendations of this think-tank, which tried to reconcile liberal and localist views on education. However, when the government sought the help of the International Monetary Fund in the wake of the 1997 economic crisis, the rescue package on offer promoted a lean state with minimal government involvement in educational matters—in other words, the privatisation of education—at least in post-compulsory education.

With the 1999 education reform, the Democrat-dominated government tried to follow these educational recommendations in line with their liberal convictions while at the same time voicing the rhetoric of the localist views on education. However, there is one topic on which both political strands seem to coincide without reserve: the necessity to weaken the central level of educational administration and to give the power to decentralised entities.

This deference to localist views was dictated by the need to get the political support of the localist movement. The Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC), charged with implementing the education reform, has become expert at mixing the contradictory liberal and localist discourses which underpin current education policies, a strategy which preserves the original compromise that gave birth to the education reform. In the following statement from the Prime Minister's Office, we can observe this compromise at work, as it seeks to reconcile the sentiments of the original supporters of the education reform with those of Thaksin Shinawatra's liberalism:

[T]he 1997 Constitution . . . advocates an improvement of education in harmony with economic and social change, the development of science and technology and the promotion of local wisdom and national culture.

The development of Thai society with priority accorded to economic development has proved that the wrong path has been followed. There is thus a need to formulate a new vision, strategy and policy for developmental efforts . . . guided by the principle of equal importance . . . to all types of capital—economic, social, human and natural—with a strong adherence to the Thai cultural way of life, deeply rooted in religious principles . . .

Our society of today and tomorrow represents a knowledge-based society in which learning, knowledge and innovation are essential development factors. Continuous learning [is needed] . . . to raise the quality, efficiency and competency of the majority of the people . . . [involving] all segments of society. . . . Providing support to all sectors and at all levels of society to develop to their highest potential, as well as creating an environment conducive to success, will empower local communities to become a firm foundation for steady and sustainable development. (ONEC 2002, 3–4)

Fundamentally, reconciling liberal and localist stances on education (see Arnone and Torres 2003) has led to a fragile compromise embedded in the contradictory philosophical foundations of the education reform. Let us examine these foundations.

The Philosophical Foundations of the Education Reform

The dual liberal and localist political foundations of the education reform are mirrored in its philosophical foundations. The theoretical framework elaborated in chapter 5 of this volume has been used here to briefly investigate these philosophical foundations. The education reform has borrowed ideas from three main streams of educational philosophy, namely perennialism, progressivism and post-modernism.

Official texts for implementing the national education policy since 1999 reveal that the liberal political stance has been expressed in post-modern educational positions, while the localist political stance has been translated into perennialist ones. Thus, the reform appears to be the result of a compromise between political and social forces—that is, between advocates of an individualistic society and advocates of a hierarchical society. How these contradictory philosophical foundations resulting from this compromise can be viable is a major question to which we now turn.

Despite its practical and empirical nature, the education reform is at the crossroads of two major streams of political philosophy, namely perennialism and post-modernism. Progressivism, which has been an important stream of education in modern societies, disappears from the scene by being interpreted in a post-modern way. The purpose of the reform is clearly to improve the quality of education so as to meet the needs of both the individual and society. It aims to adapt Thai education to the new world of economic development, globalisation and cultural change. However, in order to satisfy the political compromise between liberals and localists, it pretends at the same time to protect the prevailing social order from excessive individualism. If the reform does indeed attach considerable weight to individualistic views (whether rational or post-modern), it does so surreptitiously, as we will contend below. In fact, the political compromise has led to the adoption of perennialist objectives and post-modern means of education. As a result, contradictory outcomes may well arise from the political and philosophical compromises necessary to achieve a workable reform.

Perennialist Objectives

The major stated objectives of the education reform reflect a perennialist advocacy of the conservation of social hierarchy. In a hierarchical society, ethics and moral values, as well as the arts and

humanities, stress the duality of social relationships based on those who pay respect and those who provide protection. This duality is organised according to differences of age, merit, responsibility, power, wealth and knowledge. This cultural framework of patronage establishes a particular social relationship to knowledge. In particular, the existence of beings and things, as well as their established relationships with each other, is not to be questioned. This culture makes it particularly difficult to raise philosophical doubts or to foster scientific or rational approaches to knowledge (Tamthai 2002).

Sticking to perennialist objectives as it does, the education reform cannot envisage any change to hierarchical structures which may enhance learning. It aims to protect the current hierarchical social order embedded in Thai culture, religion, ethical and aesthetic values, and local wisdom. What is quite unique about the reform is the political will to reconcile, on the one hand, a tradition based on ethics, morals and mores that mainly value communitarian social life and local wisdom and, on the other hand, an enhancement of scientific and technological knowledge based on modern, individualistic Western ontology and cosmology. This uniqueness is not surprising, resulting as it does from the reciprocal concessions made by liberals and localists. Of course, whether such reconciliation is sustainable is another matter. At the same time, the reform emphasises lifelong learning because it is consistent with an egalitarian aim of providing new opportunities for those who have received too little education. Lifelong learning is also valued because it allows a quick adaptation of workers' skills to the rapid technological changes. Broadly, the reform postulates that the pursuit of perennialist educational objectives can stem the actual expansion of an individualistic society and can at the same time serve to foster scientific and technical studies for modernising the economy.

Post-modern Means

Prior to the education reform, conservative educational objectives based on a perennialist philosophy were sustained by hierarchical approaches to knowledge with its transmission based on instruction and inculcation, backed up by the authority of the teacher. Curricula and pedagogy were viewed in a similar fashion. This conception of knowledge was reinforced by the Buddhist concepts of karma and merit.

However, curricula and pedagogy were criticised as being the main causes of the low quality of education. Children, it was said, were educated to be conformist through the use of rote learning and discipline, and were directed towards useless studies in fields such as the humanities and arts instead of the urgently needed science and technology. Moreover, children were thought to be ill-prepared for the world of today, which requires the abilities of management, initiative, responsibility and problem solving, as well as a good knowledge of science and technology. The answer to these alleged flaws and weaknesses, according to the education reform, is the revision of curricula and the adoption of the acclaimed child-centred principle. These are the core teaching innovations. Curricula are to be amenable to local influence and, above all, pedagogy should reverse the relationship between teachers and students. This means abandoning a definite programme of instruction and adopting students' interests and their developmental needs as the basis for learning. The new pedagogy is designed to foster students' ability to use rational methods for approaching knowledge independently. It is based on the idea that children can be enabled to achieve a deep understanding of what they learn, provided the teaching ensures that the knowledge makes sense to them. This pedagogy is based on children's own experiences and environments, a point on which perennialist and post-modern philosophies of education converge.

A post-modern view of the child-centred curriculum and pedagogy, however, opens the door to curricula à la carte that are structured on the basis of children's and families' freedom to choose. The child-centred approach can constitute the child as an individual in his or her own right, while teachers lose their authority to teach basic and indispensable knowledge on which the child can build his or her capacity for reasoning and judgement. Alongside this new social position of the child as an individual in his or her own right, lifelong learning constitutes adults as permanent learners, an outcome which renders illegitimate the notion that adults should teach their children. In erasing the differences between childhood and adulthood in this way, post-modernism leads to the collapse of authority and undermines one of the very cornerstones of the prevailing social order which educational objectives are intended to preserve.

Similarly, school-based management and the admission of parents, community leaders and business people to school boards will introduce more economic and political concerns into the school and the educational arena. This is in fact "re-contextualising" education, a significant backward move from improving the quality of education.⁴ The integration of these new actors will contribute to the loss of teachers' authority and leadership, to the widening of inequalities between schools in terms of resources and achievements, and to the re-emergence of schools organised based on class structures. In this way, the communitarian vision shared by post-modern and perennialist philosophies of education may in fact foster local particularisms. Expelled from the role of forging a national culture and identity, the state may relinquish its educational responsibilities more quickly than expected, and the process of privatisation and the development of an education market may be hastened. In that respect, the education reform may prove successful in supplanting the strong state, replacing it with the strong society. However, it is clear that the retreat of the

4. This view is qualified in chapters 8 and 11.

state from the educational scene will accentuate social inequalities in education, as well as more widely through society.

In both the perennialist and progressive perspectives, education is primarily at the service of society. In the former, it subordinates the individual to society, while in the latter it develops the individual's potential for the sake of society. In both cases, by investing in the education of its children, a country prepares for its future, whether that be the same or different from the past. In both cases, there is a strong argument for developing a public and free education. In post-modern philosophy, however, the greater educational achievement of individuals is solely for the sake of those individuals; society as such disappears from the educational landscape. This philosophy lends itself to the legitimisation of private and paid education. By endorsing post-modernism, the education reform is paving the way for privatisation—particularly in post-compulsory schooling—which will make impossible the attainment of its perennialist objectives. Eventually, the expected improvement in the quality of education may not occur because, as we will see, the compromise between perennialist objectives and post-modern means of education appears unsustainable.

Are Perennialist Objectives and Post-modern Means Compatible?

Our assumption is that the reformers expect to develop a coherent education system despite the tension between objectives and means that stems from giving to each stream different roles and relative weights. In a nutshell, the reformers believe that by sticking to perennialist educational objectives Thailand's hierarchical society can be protected from foreign influence and saved from the adverse effects of economic development and social change. They also believe that the quality of education can be improved by using post-modern means to enhance the quality of both teaching and learning

processes. Hence, through this hierarchy of perennialist objectives and post-modern means, they seek to reconcile the conservation of a hierarchical society and the promotion of economic development in a globalised context.

In an historical perspective, this fragile balance belongs to a secular process of individualisation within a still strongly hierarchical society. The social structure is still shaped by patron-client relationships, something which reflects the combination of an individualist view and a holistic view within Buddhism (Mulder 1992, 1997; Gabaude 2001). The gradual emergence of the individual from a hierarchical society is not straightforward. It involves conflict in which struggles and compromises take place and where the victory of one side over the other is never definitive. The education reform is a provisional compromise: it partly aims to slow individualisation by reasserting holistic objectives, but at the same time it fosters individualism through its learning methods and, perhaps more importantly, by promoting private education. This compromise between perennialist objectives and post-modern means is not sustainable and suggests that two likely alternative scenarios may emerge.

The first scenario corresponds to what may happen in the short term: the means will be adjusted to meet the objectives and the “pedagogical revolution” will not take place. In the short term, perennialist philosophy will still be prominent in the collective consciousness, and it will last as long as the economic power structure can still take advantage of such a collective spirit.

The education reform and social actors’ opinions⁵ are convergent enough for the implementation of the reform’s main objectives to continue as planned. In the vision of the reformers, the education system will continue to teach an organic view of the relationship between the individual and the community. This will encompass

5. See CELS (2006) for an analysis of social actors’ opinions regarding the education reform.

moral and ethical values, social norms corresponding to the Thai understanding of individual good behaviour, respect for elders and authorities, aesthetics and arts as a route to happiness, submission to existing norms and relationships as well as prevailing knowledge, and crafts and skills that are useful for the community. This view teaches that a good community is underpinned by good individuals. Social groups, taking up this view, endeavour to give to the education reform the substance of a revamped perennialism, using progressivist and post-modern techniques to enhance this perennialist quality of education. Empirical research suggests that teachers, despite their enthusiasm for some aspects of the education reform, face increasing difficulties and become disheartened when trying to implement these new teaching techniques. Teachers are convinced that perennialist objectives are the right ones because they share them. Throughout their lives, they have been culturally and professionally embedded in social hierarchical relationships. Therefore, if any discrepancy appears between the objectives and the means of teaching, they are inclined to adjust the means rather than the objectives. Indeed, they face difficulties in teaching traditional content in ways that contradict their own methods. At the same time, they find it hard to motivate their students and to provide an education that makes sense in their environment.

Teachers face also learning behaviours entirely inconsistent with their new pedagogy and teaching methods. It is likely that the majority of students, particularly those from poor social backgrounds, are in fact encouraged by their own social environment to stick with “perennialist”, passive ways of learning. For example, when reading, reflecting, arguing and discussing are socially devalued, and when pleasing elders and authorities is better appreciated than voicing criticisms or taking bold initiatives, new teaching methods which abandon these still socially prevalent attitudes do not make sense to students. Soon, teachers face these discrepancies, and they become discouraged by their students’ lack of motivation. They give up

progressively their endeavour to improve their own teaching. Finding that their old methods fit better with their students' attitudes, they return reluctantly to perennialist methods. In other words, perennialist objectives of education will soon overwhelm the means, and changes expected by the reformers will not take place on the expected scale. Teachers will surely take the blame for failure to renovate teaching methods and will be accused of conservatism, when the real reason for the failure, stressed by most textbooks of the sociology of education, is that social structures and values determine education and not the other way round as generally expected by policy-makers.

Whether or not such a revamped perennialism would enhance the quality of education depends on the meaning given to "quality of education". This ambiguous term *quality* is a source of discord and dissension. In general, improving the quality of education is interpreted as improving the efficiency in reaching educational objectives, usually perennialist objectives. But the quality that the reformers had in mind when they followed the recommendations arising from early criticism about the poor quality of Thai education is quite different and refers to a more individualistic philosophy of education. The notion of quality used by the education reform deals with the motivation of students and the meanings that students give to their studies, their awareness of scientific and liberal knowledge, their ability to learn independently, their aptitude for forming their own views and judgements by reasoning and thinking, their capacity to raise questions and solve problems, and their ability to abide by their own decisions. In fact, the education reform is aimed at strengthening the prevalent *education of attitudes* by using an *education of aptitudes*. The risk is that the reformers, by using new didactic devices to enforce traditional values, will instil new objectives of education more akin to individualistic social values. This choice may lead to a second scenario.

The second scenario corresponds to what may happen in the medium and long term: the de facto abandonment of the reform's

perennialist objectives. In our view, it is the more likely scenario. This would occur if a post-modern view comes to pervade the whole education system. The individualisation and “marketisation” of education will accelerate as a result of the new pedagogy and the new organisation of schools and their management. Private and vested interests will determine educational orientations, and the recognition of educational achievement will probably be limited to a “vocationalist” standpoint (see chapter 8). The education reform will not be able to reach its objective of stemming the long-term trend towards a more individualistic society. By adopting perennialist objectives, it will only slow down this process but not reverse it. Moreover, it will leave the education system mostly unchanged as long as teachers are unable to cope with contradictory objectives and means of education, as pointed out above. As a consequence, the elite and the middle classes, who have advocated the rapid improvement of quality through post-modern means, will soon be disappointed by the actual achievements of the reform. They will respond by increasingly removing their children from the public education system. It is already noticeable that these upper social groups are building a privileged education system isolated from the bulk of the national education system. This elite system is formed by a combination of privatisation, additional years of study, and studying abroad. It is reserved, with few exceptions, for children from the upper and middle classes, those who can afford a more expensive education. In the elite system’s institutions, the quality of education is understood in terms of post-modern educational objectives as well as post-modern means. Their philosophical foundations consist entirely of individualist tenets. In practice, the move to create an elite system is opposite to the one foreseen in our first scenario. Post-modernism may indeed invade education by forging a new educational spirit that is used by dominant social actors. For the purpose of legitimating those strategies, privileged classes sometimes use the rhetorical argument that the objectives of education have to remain perennialist. This

discourse, however, disguises their behaviours rather than revealing them. This rhetoric is indicative of the “double bind” inherent in making workable the hierarchy between perennialist objectives and post-modern means.



It is worth stressing that there is also an institutional “double bind”. In effect, the national education system is partitioned, with well-endowed educational institutions, both public and private, reserved for privileged social groups and poorly endowed ones attended by lower rural and urban classes. As a result, the education reform will yield a paradoxical result. By emphasising perennialist objectives and by creating high expectations of the quality of education, the reform encourages, more or less unintentionally, these divisive tendencies in the field of education and risks entrenching an impoverished education system for the lower social classes. Instead of stemming inequalities in educational opportunity, it will exacerbate them. While the reform may not have actually triggered this phenomenon, it is likely to accelerate it because, by relying on post-modern means for improving quality, it may actually institutionalise the partition of the education system. Under such circumstances, the reform would have triggered a social process that changed the education route in quite the opposite direction to that which it was designed for. Step by step, the nation will lose any power to reverse this evolution and thus will find that a powerful means of forging national identity and cohesion has been destroyed. Moreover, the rise of education markets will open wider the door to foreign influence. The education reform will be incapable of reversing this transformation. To the contrary, it will have introduced a worm into the fruit. In losing education, the state will also lose a crucial dimension of its power and sovereignty.

If this bleak prospect is a realistic one, and is confirmed by further analysis, what can be done? The first direction of reflection and action

is certainly to rehabilitate the role of the state in the educational arena. While the neo-liberal and localist-inspired fight against a strong state logically promoted a new democratic education, it will nevertheless result in a double defeat of the localists. On the one hand, the elite and the middle classes, the proponents of democracy, introduce mechanisms which lead to increasing social inequalities, outcomes detrimental to the poorer classes that the localists are meant to defend. On the other hand, a weakened state will be unable to stop these increasing social and educational inequalities. Among the strong-society advocates there has been confusion over the distinction between dictatorship and a strong state, which has led to many ignoring the effect of neo-liberalism on social equality and cohesion. It is well known that neo-liberalism prefers the authority of the market to the authority of the state. Historically, in the European tradition, the state has been considered as the rule of law that defends the weak and the poor against the strong and the wealthy. Indeed, only the state can promote social equality. However, in Thailand, the strong-society supporters have adopted the American tradition of advanced individualism and minimal state. Thailand will need to find its own way based on its own tradition of a balance between the individual and society, which corresponds in the educational field to the progressivist philosophy. The adaptation of this philosophy to the Thai context could be the theme of the national debate on education that is so sorely needed.

4

Higher Education: Towards an Education Market?

PHASINA TANGCHUANG & ALAIN MOUNIER

Across the world, most higher education institutions, for whatever reason, have come to be assigned only the limited function of serving economic interests. As Thai higher education has historically been—and still is—deeply shaped by Western influences, a comparative examination of Western and Thai educational histories is needed in order to understand its evolution. Thai higher education is now evolving, somewhat belatedly, as the majority of universities around the world, especially in Asia, have done under the pressure of demands for education reforms (Zhou 2001). Worldwide, public universities are becoming more autonomous and more open to private interests, and at the same time the higher education market is attracting greater interest from foreign private investors.¹ Thailand, in enacting the comprehensive National Education Act of 1999, did choose this specific path for its higher education. From the twelfth to the twenty-first century, universities in the West have been designed to serve successively the church, the nation-state and eventually business. They

1. The Thai Board of Investment recently moved to attract private capital to the educational sector by providing tax privileges to foreign investments in Thai education.

have ended up putting unprecedented emphasis on the individual, as an ultimate and extreme consequence of rationalism. We contend that, today, by giving primacy to individual and corporate interests, universities may leave unattended more important social and political concerns. In Thailand, universities emulating Western models could take the same direction and risk neglecting or even abandoning their historic mission to serve society as a whole and, as a consequence, put the quality of education at risk.

Higher Education and Nation-State Building in Thailand

Universities in Thailand have a short history that started in the modern form at the beginning of the twentieth century. Their function and organisation have been based on Western models.

Higher Education in the West: From Church to Welfare State

Throughout the history of higher education, most universities have been organised to fulfil two purposes. One is the compilation and advancement of knowledge geared to the service of the interests they were set up to serve—and this is the function of research. The other is the dissemination of this knowledge to the population at large—which is the function of teaching.²

2. Our brief sketch of the history of universities in the West is mainly borrowed from Ford (2002), Cobb (2002), Ruegg (2004) and Thelin (2004).

The Paris model: Serving the church (1100s)

The University of Paris (La Sorbonne) was founded between 1150 and 1170. It was the earliest of the great universities established in medieval Europe.³ In its times, it exerted a great influence all over Europe.

The University of Paris aimed to serve society primarily by serving the church. Its purpose was to strengthen Christianity and the Christian faith. By collecting and transmitting existing knowledge, by studying its foundations and legitimacy, Christian tenets and faith could be better enunciated and articulated. Additionally, the moral and political authority of church ministers over the people could be strengthened. The central assumption of the Paris model was that the Christian faith and broad learning were mutually supportive.

The organisation of the university and its curriculum into four faculties reflected its mission. One faculty was the College of Liberal Arts, which delivered basic knowledge (grammar, logic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, music and astronomy) for the further development and forging of attitudes. It also prepared students for further studies in one of the other three faculties, which were conceived as graduate schools in the disciplines of medicine, canon law and theology. Not surprisingly, the last school was given primacy.

Numerous European universities emulated the Paris model, whether they were Catholic (e.g. Bologna in Italy and Salamanca in Spain), Lutheran (e.g. Freiburg in Germany) or Anglican (e.g. Oxford and Cambridge in England). The model even inspired Harvard College in Boston, founded in the mid-seventeenth century.

The influence of La Sorbonne in Europe eventually declined with the rise of nation-states.

3. Al-Azhar Muslim University was the oldest university in the world, established in 969 in Cairo, Egypt, and served as a mosque and the home of Muslim scholarship.

The Halle model: Serving the nation-state (1600s)

Following the signing of the Westphalia treaties in 1648 that ended thirty years of religious wars in Europe, the primacy of the Christian faith and the church gave way to the primacy of the nation-state. Catholics, Lutherans and Anglicans started to call themselves French, Prussian or English.

The rise of the nation-state and of rationalism, which was inherited from the Renaissance, gave birth to a new university geared to the service of the nation-state rather than the church. Latin was abandoned, replaced by national languages as the language of instruction. Universities were to be used as the lever to build a national identity (Hobsbawm 1990; Green 1990).

The new University of Halle was established in 1697 in Brandenburg (which became Prussia four years later), with the mission to prepare the people and their leaders for the service of the state. It was born out of a practical concern to deliver economic, technical and administrative skills for strengthening the nation-state, economically, politically and militarily. Law, public administration and military science, as well as economics, forestry, agriculture and mechanics constituted the core curriculum.

Halle became the dominant model in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In France, the “great schools” (schools of advanced studies in engineering, National School of Administration and Military School) established by Napoleon at the turn of the nineteenth century systematised the Halle model. The great schools were exclusively geared to training leaders for the army, public administration and state enterprises. They still exist for that same purpose today. In the United States, the Morrill Land Grant Act 1862 allowed each state to establish a state university that focused on agricultural, mechanical and military fields of study (some of them are known by the acronym A&M universities).

The Berlin model: Serving the advancement of knowledge (1800s)

In German-speaking nations, opposition rose against universities being turned into sites for furthering practical, economic and military goals and for airing political concerns. Many intellectuals felt that universities should focus on research for the advancement of knowledge. In their view, as the pursuit of knowledge is never-ending, universities should concentrate on this task. For practical applications of knowledge, universities should pass the baton to other institutions.

In 1810, after the Napoleonic wars, the University of Berlin was founded based on the principles of a true research university. The philosophy of Immanuel Kant was influential in shaping this vision. He held that the world can be understood by human experiences of natural and social phenomena and not by faith or beliefs. Moreover, he believed, the world is ordered by the human mind and spirit, the *geist*. Thus, the study of the world should be organised as two sets of disciplines: the sciences (*naturwissenschaften*) inquiring into nature and the humanities (*geistwissenschaften*) inquiring into the human spirit.

The Berlin model was based on well-defined organisational and scientific principles. Universities, it was believed, must be organised to provide the conditions for research objectivity and unbiased results. Hence, they must promote and protect the unconditional freedom of researchers. Specifically, researchers have to be intellectually and financially independent from vested interests and from economic and political pressures. They also have to be protected from financial contingencies. Moreover, in a true research university, professors have to be exempted from teaching, except for training future researchers.

Regardless of the research university's initial intention to avoid practical goals for the sake of genuine research, a great deal of research results proved to have practical applications, particularly

in bringing about technological, institutional and organisational changes. Probably for this reason, the University of Berlin exerted tremendous influence all over the world and still does today. Its followers embraced its vision whether by adhering to its principles or by investigating into the powerful, positive and practical effects of sciences on the natural and social world. In the nineteenth century in the United States, Johns Hopkins University and the University of Chicago were founded on the principles of the Berlin model. In France after World War II, academic research was conducted from specific national research institutes, independent of teaching universities. These national research institutes were, and still are, a true replication of the Berlin model: freedom of researchers, exemption from teaching and organisation by scientific disciplines.

Since the creation of the University of Berlin, the prestige of universities around the world has been mostly connected to the prestige of their research activities.

Halle and Berlin models combined: Serving the welfare state (1900s)

The economic nationalism that characterised European economies and societies undergoing reconstruction after World War II led to the amalgamation of the Halle and Berlin models of universities. The rationale of this amalgamation was firstly economic and secondly political.

At an economic level, governments, relying on economic theories, were convinced that the best way to strengthen the nation-state in a peaceful and non-communist world was to put into practice three related principles as pillars of the welfare state. These principles were prosperity, solidarity and opportunity. The principle of prosperity meant in practice the acceleration of economic growth through scientific knowledge development and technological advances. The principle of solidarity assumed that economic growth actually

nurtured social progress and economic security for all. It was believed that policies should be geared to creating full employment, fair income distribution and social protection, which could not be spontaneously achieved by a competitive and unregulated labour market. The principle of opportunity meant that social positions should be acquired by merit and not by ascription. Social justice was the thread that tied these three principles together, as equal opportunity for all in order to achieve a better position and income in life presupposed economic growth and social solidarity. In this respect, equal access to education was seen as crucial to efficiency and equity.

At the political level, the concern was to deliver an adequate education to all citizens with a view to consolidating democracy. The preservation of peace and the suppression of totalitarian regimes were urgent. More importantly, by promoting social justice and social stability, and by enhancing the individual's capacity for judgement and opinion formation, education was seen as a key device to enhance democracy. In Western cultures, democracy can be protected by the rule of public law (the state of rights), but even more efficiently by individual attachment to freedom. In particular, by developing the individual's ability to analyse, judge, criticise and vocalise opinions, education is the way to keep dictatorship at bay.

In this context, education as a whole and higher education in particular became a major instrument of economic nationalism and welfare state consolidation (Avis et al. 1996). Borrowing from the Halle model, universities were geared to the training of an increasing number of political and public administration leaders required for the management of the welfare state's economic and social institutions. They also had to train an increasing number of teachers mobilised to deliver a longer scientific and democratic education to all children of the nation. Borrowing also from the Berlin model, they all developed genuine research capabilities for studying practical concerns such as technological improvements geared to stimulating economic growth and improving social well-being, as well as for contributing

to the advancement of human knowledge. During this period of rapid economic growth and social transformation, the majority of universities across the world actually combined these two models.

Higher Education in Thailand: Building the Nation-State

In the light of the evolutionary history of Western universities, it is now possible to sketch the recent history of Thai higher education.

In 1916, there were eleven higher education institutions under the Education Department (among them the Normal School, King's Medical College and Midwives' School) with about sixteen hundred students. Other specialised colleges (Royal Military College, Royal Naval College, Royal Survey College, College of Agriculture, Civil Service College, Post and Telegraph School, Gendarmerie School) were set up under the authority of relevant ministries to train officers and civil servants of the kingdom.

In 1917, the first university, Chulalongkorn, was founded by King Rama VI along the lines of the Halle model (Wyatt 1969). The humanities, law and economics formed the core of the curriculum, designed with the intention to produce dedicated and efficient civil servants. The consolidation and improvement of public higher education was an important strategy employed to serve the royal project of strengthening and expanding the nation-state.

Following the 1932 revolution, other major universities were founded with the same intention—to strengthen the nation-state. They were Thammasat (in 1933), Mahidol and Kasetsart universities in Bangkok and Maejo University in Chiang Mai province (all three in 1943).

In the 1960s, a new wave of university creation occurred first in Bangkok with the establishment of the Mongkut Institutes of Technology (1959 and 1960) followed by provincial universities: Chiang Mai in the North (1964), Khon Kaen in the Northeast (1964) and Prince of Songkhla in the South (1967). These new universities

were all founded under the same Halle model. During this same period, old and new universities also borrowed some features of the Berlin model, adding research to their teaching activities. The welfare state university concept, which advocates also the democratisation of access to universities, was realised in the 1970s by the creation in Bangkok of two open universities: Ramkhamhaeng in 1971 and Sukhothai Thammathirat in 1978. However, Thai universities did not entirely adopt the university model of the welfare state, probably because the development of a welfare state has until today not gone beyond the embryonic stage. When the state decided to promote research activities, national institutions outside the domain of public universities were set up.⁴ Numerous new public universities were created from 1985 until the end of the 1990s. They were more diverse in their goals. A shift in university objectives occurred during this time owing to the decline of economic nationalism and the rise of globalisation, which we will discuss in the next section.

Until the 1970s, public universities were more focused on the social sciences and the humanities (SSH) and less on science and technology (S&T) than today. Even though the ratio between SSH and S&T enrolment declined from 2.5 in 1966 to 1.7 in 1971, SSH remained dominant, compelling educational authorities to attempt to reverse this trend by imposing admission quotas by discipline. However, this trend and the attempt at educational planning cannot be explained by a need to serve the welfare state. What we are seeing in the current context is a dismantling of the regulations and institutions of the welfare era. This is because it is generally believed that the job can be done better in a competitive market, particularly a world market.

4. Outside universities, there are research centres in government ministries (forestry, marine resources, rubber, agronomy, transport, health, atomic energy, etc.) and general research institutes, such as the BIOTEC (biological research), NECTEC (electrical and electronics research) and MTEC (materials research) research centres affiliated to the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) and Chulabhorn Research Institute (research on new materials).

Universities in the Age of Globalisation

Thai universities are thus at a crossroads, and their foreseeable future relies heavily on well-informed decision making by governments and university bodies. Ignorance of current trends, in particular that of the privatisation of higher education, could jeopardise the stability of societies all over the world. This is particularly true in Thailand, where strong factors—among them foreign influences—have contributed towards a market-driven higher education. At the end of the day, the authorities might discover that universities can no longer perform the social functions needed by a developed and cohesive society.

The Phoenix Model: Serving Private Interests

A new university model with American origins is spreading throughout the world. It is a university that serves individual and corporate interests. The University of Phoenix in Arizona is a case in point.

This new model has its roots in two main developments. The first was the response to the economic crisis which started at the end of the 1960s that saw corporate profits tumbling and resulted in a long period of stagnation for Western economies. This stagnation ended around the end of the 1980s, by which time the dismantling of welfare states, which were held responsible for the stagnation, had begun in earnest. The second actually stemmed from a deep-rooted belief of English-speaking cultures that emerged during the seventeenth-century English Revolution. It was believed that the involvement of the state encroached on the freedom and responsibility of individuals and businesses, and this was held to be a source of economic inefficiency. This conception inspired political and economic responses to the stagnation of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the United States under the administration of Ronald Reagan, in the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher, and in Australia under Malcolm Fraser and more recently John Howard. Economic, institutional and political

restructuring was necessary, it was believed, in order to limit state power and “interventions” in the economy and in society. This, of course, paved the way for rethinking the role of education and universities.

In this view, which is very different from those prevailing during the time when the needs of the nation-state and the welfare state dominated policy direction, education is not a public matter but a private one. Therefore, market mechanisms seem better suited than state policies to organise and guide higher education. Individuals and businesses have to take the baton from the defunct welfare state in educational matters. Higher education, seen as the key to systems change, has to be geared to serving individual and corporate interests through market-like mechanisms (Gemmell 1997).

The Phoenix model offers a quite advanced version of a market-driven higher education model that responds to these ideals. In this model, the university is a business just like any other and has to be organised accordingly. It is considered to be, and should be restructured as, a profit-making private company whose main role is to produce and sell educational goods (Sperling and Tucker 1997). By becoming a market-driven activity, education can be sold globally; and indeed many universities are now trying to expand worldwide in a process of internationalisation (Reich 1991; Spring 1998; Arnone and Torres 2003).

A university's customers are its students. The kind of educational services offered should thus be determined by the demand of its customers. The learner- or student-centred approach enables this to happen. Subject matter and curricula are defined according to the explicit demands of students. Borrowing some of the once-useful insights from the philosophy of education known as progressivism (Dewey 1990), this approach asserts that the needs and interests of students are what matters. Those needs are measured by the fees that students are willing to pay for receiving educational services. This leads to a situation in which the quality of education is evaluated not in terms of the acquisition of knowledge but in terms of professional

rewards that the acquired credentials make possible, that is, the expected income and social position that the chosen vocation provides. The best way to attract rich and numerous customers is to involve the providers of jobs—the employers—in defining curricular content, so that employers' labour and skills requirements can be met.

At the same time, recruitment practices reflect a dramatic change in the concept of professors. They are now employees who can be hired on a temporary basis when adjustment is needed to meet fluctuations in the demand for specific curricula. Their suitability for the job of teaching is no longer assessed by objective criteria relating to their academic knowledge and their pedagogical skills, but by the degree of customer satisfaction based on students' evaluation of their professors. As the practical knowledge and know-how that engineers and managers of private companies acquired on the job tend to better fit the practical curricula in demand than the academic knowledge of professors, universities would rather hire industry specialists and professionals than academics to teach courses on a contract basis.

Research activities, too, are undertaken less for the advancement of universal knowledge than out of a need to respond to the immediate interests of the businesses that fund them and a need to seek new private sources of revenue. In the United States, expectations of eventually setting up their own business to sell their innovations have also been a widespread motivation for academics to conduct research. In the Phoenix model, research has followed the path of teaching and learning by becoming a private concern.

On this basis, the knowledge produced and acquired at the university is increasingly of a practical nature similar to that in training, and determined by the practical concerns of businesses and individuals. The Phoenix model borrows more from the Halle model than from the Paris or the Berlin model, as it is relatively easy to shift from serving the interests of the nation-state to serving the economic concerns of private businesses and individuals.

The Phoenix Model for Thailand?

Higher education in Thailand is increasingly borrowing features from the Phoenix model. This has occurred more because of the urge to develop national education than because of ideology as was the case in English-speaking countries. The same is also taking place today in most other Asian countries (Tienchai 2001; Altbach and Umakoshi 2004). In any case, our contention is that this development can be injurious to the Thai nation.

The development of private education has been stimulated by successive public policies since the Private College Act 1969, which allows private entities to operate educational institutions and confer degrees. Since then, the involvement of private players in education has been continually encouraged in successive education development plans right up to the last education reform project. Successive governments have fostered private education by means of a series of favourable measures such as tax exemptions and educational deregulation (Prathip 1997). The last education reform adopts the same stance, citing the need to mobilise all national resources, public as well as private, for the sake of the development of national education. The argument in favour of private education seems to rest only, and always, on financial grounds. Other considerations such as quality and social equality seem to be absent from the deliberations of policy-makers.

Thai higher education institutions increased at an impressive rate from 1985 to 2008. The number of public universities rose sevenfold, and private universities sixfold. These figures, however, are deceptive, as private universities actually expanded more rapidly than public ones. In 2004, Rajabhat teachers' colleges (41 of them today) and Rajamangala technical colleges (9 of them today) all over the country were converted into public universities, so in actual fact 6 new public universities (over 23 when Rajabhat and Rajamagala are excluded) had been created over that period. In 2008, there were 79 public universities, while private universities rose to 63.

However, the ratio of enrolment in private higher education institutions to enrolment in public ones does not reflect the change in the number of institutions. During the last thirty years, it has fluctuated around an average of only 25 per cent. In fact, to the extent that the Phoenix model has been adopted in Thailand, it is in the guise of autonomous public universities rather than private universities.

This development, however, does not mean that government investment in public higher education is being curtailed. The budget allocation for higher education increased from about 5,000 baht per student in 1980 to 15,000 baht in 1997. Subsequently, however, it decreased to about 10,000 baht in 2008, or the same level as spending on each primary and secondary student.

In recent years, heavy criticism has been levelled at higher education institutions for neither preparing students for the rapidly and permanently changing conditions they will face in life nor for the age of globalisation. The National Education Act of 1999 and the National Economic and Social Development Plans were intended to address these concerns. Numerous public conferences and consultations have been held, and the consensus is that higher education should (1) play a leading role in strengthening the competitiveness of the Thai economy, in promoting international cooperation and in protecting the natural environment; (2) be open and accessible to all Thai citizens; (3) develop a curriculum that is more relevant to national development needs; (4) support democracy; (5) act as a think-tank and train agents to improve the efficiency of the national administration; and (6) be more autonomous and free from bureaucracy (Ministry of University Affairs 1996; National Education Commission 2001; Waraiporn 2003).

This implies a very broad role for universities. However, narrower interpretations tend to focus on the economic role. For instance, in a speech to a conference in 1999, Prachuab Chaiyasarn, the then Minister of University Affairs, urged that universities should aim to be either a “university for industry” or a “university with industry” (Prachuab 1999). In his communication to the “Conference on the

Modalities of University-Industry Cooperation in the APEC Region” organised in 1999 by the Ministry of University Affairs, Kanok Wongtrangarn argued that universities need to adapt themselves to a new role of supporting industry in the near future. He urged that University personnel should be encouraged to work with industry through incentive schemes (Kanok 1999). These opinions may be interpreted in the framework of the Halle-Berlin model in that academic research should contribute to the strengthening of the national economy to help the development of the welfare state. However, the framework is more akin to the Phoenix model in its economic bias for higher education philosophy and practices. In this model, universities are urged to be at the service not so much of industry but of business in general, industrial or otherwise.

Today, increasing numbers of public schools and universities are adopting the Phoenix model in the name of autonomy. The reorganisation of educational institutions occurs by “downsizing” manpower, adopting a learner-centred (or client-centred) approach, developing curricula that satisfy narrowly defined economic concerns, and employing management techniques that are centred on cost-benefit analysis and a profit-making rationality. In light of this trend, we are of the view that the privatisation—rampant or otherwise—of higher education, as well as of schools, is underway and that the situation has gone almost beyond the crossroads where other choices are still possible. Ambiguity in the education reform provisions, in which no clearly chosen educational model is proposed, has opened the door to the expansion of the Phoenix model. Our contention is that, without a prompt and forceful response from the state and other conscious social actors, Thai higher education will be dominated by business logic and its function will be determined by the market. This could result in major social issues being left unaddressed, neglected by an institution that is abandoning its historical social role.



The evolution of universities worldwide towards the Phoenix model tends to favour an individualistic society, where individuals and businesses matter more than society. Globalisation and its impact on the aims of higher education leave unaddressed three major social problems that are emerging quite rapidly in contemporary societies.

The first problem is that of socialisation. The successful integration of the individual into social groups has long been a viable strategy for controlling or eradicating violence. However, this integration process is under stress and problems are emerging. Democratic regimes have tried to solve this problem in their own ways. They are opposed to political forms that subordinate the individual to society, as in ancient societies and in contemporary authoritarian regimes. Democratic regimes, on the other hand, trust individuals to understand social concerns, to think for themselves and to freely accept the need for social rules in order to eradicate violence. Yet, democracy has to find ways of permanently solving the tension between the individual and society. Today, it seems that democracies are declining to resolve this tension by accepting the primacy of the individual over that of society. Contemporary societies are witnessing the rise of individual and corporate selfishness, the disappearance of solidarity and the abolition of welfare systems. The result is a dramatic increase in income and social inequalities. By accelerating this evolution, the spread of the Phoenix model in Thai higher education may threaten the viability and stability of Thai society and democracy. It may contribute to the escalating violence that can be witnessed in some Western countries.⁵ This problem will have to be tackled, whatever the principles and institutions of social life that prevail in the near future, whether local, regional, national or global. Higher education authorities have to be

5. Violence has escalated to alarming levels in many democratic countries. As Galbraith (2000) has shown, economic inequalities are responsible for social unrest, crimes and social violence.

aware that by accepting the Phoenix model they become part of this future problem instead of being part of the solution.

The second problem is that of the quality of education. Higher education plays a leading role in determining the quality of primary and secondary education, as it trains and develops teachers and educational administrators, who in turn design didactic material and build the philosophical foundations of education policies. The ability of teachers to help develop the cognitive skills of students in lower levels will prepare these students better for higher education and for their future life. The Phoenix model leaves unattended this crucial role of higher education.

The third problem left unaddressed is that of the management of the common properties of humanity. Tackling future problems of humanity and averting impending catastrophes—which involve questions of food, energy and water supply, poverty reduction, technological innovation and environmental protection—requires specialists trained by universities.

Higher education institutions would have to take responsibility for the consequences if it cannot fulfil higher ideals than making money. The defence of peace and harmony, the development of skills and abilities, and the improvement of the well-being of mankind require more ambitious university models. These models should promote the sharing, development and transmission of universal knowledge. They have also to acknowledge and teach future generations that the wealth of the planet lies not in economic and cultural uniformity but in the diversity of languages and cultures.⁶

6. As the French philosopher Michel Serres asserts, “L’humanisme universel qui revient” [Universal humanism is coming back] (*Entretiens du XXI siècle*, 21^e séance, UNESCO, Paris, 18 June 2002, published in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, 13 July 2002).

5

Do Education Policies Have Philosophical Foundations?

ALAIN MOUNIER

Education policies are always underpinned, whether explicitly or implicitly, by philosophies of education and derive much of their meaning from these philosophical positions. The present chapter looks at those philosophies which underpin Thailand's comprehensive 1999 education reform. It thereby provides an intellectual framework for interpreting education policies in general and the Thai education reform in particular.

Philosophies of education cannot be understood except in a broad context of societal evolution and history. We will first examine political philosophies in an historical perspective before comparing the approaches of different philosophies of education. The "stream approach" is then employed to build a general and manageable theoretical framework for revealing the underlying meaning and potential effects of education policies. This framework illuminates current debates on education worldwide, including in Thailand.

To understand the present situation, and to provide insights into the real meaning of current debates, it helps to examine some essential characteristics of the relationships between education and society throughout history (Avanzini 1981). A useful way to look at the evolution of the long history of humanity is to contrast the

pre-modern or hierarchical forms of society with the modern or individualistic forms of society. In Ferdinand Tönnies's and Max Weber's terms, human beings live either in small communities (*gemeinschaft*) where society is more than the totality of its members or in societies conceived of as associations of individuals (*gesellschaft*). Some philosophers and sociologists have retraced the historical turning point between hierarchical and individualistic societies, which arose mainly from within Christianity (Macfarlane 1978; Gauchet 1985; Dumont 1986; Renaut 1999). Of course, the process of history is more complex, but this classification of societies can be adopted without adhering to an evolutionary scheme. Moreover, a comprehensive study of the history of educational philosophies should examine important philosophical schools of thought such as Confucianism and Islamism. With the limited scope of this chapter, however, only Western traditions are examined. The reason is simple: in most countries, in particular in Asia, modern education and current education reforms have been in great part influenced and sometimes underpinned by Western educational philosophies. This is a fact and perhaps a problem; we stick here to the fact.

In a very long political perspective, the difference between pre-modern and modern eras lies in the degree of dependence (or independence) and heteronomy (or autonomy) of the individual in a social group. This difference overlaps another one between two opposing principles of truth. One of these is based on religious beliefs and the other on metaphysical and scientific beliefs. Two other distinctions may be useful for understanding the history of education: the distinction between societies with states and societies without states and the distinction between education as a public matter and education as a private matter. The unique combinations of these differences provide each period and place in history with its distinctive educational configuration and distinctive education policies that are all based on at least implicit educational philosophies.

Approaches of Educational Philosophy

Educational philosophy searches for educational principles within philosophical tenets, seeking to elucidate appropriate educational aims and processes. It critically examines the implications for educational theories and practices of recent streams of philosophy, such as post-structuralism and post-modernism. Recent philosophies of education draw upon not only philosophy but also other disciplines such as linguistics, epistemology, sociology and economics (Durkheim 1999; Bowles and Gintis 1975; Halsey et al. 1997; Burbules and Torres 2000).

Presentations of philosophies of education generally adopt one of three major approaches. Firstly, the “philosopher” approach—found in textbooks—presents the stances of great philosophers regarding education (Peters 1973; Philipps 1985; Rorty 2001). Secondly, the “thematic” approach derives educational principles from important themes of political philosophy, even though these lack a comprehensive position concerning education (Blake et al. 2003; Pring 2005). Finally, the “stream” approach is characterised by comprehensive and coherent clusters of doctrines and tenets on education, principles which influence education policies in their foundations, their ends and their means (Brameld 1955; Carr 2003). This third approach, combined with the second one, prevails in major debates within the field of education.

The “Philosopher” Approach

The philosophy of education seeks to make explicit both the foundations and the goals of education. As a discipline of thought, it mostly refers to the thinking of philosophers whose general concerns and doctrines deal with the nature of human beings, with society and with their natural environment. Philosophers from Plato to Foucault and Derrida have proposed new interpretations of the very nature

of human beings (ontology), human knowledge (epistemology), human location within society and the universe (cosmology), and human destiny through time and the universe (eschatology). Some philosophers have sought to develop education systems in order to put their views into practice (e.g. Rousseau, Condorcet and Dewey). Others did not pursue the application of their views on education but have nevertheless been influential in educational thought and practice. Few of them have understood the cognitive processes through which humans actually learn. Such cognitive processes have been the focus for scientists of pedagogy, such as Dewey, Vygotsky, Brameld, Piaget and Bruner, who have exerted a strong influence on modern education.

The dominant way of teaching philosophies of education—presenting the thoughts of past philosophers—belongs to the traditional approaches to philosophy. This is the case with numerous textbooks. This approach usually divides the philosophical field of knowledge into distinctive topics, such as ethics (analysis of customs, habits, and rules of conduct; analysis of social values), metaphysics (analysis of the primordial origin of human beings and of the universe, defining what is true and what is not), logic (norms and methods of thought, formation of judgement and reasoning), epistemology (theories of knowledge) and psychology (unconscious motivation of human behaviour). Philosophies of education then attempt to draw inferences regarding education from these fields of knowledge in order to establish the reason for and the purpose of both teaching and learning.

The problem with this method is that it fragments philosophy into separate fields and thereby obscures the differences between philosophical doctrines and tenets.

The “Stream” Approach

Some authors present educational philosophy by classifying philosophers and debates into streams, doctrines or tenets, such

as evolutionism, phenomenology, rationalism, logical positivism, essentialism, existentialism, Marxism, structuralism, culturalism, idealism, realism, analytical philosophy, post-modernism, interactionism and cognitivism. Over the course of the twentieth century, these streams have variously influenced philosophies of education (Halsey et al. 1997).

Theodore Brameld's (1955) systematic classification of philosophical tenets and doctrines on education is a good introduction to the current debates on education, to the extent that he differentiates between streams based on different conceptions of the relationship between individuals and society. Drawing on Brameld's classification, we can distinguish five philosophical streams:

1. Perennialism, often associated with traditionalism and conservatism
2. Essentialism, associated with rationalism
3. Progressivism, underpinned by pragmatic philosophies
4. Reconstructivism, an attempt by Brameld to retrieve progressivism from its post-modern interpretations
5. Post-modernism

After a brief overview of these streams, we offer an in-depth analysis of their respective views on major questions of education.

Perennialism

Perennialism proposes that education should teach students to see the relevance of the past in solving present problems. In this philosophy, the individual does not exist independently of society but is subordinated to the values, languages, norms and rules of his or her community. Moreover, the individual does not have the right to change any of these, as they are inherited from the past. Education is charged with transmitting this inheritance, so that the reproduction of

the social order is ensured. While this conception has been prevalent within traditional and hierarchical societies that preceded modernity, it still has its advocates today, thinkers who claim that tradition is better suited than modernity to organising social life (adherents of romanticism and conservatism).

Essentialism

Essentialism advocates an education dedicated to developing the “essence” of the human being, an essence which is seen to be free and rational—indeed, free because rational. Rationality is viewed as being intrinsically and universally the nature of all human beings, and the cornerstone of society and government. From this perspective, individuals are bound to their rationality and to the laws of nature. Because all human beings share this intrinsic characteristic, they cannot be conceived as anything but similar and therefore equal. As a human being, the individual has rights that acknowledge his or her true nature as rational, free and equal, and statutory rights must institutionalise and preserve these rights. Actually inherited from Greek philosophers, rationalism was developed mainly by Enlightenment thinkers and was put into practice by the English gentry in the seventeenth century and by the French Revolution in 1789. The philosophy of rationalism has become the cornerstone of modern education (Dearden et al. 1972; Wood 2001).

Progressivism

Progressivism is associated with John Dewey’s influential philosophy of realism. It advocates an education dedicated to developing an independent and autonomous individual, free from all ties and influences, whether social, religious or metaphysical. In this view, the individual is the only one able to promote his or her self-development and self-achievement. Education is conceived as a way of developing

all individual potentialities. Within the concept of *Bildung*, developed by German philosophers and deeply rooted in German culture (Dumont 1991), is the idea that individuals should be initiated into the arts, sciences and humanities for the express purpose of developing that individual. Progressivism adds to this notion a consideration of the relationship between the individual and society. It considers that individual independence from all bonds is a necessary condition for the maximum development of individual potentialities. The development of the individual in turn leads to the economic and moral development of society as a whole. Thus, social progress is a necessary product of individual progress. At the same time, the increasing autonomy¹ of the individual consolidates democracy (Callan and White 2003). Developed in the United States around 1900, this philosophy was highly influential for much of the twentieth century, although its impact declined during the depression in the 1930s and during the development of welfare states in Europe after World War II. Post-modernism and neo-liberalism accelerated its decline by extending its tenets to embrace more extreme individualism (Peters and Marshall 1996; Berman et al. 2003).

In contrast, the more moderate aspects of progressivism exerted a strong influence on educational philosophies and practices throughout the world until neo-liberalism picked up the baton in the 1970s. The constructivism of Piaget (see below), for instance, borrowed its inclinations from Dewey. The criticism of progressivism

1. In English-language literature, autonomy is often confused with independence. Autonomy, as opposed to heteronomy, does not mean that the individual does not obey rules, but only collective rules that he or she freely accepts. Democracy is based on this conception of individual autonomy. Independence, as opposed to dependence, means that the individual follows his/her own will and does not accept any collective rule that may override it. Anarchy is based on this conception of individual independence. On the distinction between heteronomy and autonomy, see Renaut (1999).

by both Marxists² and post-modernists is no doubt due to a too liberal interpretation of progressivism. In elaborating the concept of reconstructivism, Brameld tried to rehabilitate a “Deweyan” interpretation of progressivism, delivering at the same time an educational philosophy that legitimised the welfare state.

Reconstructivism

Reconstructivism is associated with the name of Theodore Brameld, who advocates equilibrium between the development of the individual and the needs of society (Brameld 1956). For Brameld, the individual is a *social* being, though an individual who is capable of changing society by his or her own development and the capacity for initiative. Brameld combines elements from the three preceding streams but gives to Dewey’s philosophy of progressivism the greatest weight. Although this philosophy has usefully theorised the educational conception of social democracy and the welfare state, it has exerted very little influence on education policies.

Post-modernism

The arrival of post-modernism was well-timed for preparing, legitimising and strengthening the rise of neo-liberalism, with its advocacy of an individualised and private education. Post-modernism has become very influential within educational thinking, so it is worth understanding its foundations. Post-modernism is largely associated with French philosophers, such as Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault, but it is influential throughout the world (e.g. Rorty’s influence in the United States). Post-modernists inherited from Heidegger the criticism of rationalism. As they equate modernity with the reign of Rationalism, their criticism of modernity is based on their criticism of

2. See, as an example, the criticism of Madan Sarup (1982).

rationalism. So, first, let us look more closely at rationalism in order to understand its criticism.

After a period of oblivion in the Middle Ages, rationalism—whose roots extended to antiquity—was revived during the European Renaissance. It was further developed by Enlightenment philosophers and enjoyed much support during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe. With its repudiation of religious explanations for life and the universe, rationalism promotes the principle that everything that exists can be explained by reason—that is to say, by a systematic and logical method of investigation and thought, which replaces the exercise of faith and belief.

Rationalism not only led to the birth of modern science, but it also ushered in a new ontology of humankind. When Descartes claimed “I think, therefore I am,” he opened the door to the idea that human beings are free from all bonds, whether religious, political or economic, and are able to forge their own destiny by their own will. Descartes claimed that the mind is independent of the body, an argument which postulates that thoughts can be governed by reason instead of emotions, desires and beliefs. From the assertion that “I am free to think, to judge and to decide with the help solely of reason”, there stems another fundamental assertion that “I am free from all bonds”. These links between rationalism and individual autonomy also led rationalism to assert that all human beings—once released from their mores and customs—are fundamentally alike, since they are all reasoning beings.

This line of thought can also be extended to politics. For rationalism, democracy is the only rational political regime to the extent that it reconciles the liberty of men and their social nature. Democracy is the only political regime where individuals can exert their free will and decide to live together under rules of conduct which they themselves lay down. This is the essence of the famous “social contract” of Rousseau, which assumes and protects individual autonomy. Democracy is the only political regime where the individual can

choose who governs as opposed to those imposed governments under the sway of hereditary rulers or tyrants. Consequently, democracy is the only political form that institutes individual autonomy against individual heteronomy.

Today, post-modernism claims that rationalism is dead in practical life and that its beneficial effects on social transformation have been exhausted. In this view, rationalism cannot explain life events that are distinctive. More ominously, post-modernism underpins the rejection of “grand narratives”, which conceal differences between human beings. Instead of grand narratives, post-modernism argues for small narratives where real life appears in all its richness (Lyotard). For post-modernists, rationalism does not overcome value-laden and social structure-loaded languages (Derrida), and in fact it services the needs of power and the institution of domination by the state over the individual (Foucault).

For post-modernists, rationalism is no more than a “metaphysic”, a “secular religion”, according to which Reason (as God) is the ultimate and intrinsic nature of all things and beings. Thus, rationalism must not only be discarded but also overthrown in order to restore human liberty and put an end to the dictatorship of Reason. In pursuit of this, post-modernists began a systematic “deconstruction” of words, concepts and discourses (or previous theories) which they claimed reflected power relationships and hierarchical social positions.

Post-modernism has been viewed as the “theory of difference” of human beings (between languages, cultures, races, ages, sexes, etc.) as opposed to the universality of their human nature that is postulated by rationalism. For this reason, post-modernism has served as a theory legitimating cultural relativism. Politically, it favours social movements which have been organised on the basis of social differences, bestowing legitimacy on movements such as feminism, gay rights, and communitarianism in general. Post-modernism was also used by right-wing thinkers to revitalise liberalism and to enhance the march of individualism, which they

saw as encumbered until the 1970s by nation-states, world wars and welfare systems. Post-modernism lends itself to neo-liberal interpretations and can be used to support individualism and a minimal state. Despite its rhetoric in support of emancipation, post-modernism is inclined to be indifferent to social inequalities, adopting a general posture that sanctifies differences between real human beings in the real world.

One of the main problems with post-modernism is its radical relativism. All actions, thoughts and behaviours of individuals are equivalent, every culture has the same values and merits as others, and no political regime can be declared superior to another. From this it follows that actions, cultures and political regimes cannot and should not be assessed by any metaphysical or moral standards.

To conclude this synoptic overview of post-modernism, it is worth mentioning some current criticisms which also seek to rehabilitate the Enlightenment project of social progress. Thinkers like Rawls aim to refurbish concepts of rationality, equality and democracy, while others like Habermas focus on the knowledge produced within the social sciences on social interaction and communication. However, until now these endeavours have not dented the influence of post-modernism in the educational field. Post-modernism still heavily influences education policies, despite being unclear and diverse in its philosophical positioning. Because post-modernism opposes essentialism and radicalises progressivism, it opens the way for a purely individualistic vision of education and reinforces the view that education is purely a private matter. At the end of the day, post-modernism may well make education impossible.

Streams of philosophy on education: An historical perspective

Historically, perennialism, progressivism and post-modernism have been, successively, the most influential philosophies of education. However, the trajectory that led from one to another is not straight.

For instance, essentialism appears to be a transition between perennialism and progressivism, and reconstructivism appears to be an attempt to return from post-modernism to progressivism by stemming the individualistic and post-modern interpretation of progressivism.

These three major philosophical positions illustrate, in a way, three stages of educational thought which have successively dominated different eras and periods of Western societies. These stages represent an historical discovery of a purely individual responsibility for education. In modern states, education emerged as an obligation imposed upon citizens, and then it became a right. Today, it is becoming a choice. Of course, real history is more complicated and most of the time is composed of various combinations of these three streams of thought. At the same time, the educational thought and policies of non-Western countries also seem to follow similar trajectories and patterns.

This theoretical scheme of historical evolution has helped in interpreting the orientation and meaning of educational opinions, debates and policies in Thailand, as carried out in chapter 3.

Current Educational Dilemmas

Each of these streams of educational philosophy can help answer major educational questions. Exploring those questions and the different answers given by the major streams of educational philosophy is one way to usefully compare these streams within their historical context. From this exploration emerges a general theoretical framework which is useful for interpreting education policies.

In public controversies over education, we often find recurrent patterns and we also observe that they are based on implicit philosophical standpoints. Actually, philosophy lies concealed behind the political and public debates on education.

There are at least five major questions of a philosophical nature which become the subjects of political debate:

1. The issue of the child
2. The issue of the teacher
3. The issue of knowledge
4. The issue of equality
5. The issue of the state's role in educational matters

The first two are anthropological issues, the third is essentially about epistemology, and the last two are basically political issues. In answering these questions, a philosophical discourse is constructed, as with education policies. However, because the answers to these issues do not emerge at the same pace, we find persistent and unresolved tensions within the educational field.

Also implicit in these questions are debates about the primacy of the individual or that of society, as well as the relative advantages of modern over traditional education. Of course, these debates are not unique to Thailand but occur around the world. They can be seen as part of a wider set of tensions: tradition versus modernity, society and the state versus the individual, and the political versus the economic.³

The Issue of the Child

Current dilemmas around the child arise because the question "Why should we educate children?" has become "How should we educate them?" In so doing, the ends and means of education have been blurred.

3. In this discussion, we borrow heavily from Arendt (1978, in particular chapter 6, "The Crisis of Education: Its Social and Political Impact"), Halsey et al. (1997) and Blais et al. (2002).

In all times and places, the newborn child—what the Greeks called the “newcomer”—requires education, in one form or another, simply in order to live in society, and to pass through initiation into adulthood. Such initiations are the basis for the reproduction of society. Apprenticeships of various kinds teach language, social codes, moral norms, beliefs and technical know-how, all of what amounts to the technical and social skills and knowledge needed for adult life. Of course, reproduction of the social order is not the only purpose of such processes. The education of the child also creates an individual identity based on social integration, and recent sociological studies have emphasised the importance of this for individual dignity and happiness. In this perspective, the child is not an adult, but rather an adult in the making—a white page on which education writes on behalf of society.

Today, the most controversial issue is encapsulated in a widely used slogan: put the child at the centre of education. Some interpret this slogan as new advocacy for a more individualistic education. However, the idea is not new but has a long history, which is in fact the history of modern pedagogy. Why does this slogan arise if all modern pedagogies have already undertaken this task? Let us look at its history, and at some of the pedagogical responses to a child-centred education as a way to answer this question.

As historians have pointed out (e.g. Ariès 1962), the social conception of the child differs across cultures and historical periods. The notion that the child is an actor in the future, indeed an actor who may improve the world through the exercise of knowledge and rationality, is a concept that goes back to at least the Enlightenment era. From their beginnings, the institutions of mass schooling which were established in the nineteenth century insisted on child-centred programmes and pedagogy, and from this arose the development of scientific pedagogy.

At first, education aimed at preparing the child to be a rational individual, able to cope with any circumstances. The goal here was

ambitious: the child should become an independent and responsible adult, able to make decisions based on reason, able to distinguish between moral and immoral actions, and able to develop their own tastes and potentialities. Moreover, such adults should also be able to recognise that other human beings are alike and are entitled to respect, and that humans must accept obligations that are entailed by their rights. Finally, they must also participate, as actors and as beneficiaries, in scientific, technological, economic and social progress.

Within this framework, a “learning programme” was designed to develop the individual abilities needed for building a rational and democratic society. From this new pedagogy arose one directed towards the child. In the eighteenth-century evolutionary conception of human beings, childhood was seen as a stage of “nature” during which education was needed to transform and take individuals to a stage of “culture and civilisation”. From these Rousseauian origins (Soëtarđ 2000) through to modern pedagogy, the child is placed at the centre of education. The influence of Pestalozzi (dating from the end of the eighteenth century), and that of Darwin and Fichte, was followed by that of modern pedagogues such as Edouard Claparède in France at the beginning of the twentieth century and converged with Dewey’s pedagogy in the United States. All these pioneers insisted that science can help develop education through employing developmental psychology.

Psychology shows that the child has a “spontaneous interest” in different branches of knowledge according to his or her age and personal stages of development. Claparède, for instance, describes the sequence of these interests according to age from birth through to adolescence: interest in the senses, language, imagination, the environment, and finally society and ethics. For Claparède, it follows that subject matter and pedagogy should accord with this succession of interests. Such a “genetic” or “functional” pedagogy also considers that children, guided by their own interests, know beforehand what they need to learn. Dewey’s elaboration, on the basis of his progressivist

philosophy, is similar. This stream of thought traditionally culminates in the work of Piaget—the European “constructivist” pedagogue—whose approach became pervasive in most Western schools after World War II.

In the light of this history, we need to ask: why is there a reassertion of the necessity for child-centred education today, as in the Thai education reform, for example? In fact, this new affirmation reveals another concept of the child which can be linked to post-modern philosophy. The child is no longer understood as an adult in the making, but as an individual in his or her own right who decides by himself or herself what he or she is going to study. This choice is guided by a “credentialing” logic whereby individuals seek, through a certification of their education, the appropriate credentials to sell in the “credentials market” so as to attain the employment, income and social position that they desire. In this new child-centred approach, we witness the decline of rationalism and its ideal education on the one hand and the decline of the welfare state on the other. Education is no longer seen as a common good, serving the interests of the nation or humanity. Rather, it is a new vehicle for individualism, and it comes to pervade all aspects of life. Paradoxically, this new conception of the child as an individual is the ultimate and inevitable consequence of modern pedagogy, insofar that it focuses on the relentless development of the individual at the expense of the greater good.

In fact, many philosophers have remarked on the new meaning of the “child-centred education” slogan and its contradictory effects. Despite the long history, this “new” emphasis on the child makes this pedagogy supposedly more relevant to modern societies. Asserting that the child is an individual in his or her own right means that the child is not significantly different from an adult as far as education is concerned. The logical consequence of this is that adults have nothing more to teach their children, except to help them make their own choices within education. For some authors, this logic leads to impossibility

of education itself and the ultimate closure of all schools.⁴ Even if such a programme has no chance of implementation, it nevertheless reveals that the pupil has disappeared behind the learner, and the learner behind the customer, and that the borders between childhood and adulthood have been removed. Both implications of this vision of the child-centred approach may deny the social necessity and even the possibility of education.

In summary, this new vision of the nature of the child poses questions for the whole education system, as it exists in the form inherited from the era of nation-states and welfare states. It challenges the entire foundation of modern education, putting into question the principle of authority, the social relationships to knowledge and the principle of equality that constitute this foundation.

The Issue of the Teacher

The dilemma here can be posed as: Should teachers transmit their knowledge using the authority of their expertise, or should they simply “accompany” students on their journey through knowledge? This leads to another quandary: Should schools be organised as disciplinary institutions or as mere “resource pools” available to learners? In the case of the former, the school is a place where learning implies teaching; in the latter, only learning matters. The final sets of questions thrown up by these dilemmas are: Is it possible to learn without being taught? Must we choose between instruction and learning? Are teachers and instruction obstacles to free learners?

Let us start with the case where the child is seen as a newcomer in society, an adult in the making, and where education is viewed as a gateway to adulthood and hence into society. Society, by virtue of its

4. Ivan Illich is one of them, although his complex thought has been distorted (Illich 1972). For the kinds of arguments in favour of this stance, see Bereiter (1973).

mandate to integrate newcomers, and by its rules and norms, exerts a strong authority on the child, as well as on the adult. The child cannot learn by himself or herself the knowledge or codes to access society but has to be initiated into society. He or she has to be trained to face the authority of society. During this period of training, the child has to be protected from the authority and violence which the world of adults may exert. The teacher plays the role of ambassador for society and also intercedes on behalf of the child. The teacher is the one who exerts benevolent authority over the child in order to eventually free him or her from the need for a teacher, and from the violence and authority of society. The teacher is thus a necessary tutor for the building of individual autonomy among children.

If, on the other hand, the child is seen as an individual, with similar rights and obligations as adults, the teacher's role is that of a companion for the child on his or her journey through education. The teacher is no more than a peer, devoid of authority or guidance. The teacher simply helps to reveal the child's interests and inclinations. That is, the teacher is no longer a teacher and, in the final analysis, is no longer required.

The problem with this perspective is that it overlooks the fact that knowledge acquisition requires an intermediary between the child and that knowledge. A human presence is necessary to foster a fertile relationship between knowledge and learner; only the chemistry that develops between teacher and student in their face-to-face encounters can produce this kind of productive relationship. Even an autodidact's access to knowledge requires initial guidance from a third party. It is clear that access to knowledge relies on a hierarchy that provisionally institutes the superiority of the one who knows over the one who does not know. This is the paradoxical condition of their future equality.

This provisional hierarchy is not merely instrumental; it is above all a human relationship, composed of emotions that are mobilised in the act of learning. The child's curiosity and his or her interest in knowledge are always better developed by someone whom the child

loves and admires. The dialectic between master and disciple, based on admiration and mimicry, is a major ingredient of the teaching-learning relationship. No technological device, whether video, television or the Internet, no “ICT”, can replace this particular human relationship when it comes to acquiring knowledge.

Of course, the real motive for claiming that intermediaries are redundant is not based on educational grounds, but rather it springs from economic objectives related to the profit of marketing information services and the savings to be made on teachers’ wages. From an educational perspective, individual learning cannot replace learning in a group situation where much of the following takes place: the experiences of socialisation, the apprenticeship of mutual respect, the healthy confrontation of discussion, and the sharing of difficulties and enthusiasm. Learning in a group under the benevolent authority of the teacher is the only learning process that can be free of ideological inculcation or mercantile manipulation.

The Issue of Knowledge

The issue of knowledge lies behind both the earlier issues, and indeed it shapes the main dilemmas in education. In most countries today, the current crises of education are due to a loss of the meaning of knowledge, a term which is now increasingly equated with mere information or with the formation of skills or competencies.⁵

5. It is interesting to note that the Thai Ministry of Education follows step by step the American conception of education when it mingles knowledge with “competencies”. In its view, the main task of education is to deliver eight competencies (or skills): (1) creativity and innovation, (2) leadership, (3) teamwork, (4) thinking, (5) critical and analytical thinking, (6) abilities in using information and communication technology (ICT), (7) Thai values and morals, and (8) world awareness (Ministry of Education 2008). The main targets of education are vocational skills, and knowledge is entirely overlooked.

Our framework for addressing this difficult issue is an historical and comparative one, an approach which helps us understand such prescriptions as “learning to learn” and “lifelong learning”. “Learning to learn” is in fact an age-old maxim, contemporary in its origins with the child-centred approach discussed earlier. This raises the same question: Why do we need to reassert what is already practised? Perhaps the prescription “learning how to learn” has changed over time in ways that reflect changes in the social relationships to knowledge. We pursue this insight by comparing these relationships in traditional (hierarchical) societies and in modern (individualistic) societies.

In hierarchical societies, knowledge, which is understood as a system of social truths (beliefs, codes, rites, norms and know-how), is inherited from the past. Since these truths are inherited, they cannot be denied, modified or amplified without the risk of losing their character as truths. Education, whatever its form, aims to transmit this system of truths to ensure the reproduction of social order. Men and women are obliged to adopt these truths and to follow them scrupulously. The need to preserve society demands the transmission of this unaltered knowledge from generation to generation from the golden age of its beginning. Newcomers must be compelled to learn it, as accurately as possible, by copying and by rote learning. This knowledge, inherited from gods and ancestors, is transmitted from generation to generation by the elders, who are acknowledged as the true custodians, since they are the closest living persons to the origin of society. The respect due to elders is equivalent to the respect owed to this knowledge.

The only way of reproducing the social order, as it has been since its origins, is to give knowledge this kind of primacy over individual fancy and desire. Today, within hierarchical societies, this social relationship to knowledge has not disappeared, even with the advent of modern forms of education. Although education may now be organised in mass institutions, and geared towards instilling modern and scientific knowledge in a subtle compromise with traditional truths, it is clear

that the traditional social relationships with knowledge remain fundamentally the same. Thus, the teaching role of elders is shared by teachers, who are to some extent the elders' socially accepted representatives. This new caste of education professionals achieves the same respect as that owed to elders; and the knowledge they transmit, though modernised, achieves the same respect as traditional truths.

The liberal revolutions in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe challenged this religious conception of knowledge. Philosophers contested it as a drastic impediment to individual freedom and denounced it as a system of alienation and obscurantism. The Enlightenment represented a decisive break with the traditional concept of truth with the idea that human actions reveal the intrinsic nature of human beings: their rationality and their freedom. On the basis of this, they elaborated a concept of knowledge based on reasoning, method and research that aimed to improve society and to empower people to act.

For Enlightenment philosophers, the true nature of humankind and of the universe could not be revealed by beliefs which grew out of ignorance. Rather, men and women could apply their rational minds to investigating and revealing this true nature by means of rational, systematic and logical queries. The discovery of natural laws demonstrated at the same time the efficiency of the method and the intrinsic rational nature of living beings and things. This metaphysic broke definitively with religious concepts of knowledge. Knowledge is not already made; rather, it must be developed in order to master nature and to empower people to control their own destinies. Science, then, could blossom on the basis of this epistemological breakthrough.

Developing knowledge was at first considered as the human ability to reveal the finite and rational essence of things and of human beings. Then, at the second stage, there emerged the conviction that developing knowledge made possible the triumph of rationality by promoting an endless process of human and social progress.

Within this framework, knowledge is claimed as a legacy that must be invested in, reproduced, enlarged and accumulated, and not an untouchable heritage.

This rationalist split from traditional perennialist views brought about a new social relationship to knowledge. Knowledge would now serve societal change rather than the reproduction of the past and its existing social order. From this flowed a radical transformation of the concept of learning. Learning was no longer an individual acquisition of a pre-existing body of knowledge, but rather a new process of learning how to learn. It became an apprenticeship in the scientific approach to knowledge. The goal for education was to improve society or, more precisely, to improve an individual's abilities to improve society. Education was intended to prepare human beings to cope with a future that would, in principle, be different from the present, and to prepare them to act in determining this future.

Clearly, with this social project of enhancing individual progress and social progress, antiquarian methods of transmitting traditional knowledge by demonstration, familiarisation and practice became obsolete. Learning how to learn became the method most suited to such an ambitious project. This meant adapting individuals to the uncertainty of the future, by teaching them rational methods for facing novel situations. This philosophy of learning how to learn asserts that teaching is the culmination of the rationalist political project of the Enlightenment, a project which Dewey systematically formulated at the beginning of the twentieth century. Modern pedagogies, using scientific knowledge about cognitive processes, continue to be based on the principle of learning how to learn.

Today, we are confronted by the obvious questions: Why pretend to change the way of teaching by implementing an already enforced "learning how to learn" pedagogy? Why present an old slogan as something new? The answers are straightforward. This novelty is a logical consequence of the obsession with child-centred education in its current guise. If it is to be the children who choose their own field

of interest—that is, the segment of knowledge that they are willing to learn—the only elements that they can share at school with others are the *methods* used to access these fields, and not the knowledge itself.

Moreover, it is argued, because knowledge is rapidly evolving and enlarging, students should not acquire “ephemeral” knowledge, nor do they have any hope of acquiring an expanding encyclopaedic knowledge. Because existing bodies of knowledge cannot be learnt, they should therefore not be taught. The only way to overcome these formidable dilemmas is to reduce teaching to an apprenticeship in limited methods that allow children to find their own way to access and understand available and up-to-date information. Furthermore, teaching methods that allow access to sources of information will dispense with the need to transmit “too large” a body of knowledge. Learning how to learn is then a powerful device for saving time and money in an already too expensive education.

Learning how to learn is also an indispensable tool for adulthood, for lifelong learning throughout adulthood. A common argument in favour of learning how to learn is that it avoids the problem of the obsolescence of practical knowledge and the spread, by default, of “scholarly knowledge”. The latter is viewed as useless in practical life because it is entirely disconnected from the evolving reality. Consequently, learning how to learn prepares individuals for their lifelong learning obligations. Moreover, it is argued, a uniform knowledge delivered by a centralised education system, often reflecting the ruling class culture, is useless for minority communities and the poor. In this view, if schools have any utility, which is doubtful, it is in developing different methods for different social environments. The more radical defenders of this position do not hesitate to go further in advocating a return to the transmission of communities’ knowledge and wisdom, on the grounds that they are the place where differences between children and adults are minimal, and, for that reason, the only place where children can learn from their own experiences.

Needless to say, the meaning of learning how to learn that has been articulated above has triggered fierce counter-attacks. The general tone of the critics is that this conception of learning how to learn is a euphemism for ending any conceivable education. The focus on teaching limited methods to access information and circumscribing teaching to mere pedagogy denies the transmission of knowledge to people who cannot use their existing relationships to acquire it. By recommending that teaching be limited to methods, and accepting that children should simply pick up what they want to learn, the current conception of learning how to learn denies the transmission of any knowledge, and the possibility of learning anything from society, whether of a scientific, ethical, political or social kind.

While learning how to learn in its previous guise actually involved acquiring existing knowledge in order to experience learning in practice, the currently fashionable approach represents a radical dissociation between knowledge and methods, and leads to an absurd programme of equipping learners with tools that lack an obvious point. Even the arts are considered as a field of experience for the purpose of learning how to learn, rather than a domain that may enlarge a child's sensibility. Adults—that is to say, politicians, parents and even some pedagogues—have apparently resigned from their initiating role in promoting human development during childhood and youth. Ultimately, regarding the child as an individual in his or her own right implies the renunciation and the impossibility of any education. Regarding the child as an adult is equivalent to “infantilising” children and accepting that a childish culture can remain independent from—even hostile to—society.

By the same token, lifelong learning is just another way of depreciating the transmission of knowledge during childhood and of reducing adults to the position of eternal learners. A terrible consequence is that adults are no longer entitled to teach their children because they apparently have nothing to teach them. Education is no more a means of educating. It is no more a powerful

tool for nurturing independent and autonomous individuals who respect others as equals and who understand why they must adhere to and uphold social rules for the greater good of society. The highest point of absurdity is attained when pretending that a learning-how-to-learn pedagogy would defend impoverished and marginalised classes by offering them a discounted and impoverished education. In sum, one of the great ideals of education, that it should play a role in compensating for social inequalities, has left the stage.

The Issue of Equality

In contemporary discourses, education is considered as a powerful vehicle for social equality as well as a factor of economic efficiency. However, the contemporary “individualistic revolution”, which has contributed to increasing social inequalities, seems to dash the hope of achieving social equality with mass education. Although sharing its genesis with modern education systems, the goal of social equality has been blunted by a transformation of its current social meaning and by the inability of education systems to reverse social inequalities. For much of modern history, social equality had been equated with democracy. Today, the question is whether education remains a vehicle for social equality, and whether social equality is still an objective of democracies.

Social equality has been a democratic ideal since the birth of democracy. At the end of the eighteenth century, the French philosopher Condorcet theorised that education is a tool for achieving social equality (Kintzler 1987; Badinter 1989; Rothschild 2001). In a democracy, he argued, equality in educational access is the way to promote equality in society. This goal of equal access requires the adoption of the principles of a public, secular, compulsory and free education. The formulation of this theory can be understood in the historical context of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, during which time the political concerns focused on

opening education to all regardless of privileges of birth and wealth, and on removing the influence of religious education.

In a democratic framework, this equality of rights should amount to actual equality *de facto*, as well as *de jure*. However, politics cannot remove all social inequalities because of the unequal distribution of talents and merits among individuals. A theory of the relationship between individual progress and social progress was therefore established to legitimate this “natural” and irreducible inequality. One claim, for example, is that when education serves the development of the individual by promoting his or her self-confidence and self-achievement, then it follows that, no matter what the individual’s potential may be, education nevertheless may serve social progress by providing society with a diverse palette of talents and skills to suit the multiplicity of social functions and jobs. Thus, the recognition of differences of merit in education—the only inequality acknowledged by democracies—means that both individual needs and social needs can be satisfied. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Dewey clearly formulated the necessary alliance between the liberties of individuals and social progress:

A society based on custom will utilize individual variations only to a limit of conformity with usage; uniformity is the chief ideal within each class. A progressive society counts individual variations as precious since it finds in them the means of its own growth. Hence a democratic society must, in consistency with its ideal, allow for intellectual freedom and the play of diverse gifts and interests in its educational measures. (Dewey 1944, 305)

However, meritocracy has been redefined in the course of the twentieth century. A just society is progressively conceived as a society where individuals have equal opportunities in life in general and in education in particular. When all privileges of birth and wealth have been erased, and when a new principle of a legitimate social

hierarchy based on educational achievements has been adopted, then there remains the question of whether it is just to accept inequalities of talent, merit and intelligence, that is, “biologically inherited” differences. “Do we merit our merits?” ask philosophers (Blais et al. 2002). At the very least, individuals must be offered the same opportunities to study in order to achieve the highest educational level they can reach. Streaming must be applied with caution and only after a basic education has been delivered to all. Adult learning must be offered to those who had no chance to study long enough to reveal their talents.⁶

This new meaning of meritocracy is evident in the theory of justice as fairness (Rawls 1971, 2001). Taking into account the persistence of social inequalities, equity must be interpreted as a moral concept that rejects social inequalities only when they are ethically unacceptable. Thus, in the educational field, the objective of fairness should replace the objective of equal opportunity. This concept of justice in a democratic society leads one to consider not a utopian, unreachable and inefficient equality, but only morally condemnable inequalities. When such inequalities cannot be eliminated, they have to be compensated in a sort of generalised “affirmative action” in favour of underprivileged individuals and social groups. The Rawlsian concept of equity or fairness has led to the idea that a trade-off has to be made between efficiency and equity in education (Cohen 1996).

This evolution of the concept of equality in education has also been stimulated by sociological analyses of inequalities in education. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, 1979) discovered that even in democratic societies—when education policies are designed and implemented according to a principle of equality or equal opportunity—there are still strong social biases evident in educational achievements. The majority of children from poor and marginal

6. For an analysis of the issue of equality in education, see also part 6, Meritocracy and Social Exclusion, in Halsey et al. (1997, 631–798).

families perform much worse at school than children from wealthy families and even from “normal” families. As a consequence, upward social mobility does not occur, as most children come to occupy the same social positions as their parents. The upper and middle classes can then defend and retain their dominant social positions, while the lower social classes remain poor. The promise of upward social mobility and promotion, on which meritocratic equality has built its foundation, is broken. In practice, education fails to fulfil its objective of selecting individuals only on the basis of their performance and merits. The reason for this persistent and anti-democratic bias is that educational programmes are based on a “bourgeois culture” that only privileged children acquire at home and become familiar with. Social inequalities accentuate educational inequalities, which in turn further accentuate social inequalities. Educational inequalities, therefore, are rooted in an unequal distribution of “cultural capital” between families and between individuals, the kind of capital which appears to be a decisive input for subsequent successful studies. Differences in educational performance cannot therefore be attributed only to differences in merit, as generally claimed, but actually derive from differing fortunes of birth and wealth (Bourdieu 1997).

These findings of sociology of education have put into question the democratic ideal of educational equality, so much so that the increasing social inequalities we witness are felt to be a “scandalous failure” of education systems. Pushed by public opinion to remedy this unforgivable flaw, politicians and educators in turn place untenable pressure on education systems by requiring that they reverse the trend towards increasing social inequality. Yet, in demanding so much of education, these advocates overlook the real causes of inequality, which are rooted in, and amplified by, economic and social forces that the atrophied welfare states can no longer deal with. Indeed, the pressures exerted upon education systems arise from that individualistic revolution in the equilibrium between the individual

and society which was created by democracy and implemented by the welfare state (Capella 2000).

The individualistic shaping of democracy has initiated a profound change in educational objectives. Instead of aiming to achieve the freedom of individuals with a view to their integration into society according to their merits, education now aims at developing self-esteem and the resourcefulness of the individual with a view to the individual's "happy life". It is notable that this objective resuscitates liberal views of the eighteenth century, which equated freedom of the individual with happiness. The return of the individual to the fore tends to offer solely an individualistic, selfish and short-sighted meaning to human life. The needs of society disappear behind the primacy of the individual. Teaching practices no longer transmit any shared knowledge. Rather, they inculcate useful professional know-how for achieving individual objectives, they foster inter-individual competition and they aim at creating "social" winners. Education is individualising instead of socialising. The goal of an emancipating and egalitarian education, which was part of the social framework for the welfare state to maintain social inequalities within acceptable limits, is now crumbling because of the advent of neo-liberal principles and policies.

The Issue of the State

When it comes to the state, the paradox we confront is that, while the demand for educational services continues to increase, the state refuses to take responsibility for providing such services. The demand increases because competition between individuals and between families for social positions increases: higher diplomas and credentials are associated with better paid or respected jobs. With the shrinkage of their internal labour markets, and the decline of apprenticeship schemes, enterprises have withdrawn from on-the-job training, leaving the burden of training with the education system. In turn, education is

increasingly expected to deliver skills instead of knowledge. Moreover, because of reasons such as compulsory education, unemployment and competition for credentials, the average length of studies continues to increase. All these factors together feed a buoyant demand for educational services.

At the same time, the state refuses to raise public expenditure on education. There are two main reasons for this. First, public educational expenditure already represents a large part of national budgets. With their commitment to “smaller states”, neo-liberals oppose raising such expenditure; indeed, they seek ways to reduce it. Secondly, the decline of national solidarity and the associated abandonment of the welfare state have allowed social inequalities to widen dramatically. In such a context, the upper and middle classes are not prepared to pay more taxes for the education of a growing population of poor and marginal families. They have clearly chosen governments that advocate fewer taxes and have allocated their own income for the private education of their children (Galbraith 2000). This is part of their strategy to win the competition for social positions within their own ranks (the poor having long ago been disqualified from this competition).

Attempts to cope with these two contradictory demands—more educational services alongside less public spending on education—have led to the dominance of economic logic within educational management. Borrowing from the vocabulary of business, this logic embraces cost-effectiveness and accountability, market-like mechanisms of evaluation (tests, selection, league tables) and the privatisation of public education systems (Bridges and Jonathan 2003). All these changes allegedly enhance “consumer choices”. The extent of this process is greater in secondary schools and universities than in primary schools (or compulsory education), where governments still maintain democratic principles. The application of economic criteria in the management of public schools and the privatisation of education are re-instituting educational inequalities based on

privileges of birth and wealth, and on differences in social origins. Educational services are increasingly “marketed” in an attempt to match their supply and demand. For that purpose, they offer a variety of curricula that customers demand and are willing to buy. Because individuals are ready to pay for educational services that can yield the right credentials for getting good jobs, education becomes tightly governed by the labour market. Political objectives of education, such as emancipating individuals from their social conditions and attaining a more equitable society, have been discarded in favour of individualistic and economic concerns. In reality, democratic ideals are undermined, irrespective of the content of current political discourse.

The balance between individual needs and social needs, which education has traditionally promoted, is today destroyed, for the sole benefit of the individual and at the expense of society. Today, advocates of a more democratic and equalising education expect the impossible from education. They fail to see that neo-liberal society itself has abandoned objectives which are now deemed “misplaced”.



Philosophies of education have always mirrored social and political structures and changes, and have always nurtured educational controversies. The history of Thai education can be read in the light of the general history of the role of education in consolidating the nation-state, particularly from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, and in introducing some elements of the welfare state after World War II. Education played a role in the social conflicts and political struggles for democracy which were particularly marked in the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, there had emerged policies which were resistant to the democratisation of education, as well as a rationale for maintaining a perennialist education. However, since the mid-1970s, the democratisation of education has taken place because

of rapid economic growth and under the pressure of business demands. Since then, the philosophical foundations of education have changed. The rise of democracy, and of the middle classes, and the rapid growth in school enrolment have coincided with the increasing questioning of perennialist-inspired education policies along with the expansion of post-modern philosophies of education. At the end of the 1990s, Thai education reached the crossroads of these different philosophical streams, and this was mirrored in the National Education Act of 1999. The national debates and new policy orientations which resulted are best understood with the help of a theoretical framework, as this chapter has done.

PART III

THE EDUCATION–WORK DILEMMA

6

From Education to Work

ALAIN MOUNIER & PHASINA TANGCHUANG

The teaching and learning process can be defined as the carrying out of activities by one or several persons who may interact with each other that results, whether intentionally or unintentionally, in increasing the knowledge of at least one of them (generally referred to as a learner).¹ The process can be described in terms of four components: the *learning situation* with the specific *didactics*, *inputs* and *outputs* attached to it. A learning situation is a particular context—characterised as an institution—in which learning takes place. In their lifetimes, individuals go through different learning situations: the family, the school and the workplace, generally in that order. The ways of learning are unique to each of these three situations because their didactics, inputs and outputs are different; they are therefore highly contextualised. They are also interdependent in that the knowledge acquired in one learning situation is often used in further learning in other situations. Although they determine the efficiency of the education system in imparting knowledge, the learning trajectories of individuals going from one learning situation

1. / The teaching-learning process and the roles of informal and formal learning in knowledge accumulation are analysed in depth in chapter 11.

to the next are rarely analysed or taken into account in education policies.

The Learning Situations in a Lifetime

Families, schools and workplaces are the major sites of learning in an individual's life. Each place defines specific conditions of learning in terms of who the learners and the teachers are, the kind of knowledge that can be transmitted and learnt, the major didactics in use, and the nature and structure of the inputs and outputs. Each place is governed by the organisations, institutions, rules and languages that shape each teaching-learning process.

The Family

The family is paramount in establishing the psychological and social bases for a child's later educational performance. The family as a learning situation has been analysed by psychologists and sociologists in order to understand the interactions between the child, the parents, and their social and physical environments. It has been found to influence the awakening in the child of a wide range of abilities. It helps forge emotions, tastes, mores and values, as well as language abilities, on which is built the child's attitude towards learning and knowledge. In particular, it shapes the abilities of judgement, reasoning and thinking. It also helps develop the child's interests, curiosity and sensitivity regarding his or her physical and social environments, as well as the child's attitudes towards human endeavours in the sciences and the arts. Essentially, the family transmits the know-how necessary in daily life. The capacity of an individual for knowledge accumulation is partly determined by his or her upbringing—the family's structure, culture, educational style, productive activities and social position, as well as the means it has to educate the child.

This learning situation has been extensively studied by sociologists of education (Jencks 1972; Lockheed et al. 1989; De Singly 1992; Van Zanten 2000; Filmer and Pritchett 1999; Lara-Cinisomo et al. 2004; Dahl and Lochner 2005).

However, the family is not organised as a learning situation as such. Although it has a great influence on an individual's accumulation of knowledge throughout life, as a learning situation it is not socially organised. It can be described as an "informal" learning situation in that no formal didactics exists and that the inputs and the expected outputs in terms of knowledge are not clearly defined. Here, the teaching and learning methods consist of mostly child-rearing practices without much scientific basis that are largely embedded in local cultures, mores and codes as well as individual household preferences.

Each family as a learning situation differs from that of others in that it reflects each family's cultural capital. An important reason for establishing modern education systems has been to erase these family-based differences in pursuit of a homogeneous national identity, something required for the building of nation-states, and in pursuit of equal opportunities in education, something required by the social project of democracy and social justice. Some sociologists argue that the latter project has partly failed because students' performance at school is still largely determined by their social origins and by each family's culture and social position (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Moreover, it has been shown that there are also differences in family behaviours—termed "family educational styles"—with regard to the degree and style of parents' involvement in their children's education (Godard 1992; Desforges and Abouchaar 2003). It follows that equal educational opportunity depends not only on equal economic abilities for education but also on equal cultural capital among students. While education policies can compensate somewhat for economic inequalities in access to education, they are stumped in the face of inequalities stemming from the cultural origins of students.

The very process of learning at school is meant to compensate for such cultural inequalities, something captured forcefully in the metaphor of schooling as a social elevator. In countries where the goal of equal educational opportunity is strongly anchored in their national values, persistent inequalities in educational achievement due to cultural inequalities are regarded as a failure of education.

The School

From its beginnings, the school has been conceived as the major place of learning in an individual's life. It is the site of a systematic teaching-learning process that is authorised to produce and transmit knowledge to the youth on behalf of society. The school is charged with the task of preparing children for adult life in all its cultural, political, social and economic dimensions. At the same time, learning during childhood determines a great deal of an individual's trajectory through life. Crucially, education systems ultimately transmit the bulk of knowledge that an individual will have at his or her disposal throughout life, including the ability to learn beyond school. Today, this foundation of modern education systems is under siege by a new belief that rapid social changes necessitate lifelong learning by individuals. However, it is clear that even the capacity for learning beyond school depends on prior education. Consequently, lifelong learning cannot replace initial education at school.

It has to be realised when thinking of equal learning opportunity that the school is a weakly contextualised learning situation. This means that the teaching-learning process in school is less determined by and less dependent on the environment than is the case in other learning situations such as the family and the workplace. The learning situation in school needs to be weakly contextualised in order for all children to have the same opportunity to learn and to acquire knowledge (Heuveline 2005). Schools are designed to deliver the same education to all children whatever their social origins and

whatever the location and circumstances of their education. This is a crucial determinant of the quality of education. The school is intended solely for the accumulation of knowledge and the development of students' abilities to deal with the future. The teaching of scholarly knowledge is the most efficient way both to disseminate knowledge and to select individuals for social positions. Criticisms that schools have a scholarly bias, and therefore neglect the needs of the workplace, clearly miss the point. They overlook the social role which society originally assigned to schools.²

As schools differ among themselves, there is thus a "school effect". Educational sociologists argue that students' educational achievements differ considerably from school to school. This phenomenon has been labelled the school effect (Van Zanten 2000), which captures how the characteristics of a particular school influence the educational achievement of its students. This effect reflects the location and size of the school, the structure and origins of the student population, and the interactions between teachers and students. The school effect is also related to the school's selection policies, regulations and management styles. In recent years, we have witnessed the establishment of an increasing number of "league tables" that compare schools' performance in an effort to boost competition, on the grounds that competition improves the quality of education (Arnove and Torres 2003).

Micro-analyses have also been carried out in the classroom to look for a "classroom effect" on educational performance that is influenced by the interactions between teachers and students and among students within the classroom (Reynolds and Skilbeck 1976). Results suggest that stimuli coming from intense face-to-face interactions in the classroom improve educational performance, a finding which somewhat undermines the prospects of distance education.

2. On this very important issue, see chapter 8.

Both school and classroom effects suggest that schools are not entirely successful in becoming decontextualised learning situations. On the contrary, particularly in Thailand, the current education policies as well as the uncontrolled privatisation of education tend to re-contextualise schools, as it is assumed that a highly contextualised education is a condition for improving the quality of education. We argue that only the contrary is true, a fact that we demonstrate throughout this book.

The Workplace

The learning process in the workplace is highly contextualised, and its major output is skills. What is learnt is a narrow range of practical knowledge confined to individual jobs and immediate experiences. It follows that learning in the workplace cannot replace learning in a weakly contextualised place like the school. Similarly, learning in school cannot substitute for learning in the workplace. Education essentially develops cognitive skills, while the workplace fosters behavioural and technical skills.

The workplace is seldom considered as a specific learning situation.³ It is primarily a site of production, a complex setting with both material and non-material dimensions which together determine what each worker will learn by doing on the job. Knowledge acquired in the workplace is mainly attached to the job performed and generally regarded as consisting of skills (Gibbs 2008).

An important material dimension of learning in the workplace is the technology in use, which determines the kind of machinery, equipment and processes employed. To some extent, workers learn

3. Advocates of “learning organisations” (Argyris 2004) wish to see workplaces become weakly contextualised learning situations. They cannot accept that the purpose of the workplace is production and not learning, which prevents them from understanding that learning in the workplace is a specific and *highly contextualised* process.

only what is needed to use the technology. When the technology changes, workers have to rely partially on their previously acquired cognitive skills to help them make the transition. But, ultimately, they have to learn new technical skills in order to deal efficiently with the new technology. Clearly, workers learn in their current jobs only the skills required for operating the current technology. Such skills are attached to the technology in use and cannot be enhanced except through technological improvement. This predicament has been referred to as the “truncation problem”⁴ (Phasina et al. 2004).

The organisation of labour in the workplace determines for each worker his or her exact position and function, as well as the amount of responsibility, the content of tasks and the nature of cooperation with other workers. Thus, the organisation of labour in a given workplace produces a distinctive learning situation for each job. Consequently, labour management practices, which vary with the company culture, strongly influence the learning situation (Chandler 1977; D'Iribarne 1989). Some employers encourage innovation and accordingly give their workers a large degree of autonomy and plenty of training opportunities. Others prefer a rigid chain of command and are reluctant to promote initiative or provide training, and they are more inclined to require that workers stick to orders from above. These two contrasting company cultures—which are both seen in Thailand—represent two opposite learning situations. The first one appears to be more conducive to learning than the second.

4. The truncation problem refers to a widespread, although mistaken, belief that skills are a limiting factor in the improvement of technology. In this view, technological change is dependent on a prior change in skills; and as endogenous enhancement of skills cannot take place, education has to take up the task of skill formation. Conversely, if technology is a limiting factor in skill enhancement, it follows that only technological change can lead to new skills being developed; and skill enhancement cannot be achieved through education but only through technology improvement and work.

As such, opportunities and motivations for learning in the workplace can arise by reducing the hierarchy of control (through a flattened management structure and an extended internal labour market). This increases the autonomy and responsibility of workers, and promotes internal job mobility and performance-based reward systems in the enterprise. For example, major Japanese manufacturers encourage moves between jobs within the factory to make workers understand the organisation structure and the importance of inter-departmental coordination, as well as to strengthen their commitment to the company. Japanese firms also understand that skills formed on the job tend to remain hidden (implicit skills) and that their diffusion throughout the work process requires finding the procedure to make them explicit. The goals of these management methods are to enhance the learning process in the workplace, to sharpen skills and to eventually increase labour productivity.

Learning Trajectories

The simple concept of a learning situation is not only useful for characterising the different learning processes in society but also for analysing the succession of learning processes during an individual's life cycle. From the perspective of the individual, the institutions of family, school and workplace constitute successive learning situations. These are all interdependent, in the sense that the pattern of knowledge accumulation in one learning situation influences that in the next learning situation.

However, the learning that occurs in an individual's lifetime is not a seamless process. On the contrary, there are marked breaks in the trajectory through the three major learning situations of family, school and job. The transition from family to school represents a move from a highly contextualised learning situation to one that is weakly contextualised. In contrast, the second transition, from school

to work, represents a move from a weakly contextualised learning situation to a highly contextualised one. Such major transitions are always problematic, and they determine whether an individual has a positive or a negative learning trajectory. Let us briefly consider two of these transitions, from family to school and from school to work, as well as an individual's moves between schools and between jobs.

The Family-School Transition: Sociological Lessons

In the transition from family to school, the individual moves from a highly contextualised to a weakly contextualised learning situation, from an unstructured to a systematic educational situation. In this process, it is evident that students do not start on an equal footing. As sociologists have shown, the transition remains incomplete. In fact, the family's socio-economic circumstances and their educational style carry over to the school and strongly influence their children's educational performance.

This influence on educational performance reflects differences in cultural capital due to family origins. As the duration of studies increases, the impact of cultural capital on educational achievements weakens. However, the impact of family backgrounds on educational opportunity does not weaken over time, because income inequalities replace cultural inequalities in influencing educational access. The uncontrolled expansion of private education is likely to accentuate economic inequalities, and scholarship programmes designed to reduce inequalities will never replace a free and efficient public education as the most effective means of minimising inequalities.

Well-off families can afford to choose "good" schools for their children and are more likely to move their children to another school for the next level. Even if schools are weakly contextualised, each school represents a unique learning situation—something evident in the school effect. Therefore, the choice of schools and the movement of students between schools (or even between streams)

have strong effects on the acquisition of knowledge and of cognitive and learning skills. The ghetto effect, for instance, highlights the link between inequalities and discrimination and between the school neighbourhood and its local population. In our view, sociological analyses such as this can contribute to the promotion of equality between schools and to the improvement of schools' character as weakly contextualised learning situations. These outcomes are essential for achieving quality education as well as educational equality, although sociological analyses stress the latter more than the former. They rarely acknowledge the significance of the knowledge content of education, something crucial in addressing the question of quality. For this task, the insights offered by Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development are highly relevant. This theory highlights how the accumulation of knowledge is dependent on previous acquired knowledge and consequently on the educational trajectory of an individual. It also shows how didactics should be matched to the social origins of students in order to achieve educational equality and to improve the quality of education across the board.

The School-Work Transition: The Question of Skill Formation

In the transition from school to work, the individual moves from a weakly contextualised to a highly contextualised learning situation. It raises, unfortunately in a wrong way, the debate on the quality of education. This transition represents a major crossroads in the learning process, and a key concern at this juncture is whether the scholarly knowledge acquired at school meets the needs of the workplace. Only recently has the reciprocal question been raised: does the workplace enhance the dissemination of knowledge? From a vocational perspective, this transition brings up three issues.

The first issue is how well education prepares students for jobs. This question has been analysed by both labour economists and

sociologists by studying the employment and unemployment of recent graduates, as well as the qualification requirements of vacancies in the labour market. Their findings generally suggest that the best match between the demand and supply of educated labour is achieved through adjusting demand rather than modifying supply. Yet, adjusting supply is exactly what happens when employers select their technology according to the educational characteristics of the available labour supply (Tanguy 1986; Rope and Tanguy 1994). This is why aligning education with the supposed needs of businesses is a lose-lose strategy: both schools and employers lose.

The second issue is whether the diplomas, which are used by employers as a criterion for recruitment, are sufficiently standardised to act as a reliable guide to the knowledge and behaviour of job applicants. With the inflation of credentials resulting in less standardisation of the knowledge content that diplomas certify, they lose their effectiveness as guides for recruitment.⁵

The final issue—commonly voiced by the public—is the gap between the scholarly knowledge acquired at school and the knowledge needed in the workplace. The existence of such gaps has stimulated the development of various vocational streams of education more specific to every occupation.

These three issues provide the premise for promoting vocational education and training to forge the skills which are in demand in the labour market. This premise is based on the notion that education should try to transmit the knowledge necessary to perform jobs (Shavit and Müller 1997; Crouch et al. 1999). We have shown, however, that education only provides one component of skills—the cognitive component—while the technical and behavioural components come from learning on the job (Mounier 2001, 2006b). Obviously, education in school imparts more scholarly knowledge than is needed in jobs, and its historic social role dictates that it must be organised

5. See in particular chapter 9 on the inflation of credentials.

according to an educational logic rather than a vocational logic. If education systems are subordinated to the economic needs of society, the scope of studies would be too narrow, limited to learning how to do. Indeed, it amounts to amputating one of the limbs of education: the production and transmission of knowledge. It can only lead to the narrowing of scope and the deterioration of quality, because it transforms schools into highly contextualised learning situations.

In respect of the effect of changing jobs, it has been observed that too much labour mobility hampers on-the-job learning and skill acquisition. Advocates of labour flexibility contend that labour mobility benefits both employees and employers by enhancing skills. They argue, for example, that occupational mobility enlarges a worker's "portfolio" of skills, thereby protecting them from unemployment due to unemployability (i.e. a lack of the skills in demand in the labour market). Moreover, realising that they possess "portable" skills, workers are more inclined to change jobs. From the employer's perspective, this means the ready availability of the skills and workers they need.

Where there is considerable labour mobility, on-the-job training cannot provide a solution to the formation of skills (Tanguy 1986; Rope and Tanguy 1994). A widespread belief is that such training can expand a worker's portfolio of skills (ILO 1998). We would argue, however, that there are two key reasons why this is not so. First, on-the-job training can only develop a small portion, whether technical or behavioural, of the skills used in the job, unless employers precisely tailor their training sessions to the specific features of the job. However, employers are not inclined to do so because, in situations of high labour flexibility, expenditure on precise training may be wasted when workers prematurely leave their jobs. Moreover, an unstable workforce restricts learning by doing and thereby decreases the return to the investment in training. Clearly, when flexible labour prevails, employers will not be inclined to invest in training. The second reason we put forward is that, when workers change jobs, their existing

skills are partially lost or become obsolete. In fact, there is no linear expansion of skill sets, as we will see later.

The argument that labour mobility enhances learning is basically a justification used by both governments and firms for promoting labour flexibility, and it is too simplified and flawed to be of any analytical or policy use. Similarly, the strategy of continuing education and training rarely achieves a real change in skills. It predominantly benefits the already well-educated members of the workforce rather than those who might really need further education. Again, we observe that the initial school education determines an individual's capacity to acquire skills in the workplace.

A more fruitful approach to understanding the formation of skills is to integrate the analysis of skill acquisition with an analysis of transitional labour markets. When the skills content of the current job is either very similar to or very different from that of the previous job, job mobility does not enhance skill formation. For example, if a sewing machinist leaves and takes up an identical job elsewhere, then learning by doing in the new job adds little to the worker's skills portfolio, except for some specific skills unique to the new learning situation. Of course, this suits employers because the newly recruited worker does not need retraining, but this transition has done little in terms of accumulating knowledge. On the other hand, if a sewing machinist moves to a job as a mason, he or she will have to learn anew the technical and behavioural skills needed in that new position while losing his or her sewing skills. For these reasons, calls for building the skills of the workforce have grown with increasing labour flexibility (Standing 1999). If skills are inadequate, it is not education that can resolve the problem; only labour policy and labour management can.

Duality or Disappearance of Learning Situations?

Across the globe, the world of education and the world of work are increasingly converging. We can see this happening in two ways:

schools come to resemble workplaces and workplaces aspire to become learning organisations.

In educational institutions, learning situations are transformed to resemble those in workplaces. As we have argued, educational institutions, which are inherently weakly contextualised learning situations, are increasingly being transformed into highly contextualised ones. This has been driven by the desire to improve the quality of education by increasing the weight of informal learning in workshops and workplaces, something that has come to be called *alternate* or *dual* education. The argument is that education systems must be more closely linked to the economic system. While the intention is good, the execution is flawed. We see this, for example, in the trend towards encouraging students to seek temporary jobs and trainee positions in enterprises. In a few cases, such trainee positions may provide real work experiences, but mostly they exist merely to comply with the requirements of educational institutions. A major problem is that these work experiences are not used in the classroom as inputs for formal learning. In other words, training students in the workplace neither prepares them for a job nor does it lead to improved didactics in the classroom.

The same can be said for vocational education. Workshops in vocational schools are expected to train students for jobs rather than build formal learning based on practice. Yet, vocational schools are often unable to reproduce the learning situations found in the workplace. As such, they fail on two grounds. On the one hand, they remain unable to deliver the skills needed in workplaces. On the other hand, they neglect to improve their students' educational performance by using practice to enhance scholarly knowledge.⁶ More generally,

6. The German dual model of vocational education is generally misinterpreted. It incorporates, on the one hand, the learning of skills (procedural knowledge) in the workplace as in apprenticeship with, on the other, formal learning in the classroom that is based on students' work experiences and that aims to improve their declarative knowledge.

this trend pervades the whole education system. Increasingly, informal learning replaces formal learning within the education system and this happens for the sole purpose of better servicing the needs of business.

Conversely, attempts to transform workplaces into learning organisations work on the assumption that schools are becoming inadequate or redundant and on the belief that highly contextualised learning situations can be made weakly contextualised. Actually, it is the exact opposite that happens. Some businesses invest in educational institutions on condition that the courses meet the needs of business for a skilled workforce and for technological innovations. There is also a proliferation of training and continuing education initiatives that claim to compensate for flaws in the education system in enlarging and updating knowledge. Such initiatives aspire to deliver formal knowledge but provide only specialised (or discounted) knowledge, most of which are limited to the well-educated sections of the population.

The so-called “learning revolution” (Dryden and Vos 2005), and related concepts such as learning organisations, expresses a global project of transforming workplaces and everyday life situations into formal learning situations. That is, it aims to transform them into weakly contextualised learning situations as found in schools, often in the hope that schools will become redundant. However, since most learning situations are highly contextualised, this project cannot compete with schools when it comes to the ability to learn and the organisation of systematic knowledge. Nevertheless, this learning revolution persists with its denunciation of the education system as a marginal or even obsolete way of learning. It is sobering to note that the unfolding of this project jeopardises the transmission of knowledge and seriously threatens the quality of education across the board.



These two converging trends are major threats to education. What is at stake in these trends is the blurring of the line between learning situations, a separation which has prevailed since the birth of modern education. As the clear-cut separation between the world of school and the world of work disappears, we are witnessing trends which signal the return to a pre-modern general apprenticeship system where schools are designed only for meeting workplace needs. Such trends threaten the goal of producing and transmitting knowledge in an orderly, systematic and scientifically sound way—that is, the educational logic of education. The irony is that the very people charged with sustaining this goal—those working in higher education institutions—have often discarded this mission and become relentless advocates of vocationalism. This evolution has shaken the foundations of education. We can only ask: Do those educationalists and educators who are aware of this evolution accept this situation? Is society aware of this imminent danger?

7

The Educational Progress of the Labour Force

XAVIER OUDIN

Thailand's labour force has grown rapidly in the last three decades, doubling between 1975 and 2008, along with a significant rise in its workers' educational level. The average educational level of those joining the labour force in 1980 was primary school, while today it is secondary school. The average length of education of the labour force has doubled from four to eight years over the period 1975–2008. The rise in the average educational level is mainly due to the replacement of the older, less educated generations retiring from the labour market with younger, better educated generations entering it. However, the increasing tendency of workers to pursue further studies through informal educational programmes or open universities must not be neglected.

The aim of this chapter is to offer a dynamic view of the education profile of the Thai labour force and, in particular, to examine the impact of the rapid expansion of educational access on the labour force. Because of the lack of detailed data, we will only conduct a broad analysis, but over an extended period of thirty years. During this period, Thailand has experienced very rapid economic growth. It would be interesting to examine the education profile of the labour force in the context of this economic growth.

Compulsory education, which was set at six years in 1977, was extended to nine years in the early 1990s. The impact of compulsory education on the labour force has been visible since the beginning of the 1980s. Every year, new cohorts of workers enter the labour market with a higher average educational level than the previous cohorts. At the same time, workers of the less educated earlier generations progressively reach the age of retirement and so their number in the labour force diminishes steadily over time. Moreover, large numbers of less educated workers have left the labour market with the decline of agriculture, which further boosts the average educational level of the labour force.]

Notwithstanding this achievement, the educational level of the Thai labour force remains low by international standards and lags behind many countries, including some with a much lower per capita gross domestic product (GDP). In fact, it takes at least two generations before the effects of education reforms are fully transmitted to the labour force. In addition, the progress in education is not uniform among different categories of workers.

This chapter first considers the extent of the educational lag before analysing the dynamics of educational progress in the labour force. The last section deals with changes in the labour structure and the related educational characteristics of the workforce.

The Educational Lag

At the outset, it is useful to understand how education is expected to benefit the labour force, as well as what difficulties are faced in measuring educational outcomes. Then, to appreciate the extent and nature of the educational lag in the Thai labour force, international comparisons are made with developing as well as developed countries.

Education, Skills and Productivity

In most economic studies, educational level is used as a measure of “human capital”. Although it is regarded as only a proxy for skills, educational level has become *de facto* the main indicator of the stock of human capital in a population. However, it is not a totally satisfactory measure of human capital (we refer here to all the skills necessary for all kinds of jobs). First of all, human capital is not only acquired at school. Many, if not most, of the skills needed in a job are acquired on the job, through practice, observation, training and so on. Some workers with a low level of basic education may have accumulated human capital by building their skills and knowledge through work and adult courses. While it is true that doctors, architects and engineers, for instance, need to undertake a lengthy education before they can practise, the duration of education does not determine if they will make a good practitioner. In addition, people often work in fields other than that they were trained in. If a physician decides to make a career switch to real estate, his or her medical education would not have provided much of the human capital for the second occupation (OECD 1996).

Moreover, the purpose of education is not merely to develop the skills for raising productivity at work. Politicians, researchers and writers may have a high level of education, but their “skills” do not necessarily or directly contribute to economic growth. Much of our education is designed to help us understand the world we live in. Human capital theories emerge from an economic utilitarian view of the world, which is not necessarily that of education. In brief, the output of education is not only, or even mainly, human capital, so that a change in the educational level of the workforce can overestimate the change in human capital.

Many empirical studies, among them several undertaken in Asian countries, have stressed that enhancing human capital is a necessary

step to take in order to create the conditions for economic growth (World Bank 1993). However, these studies do not explain why Thailand's economy, despite its relatively low level of human capital, has performed better than that of the Philippines, which has a better educated workforce. Moreover, it is difficult to assess if it is education that provides the foundation for economic growth or the reverse. It is a fact that in Thailand the development of education has paralleled economic growth, but has it been the cause or the consequence of economic growth? In fact, rapid economic growth preceded educational progress in the population. In addition, there is a lag of fifteen years or more between an improved education and its expression in a better educated labour force. Improvement of the educational infrastructure and resources as well as increased recruitment and wage rise in the teaching profession were the results of economic growth as much as, if not more than, they were the contributors.

One of the major shortcomings of the studies that assessed the educational level of the labour force as an indicator of human capital is that they fail to measure what really matters, namely skills and qualifications. What really matters is how better work skills raise productivity, and consequently promote economic growth and raise workers' incomes. However, measuring skills presents some difficulty because, firstly, it is particularly hard to measure skills and to aggregate them in a macro-economic indicator, and, secondly, because education is usually taken as a proxy for skills.¹ Education is obviously connected to skills, but the connection may be loose and the nature of their relationship uncertain. Examining the parallel evolution of education and various occupations is a way to explore this connection. The classification of occupations may be useful for this purpose, as it is an attempt to distinguish occupations according to the skills they

1. Several industrialised countries conduct regular surveys to look into the qualifications of their workforce. This is not done in Thailand.

require. Examining the evolution of occupations, ranked by skills, may shed some light on the development of skills, but it lacks precision. In reality, we have to acknowledge that skills cannot really be captured by existing indicators.

Another point to highlight is that education usually refers to basic education, which is the time spent at school and in any other training institutions before starting work. But many workers continue to study, and some others have benefited from non-formal educational programmes.² Although the levels achieved through adult education and training are recorded in the same way as school levels, some kinds of informal education and training schemes are not measured at all. Such education should not be ignored, as it may significantly contribute to skill improvement.

A Comparative Study

As noted earlier, despite considerable educational progress, the educational level of the Thai workforce still lags behind that of many countries. As the progress in education is recent, it will take another generation before Thailand catches up with other emerging economies such as Mexico.

In most industrialised countries (countries of the OECD, or Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), around 25% of the labour force had a tertiary level of education in 2001. In Thailand, this figure was 11.3%, while it was 4.2% in Indonesia and 40% in Singapore (ILO 2003). The proportion of the labour force that had received higher education in the large countries of Latin America, such as Brazil, Argentina and Colombia, was between 15% and 20%. However, in these countries, the share of the farm labour force was much lower than in Asian countries.

2. In a survey among manufacturing workers in Thailand, it was found that 15% of the workers had pursued higher education after starting work (Oudin 2007).

The distribution of the labour force by educational level is a legacy of the past education system. Compared with other countries with a similar per capita GDP, Thailand was fairly late in establishing full primary and secondary education, not to speak of tertiary education. The effect of this can be seen in fig. 7.1, which reveals that in 2000 a large proportion (nearly half) of the Thai labour force did not complete primary school, more than twice that in Mexico. Workers with secondary education (at least lower secondary) formed the largest group (30%) in the Mexican labour force, while in Thailand they represented 22%. The gap widened at the tertiary level, with the percentage for Mexico being twice that for Thailand. This pattern can be explained by the fact that Mexico implemented compulsory education up to the secondary level earlier than Thailand. However, the higher proportion of uneducated workers in Mexico indicates that Thai education tended to be more universal, although at the lower levels, while in Mexico more people had been (and still are) kept out of school. This is also the reason why adult illiteracy is lower in Thailand than in many countries that have a larger population with higher education. Mexican workers had on average 8.2 years of schooling, while it was 6.5 years in Thailand. In particular, although the labour force in Mexico was only 20% higher than in Thailand (respectively 41 million vs. 34 million in 2000), there were nearly three times more workers with higher education in Mexico than in Thailand.

In France and Singapore, the minimum educational level of their workers in 2000 was primary school, although not necessarily completed (fig. 7.1). The median educational level was secondary school, or twelve years of schooling. Thus, the average educational level of all Thai workers (eight years of schooling in 2008) is what is in France and Singapore that of the less skilled section of the labour force. Furthermore, the proportion of workers who had completed at least secondary school in these two advanced economies was four times higher than in Thailand.

Implications of the Educational Lag

The delayed realisation of educational progress in the labour force occurs everywhere. Even in Singapore, where workers with higher education constitute over one-third of the labour force, there is still a small but significant proportion of workers with nearly no education. What is unique to Thailand is the rapidity with which education of the youth has improved in contrast to the extremely low educational level of the labour force twenty years ago. As the poorly educated earlier generations tended to enter the labour market at a very young age, often fifteen or even younger, they may remain in the labour force for up to fifty years. In 2008, many of those who had joined the labour force at the end of the 1970s, mostly poorly educated, were still in the labour force and will be there until 2015–2020. Only after that will the poorly educated generations make way for the better educated generations.

The presence in the workplace of generations with widely different educational levels may be a source of conflict. More experienced but less educated workers have to work together with better educated young workers, who may command higher wages and move up faster. The hierarchy in society, or within an enterprise, which is traditionally based on age, may be questioned by the highly educated young workers.

The Educational Progress of the Labour Force

The expansion of educational access has raised the educational level of both the labour force and the economically inactive people in Thailand. However, the educational progress of the labour force is not evenly distributed between the genders or among industries.

The Economically Active and Inactive Populations

A major concern of OECD countries has been the relationship between education and unemployment, which led them to develop the concept of employability, or the extent to which an individual's level of education helps or hurts the prospects of employment.³ In industrialised countries, it is generally assumed that the unemployed, as well as many economically inactive members of the population, cannot participate in the labour force because they lack adequate skills or because their level of knowledge is insufficient or not adapted to the requirements of the labour market. Major policies aiming to reduce unemployment, therefore, focus on vocational retraining programmes for unemployed people.

In Thailand, the labour force participation rate is relatively high by international standards: nearly three-quarters of the population aged fifteen years and over is in the labour force. Massive numbers of women, especially in rural areas, participate in the labour force. In traditional farms or small family enterprises, it is common to see young and old people helping out as well. This high overall labour force participation rate is linked to the rice economy, which is highly labour-intensive. However, this rate is trending downward as the proportion of farmers in the labour force declines. The rising schooling rate of youths aged 15–24 years accentuates the downward trend. In modern life, young people study longer, while more old people retire as early as in their fifties or sixties. A significant number of women living in urban areas choose to stay home, especially when they have young children.

3. OECD launched the International Indicators of Education Systems (INES) project in 1988 in response to the desire of national policy-makers for information that would allow them to make performance comparisons between countries and thus to better assess and monitor the effectiveness and evolution of their own education systems. The INES project develops a system of indicators for cross-national comparisons.

In fig. 7.2, which compares the educational level of the active and inactive populations, we have differentiated the employed population in the farm and non-farm sectors, as these two groups are vastly different in their educational levels. Comparing the educational level of the employed population (farm and non-farm) with the unemployed and inactive population presents some challenge. First of all, the unemployed population is not of the same order of magnitude as the other segments of the population under comparison. Moreover, the employed and the inactive segments have dissimilar age profiles. The latter includes young people, many of them still studying (making up one-third of this segment) and relatively well-educated despite not having completed their education. It also includes retired people from the poorly educated generations.

Besides retirees, the inactive adult population is constituted mainly of urban women who choose not to work in order to raise their children or because their husbands can provide well for the family. Compared with the working population, they do not lag behind in terms of education, except that few of them have received a higher education. Obviously, those who have had a higher education are more likely to be working.

Over the last thirty years, unemployment has remained low, except in 1998–99 following the Asian financial crisis. At the end of 2008, the number of unemployed people was just over half a million, or 1.5% of the labour force. This rate is lower than the commonly expected frictional unemployment rate,⁴ especially in Thailand, where job mobility is believed to be high. Compared with the employed people, unemployed people on average are younger, with two-thirds of them under thirty years old, and have a higher educational level.

4. Frictional unemployment refers to people who are temporarily unemployed while waiting to start in a new job after leaving the old one. In Western countries, frictional unemployment is estimated to be around 3%–5% of the labour force. It is incompressible so that when the unemployment rate is under this level economists consider that there is full employment.

The larger proportion of people with higher education among the unemployed (25%) may be an indication of greater unemployment among graduates (the unemployment rate among university graduates was 3.7%, compared to 1.5% for the whole labour force), as well as an indication that graduates face greater difficulty in finding employment. However, it is more likely that these people are between jobs or about to start their first job. It takes more time for fresh university graduates to gather information and make a decision about careers. It would not be surprising if frictional unemployment is more common among aspirants to higher positions or if job mobility is higher among the well-educated. In fact, only 16% of the unemployed declared that they were seeking work, presumably many of them waiting to start in a new job. In 2004, only some 5,000 people with higher education, or 1% of the total unemployed and 0.01% of the labour force, had been seeking a job for more than six months (NSO, *Labour Force Survey 2004*).⁵

It may be concluded that having a low level of education is not really an obstacle to getting a job in Thailand. Its economy is characterised by full employment, almost continuously over the last four decades. Under these conditions, it is not possible to identify any factors in the functioning of the labour market that may lead to the exclusion of less educated people. Contrary to the situation that prevails in European economies, those who do not join the labour force choose to do so for reasons that are not related to their lack of education.

The Educational Level of the Labour Force

The average educational level of the labour force in Thailand was extremely low thirty years ago, but it has steadily improved over the

5. As the labour force survey is made on a sample of the entire population, it is subject to statistical errors when data are extrapolated. Small figures may not be statistically significant.

decades. While less than 10% of the labour force went beyond primary school in the late 1970s, that figure has now reached one-third. The share of the poorly educated in the labour force will decline at a faster rate with the progressive retirement of the older generations. The cohort who joined the labour force at the age of fifteen years in 1975, most of them with four years of primary education, are still working, and it will take another twenty years before almost all of them will retire.

Between 1972 and 2008, the labour force doubled (from 19 million to 38 million). During that period, the number of workers with higher education rose twenty times (from 0.3 million to 6.4 million), and those with secondary education grew twelve times. Fig. 7.3 shows that in the mid-1970s the majority of workers only had lower primary education. Thirty years later, the picture had changed drastically.

New cohorts with higher educational levels progressively replace older workers with a low educational level. The impact of compulsory education regulations on the labour force is obvious, with “waves” of better educated workers appearing in the labour market after a lag of five to ten years following the introduction of each new regulation. The share of workers with lower primary education expanded up to around 1976, replacing the share of less educated workers. From then until about 1994, the proportion of those with full primary education increased, and from 1995 the share of those with lower secondary education expanded, all the while substituting the share of less educated workers.

The Duration of Education of the Labour Force

The length of education is a synthetic indicator of the educational level of a population. It is useful for computation of parameters such as the productivity of the workforce and for international comparisons. Here we use this indicator to measure the educational progress of the labour force over time.

For the whole labour force, the average duration of education has increased from four years in 1975 to eight years in 2008. The figure used to be lower for females, reflecting the fact that women of earlier generations were less educated and more were illiterate. This has completely changed and today women on average study longer than men. Between the women and men of the new generations joining the labour force, the gap in educational attainments is shrinking. The gap that remains is due to the presence of older and poorly educated generations of women in the labour force, mainly in farming. In the non-farm sector, women have nearly caught up with men.

The average length of education of farmers was 3.6 years in 1975 and rose to 5.9 years in 2008. In three decades, farmers' educational level had risen from lower primary to full primary education, in line with compulsory education regulations. However, it remains low, and the gap between farmers and non-farm workers has widened. This merely reflects the generation gap between the two groups. Nowadays, very few young men and women engage in farm activities. Better access to education, along with other socio-economic changes, has progressively diverted new generations away from working on farms.

The low average educational level of the labour force must be considered in the light of the large share of workers in the agricultural, forestry and fishing industries, as well as the fact that these workers tend to have little education. Thus, they tend to pull down the overall average. By the same token, their declining share, from two-thirds in 1975 to one-third now, raised the overall average.

The average length of education of non-farm workers has risen from 5.7 years to nearly 9.7 years, or from full primary to beyond lower secondary education. Hence, the educational gap between farm and non-farm workers has remained at one level of education. It must be pointed out, however, that the overall average, especially for non-farm workers, hides important differences in educational level between industries.

Education and the Dynamics of the Labour Market

The labour force grew rapidly in the 1970s and 1980, due largely to demographic change, the cohorts reaching working age were born when fertility was high. The yearly increment was on average 700,000 workers between 1975 and 1990, and the annual rate of growth reached 4% in the 1980s. At the beginning of the 1990s, growth suddenly dropped owing to a combination of factors. Firstly, the cohorts approaching working age were dwindling. Secondly, the extension of compulsory schooling tended to delay entry into the labour market. And, thirdly, the proportion of urban dwellers in the labour force, whose labour force participation rate was lower than for rural inhabitants (especially women), continued to grow. The 1997 financial crisis also hit the labour market, and in 1998 the growth of the labour force became negative.

Up to the beginning of the 1980s, new entrants to the labour market mainly had four years of education and most of them joined the farming sector. Subsequently, the labour market was fed by individuals with full primary education, who constituted the cheap labour needed by the emerging industry. At the beginning of the 1990s, the labour force was joined mainly by workers with at least a lower secondary educational level. Meanwhile, the less educated workers started to retire in massive numbers.

Thus, every decade saw a progression of one educational level in the labour force. The annual growth of the labour force is accompanied by an improvement in workers' level of education. However, the number of people who join the labour force every year tends to diminish. From 1990 to 1995, the average increment went down to less than 300,000 people annually. That means quality progressively replaces quantity in the workforce. This phenomenon has been accentuated by the 1997 crisis. Over three years, the labour force failed to grow, while its average educational level continually rose. Those who lost their jobs at that time were mostly poorly educated. The crisis served to

“purge” the labour market of the less educated and older segments of the labour force and replace them with better educated and younger workers.

The economy did not take long to recover from the crisis, and the labour force began to grow again. Some of the less educated workers who had lost their jobs during the crisis soon found employment again. However, since 1997, the growth has been mainly composed of people with at least nine years of education (lower secondary level). From 2005 to 2008, newcomers with higher education (degrees or technical qualifications) constituted 36% of the total growth. The replacement effect, defined as younger and better educated generations replacing older and poorly educated generations, contributes to a more educated labour force.

The crisis also caused some people to delay their entry into the labour market. However, it merely amplified a phenomenon which was already at work. With the trend towards longer schooling, particularly with the expansion of higher and vocational education, more and more youths enter the labour market later. This phenomenon is visible from 1990 to 1995, particularly for women under twenty-five years old, whose labour force participation rate dropped drastically.

The Structural Effects of Education on the Labour Market

The rising educational level of the workforce has been accompanied by important changes in the labour market. First, industries that employ better educated workers have been able to develop more rapidly than those that employ less educated workers. In addition, the educational and skill levels in all industries have been rising. We will take a closer look at these phenomena by examining the changes by occupation and by industry.

Analysis by Occupation

While *industry* describes the sector of activity in which a company or an individual is located, *occupation* describes the kind of work that is performed and the skills required for it. A driver, for instance, has the skill to drive a vehicle, but he or she does not necessarily work in the transportation industry. Occupations are classified by the International Labour Organization (ILO) into broad categories that reflect a hierarchy of jobs.

The progress in education can be seen in terms of two developments in the labour market. The first is that the average educational level of workers in all occupations—blue- and white-collar, farm and non-farm—has risen. The second is that jobs that require higher educational qualifications have increased. As the educational level of the population goes up, the number of executives and professionals in the labour market grows more quickly. More concretely, this means that better educated generations get better jobs and higher positions in the hierarchy. This corresponds to structural changes in the economy, with the development of activities that require more educated workers. As the economy diversifies while the farm sector declines, the increasing need for educated workers calls for the education system to provide more education and training along with more diversified curricula.

These two developments have occurred simultaneously in Thailand in the last three decades, but the second is more significant. The number of executives and professionals (categories 1 and 2 in the international classification of occupations) has increased more than tenfold from 1971 to 2008. These categories, which represented 2.3% of the total labour force in 1971, accounted for 11% in 2008. Undoubtedly, these jobs have been an important outlet for the growing number of people with higher educational qualifications.

The rise in educational level across occupations has mainly benefited the civil service. In the professional (including teachers) and clerical

categories, the proportion of workers with at least full secondary education had jumped from 62% to 92% and from 35% to 65% respectively from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s (although the proportion in the clerical category slipped in the late 1990s). In the administrative and executive category, which includes managers of private businesses, the workers' educational level has not risen much in the last twenty-five years, but their number has grown considerably.

The progress described above occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. During the 1990s, there was further improvement with a massive entry of people with higher or vocational education. This can be seen particularly among professionals and executives as well as among clerical workers, but it is also noticeable in other categories where the share of workers with higher and vocational education was negligible in the 1970s. It now registers one out of five for service and sales workers, and it has been improving significantly among the other groups, even though it is still quite low.

Analysis by Industry

Evaluating differences in educational level by industry is more problematic, as each industry encompasses various occupations in different proportions. The commerce and service sectors have mainly white-collar workers, while the manufacturing industry has more blue-collar workers. Executives and professionals can be found in all industries, but their proportion is much higher in the service sector, particularly in the government.

The highest average educational level is found in services and the lowest in agriculture (along with forestry and fishing). The high educational level of the service workforce is due entirely to the traditionally high educational requirements of the civil service. The average educational levels in the manufacturing, transport and communication, and commerce sectors are similar, while it is lower in the construction sector. In terms of the duration of education,

the inter-industry differences are greater now than they were in the past. This means that educational progress has been uneven between industries. The service sector has captured most of the progress in education, followed by the manufacturing sector (fig. 7.4).⁶

Data on the percentage of workers in each industry with secondary education are also revealing. As we have seen above, very few people reached this level thirty years ago. In manufacturing at that time, around 80% of the workforce had merely completed four years of primary education. The figure is now only 25%, which is likely to include many of the craft workers in the “informal sector”, who are classified under manufacturing. The commerce and transportation sectors show similar changes to those in manufacturing. In farming and construction, despite a noticeable improvement, the gap between these and other industries remains significant. The most striking progress is seen in the service sector, where the number of workers who have completed secondary education has grown rapidly. The yearly increment in tertiary-educated workers had been around 100,000 from 1978 to 1995, but it surged to 500,000 in 2000. Most of these newcomers joined the service sector, mainly the civil service.

On the other hand, the increment in workers with secondary education has been more evenly distributed among sectors, including agriculture (the farmers who started working in the last ten years generally had been to secondary school). The number of such new entrants has grown steadily from 200,000 per year at the beginning of the 1980s to just fewer than 500,000 in the years following the economic crisis up until now. As there is virtually no further increase in workers with only a primary level of education, it can be concluded

6. All workers, in public or private sector, are classified together by industry (e.g. agriculture, manufacturing, services, commerce...) in tables using the international classification by industry (ILO standards, in use in Thailand). The distinction between employees of the public and of the private sector appears in another variable (work status of workers). Most civil servants work in the sector of services (e.g. administration, education, health).

that half the total annual increment is made up of workers with a secondary level of education, and the other half of people with higher education.

By contrast, the growth in the labour force due to workers with a primary educational level or less, which was the main component of the annual increment thirty years ago, became negative first for farmers (since the beginning of the 1980s) and then for all workers (except for a small rebound in the manufacturing and commerce sectors in the last few years). Poorly educated workers started to leave the labour market several years before the crisis, when the farm sector stopped expanding. At the beginning of the 1990s, the farm sector ceased to absorb labour. This was due mainly to the retirement of farmers, whose children did not succeed them but took jobs in other sectors instead.

The Importance of the Government Sector

We do not have statistics on the educational level of government employees, but we know that government employees constitute around half of all service workers. When grouped by occupation, government employees mainly appear in the categories of professionals and clerical workers, and they constitute the bulk of those categories. The change in the educational level in those two categories largely reflects developments in the civil service, and this is confirmed by the trends observed above in the service sector.

We have seen that workers' educational levels in both categories rose tremendously from the mid-1970s to the 1980s, more rapidly than in any other category of occupation. Clearly, educational expansion, notably secondary and higher education, was mainly directed towards the needs of the state, much more than those of the private sector.

It must be pointed out that the needs of the state were considerable, and that graduates of higher education who would eventually be recruited into the civil service had first to attend primary and

secondary school. Given the emphasis put on universal education at that time, there was an urgent need for teachers, and for higher qualifications in teaching, particularly in secondary schools. The education system had, as a first priority, to serve its own needs in order to meet the rising demand for education from the population. The rationale for state investment in education was not to provide the private sector with skilled workers and managers but to build its own capacity. From 1980 to 1995, most of the educational progress in the labour force was captured by the state.

In more recent years, the needs of the state have diminished, but working in the government remains the main option for graduates of higher education. About 69% of master's degree graduates and 85% of doctoral graduates work for the state (NSO 2003–2004). Graduates of vocational and technical institutions are more likely to be directed towards the private sector, for secondary and tertiary economic activities (table 7.1). The spread of the private sector into areas where the state used to have a quasi-monopoly also explains why more graduates in the fields of education and health can now choose a job in the private sector.

A good deal of the investment in the education system since the beginning of the 1970s has gone into strengthening and upgrading the system itself to enable it to fulfil its objectives. By contrast, the educational progress of the remaining workforce has been much slower. This is in line with the philosophy of education, at least until recently, that the main objective of education is to strengthen the state and to educate the citizens. Besides, the role that education plays in Thailand's economic growth is debatable. Rather than attempting to find a direct link between educational investment and economic growth, as economists are wont to do (Blaug 1992), we should take into consideration education's role in the building of state capacities and, through this role, its indirect effects on economic growth.



As discussed above, the progress in education has not been evenly distributed among occupations or among industries. Overall, it has benefited the service sector more than industry, not to mention agriculture, which lags behind and hardly benefits from the extension of compulsory education. Contrary to what has become a dogma in economics, educational investment in Thailand was not directed towards industry to directly stimulate economic growth, in particular manufacturing, but rather towards the strengthening of the state apparatus, especially the apparatus of the education system. In the last three decades, the expansion of the education system has been shaped more by its own needs and the associated structural changes than by the economic system.

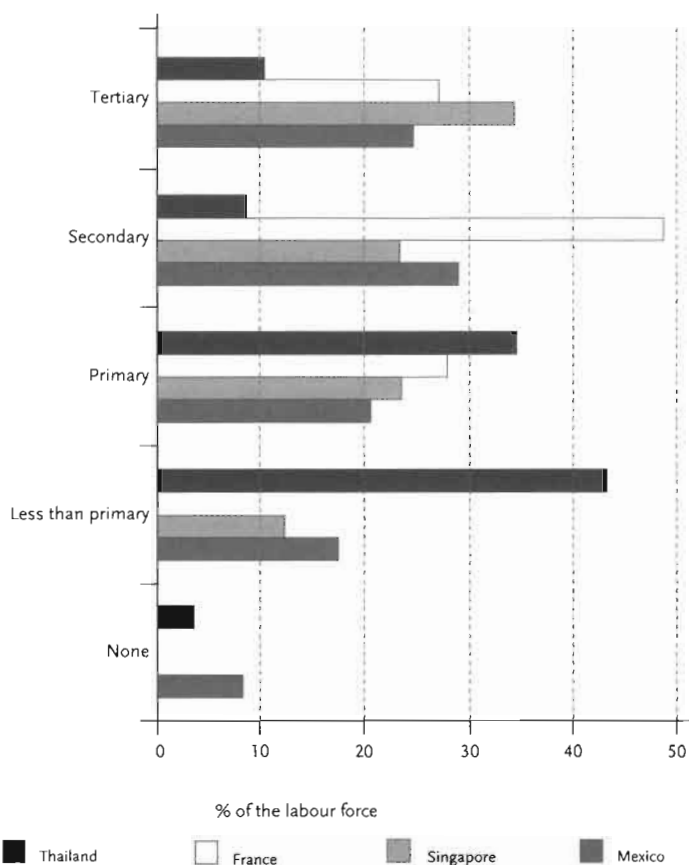
There were two components in the educational progress of the last three decades. The first is merely the elevation of the minimum educational level of adults brought about by the extension of compulsory education from four to nine years over that period. Although this has had a positive impact on indicators of human capital such as the average length of education of the labour force or the percentage of workers with basic education, one should not conclude that skills and productivity have improved accordingly. Today, workers with lower secondary education or even a vocational diploma undertake low-skilled and low-paying jobs, as their parents did thirty years ago with only four years of education. The expansion of education is certainly profitable for the population and for the country, but it has no direct impact on the economy through increased productivity. Moreover, these achievements in education look impressive only because they started from a very low level.

The second component is the growth in skilled jobs, which can be seen, if not measured, in the increasing proportion of workers in occupations requiring higher qualifications. This is part of the modernisation process of the economic system, and it contributes to, or is an indication of, productivity improvement. But, as we have seen,

this evolution has largely benefited the state apparatus rather than the production system.

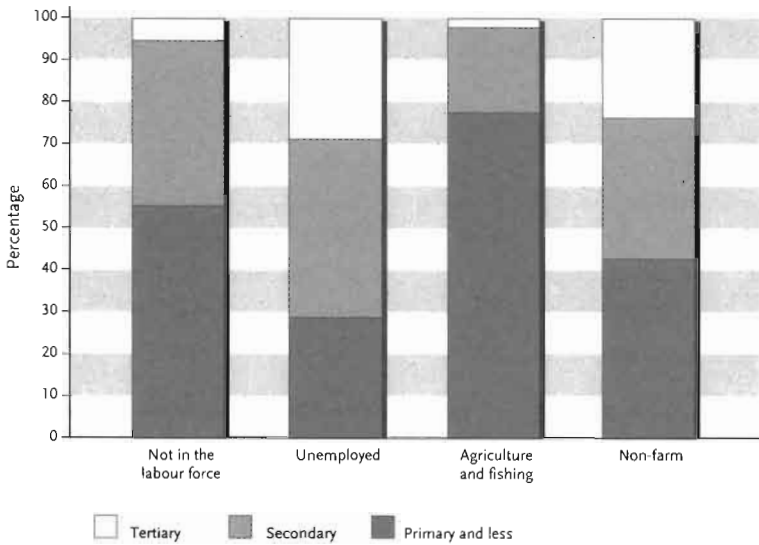
For now, the impact of educational progress on society is probably more important than its effect on productivity. The higher cognitive skills acquired in education will be increasingly required for the formation of higher productive skills, and educational progress would then impact more directly on the economy.

Fig. 7.1. Labour force distribution by educational level in Thailand versus France, Singapore and Mexico, 2000



Source: For Thailand, CELS database on education; for France, Singapore and Mexico, ILO (2003)

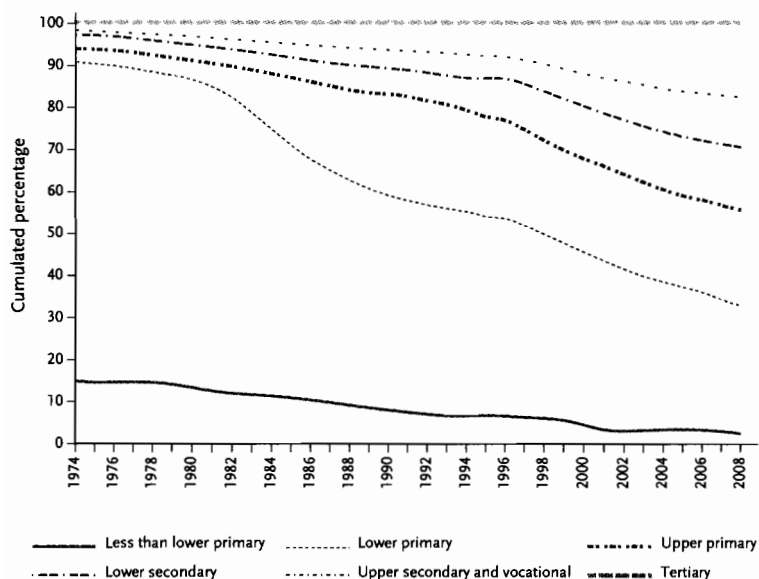
Fig. 7.2. Distribution of economically active and inactive populations by educational level in Thailand, 2008



Source: NSO, *Labour Force Survey 2008* (quarter 3)

Note: There were 16 million workers in agriculture and 21.6 million in the non-farm sector; 0.45 million people were unemployed, and 13.8 million were not in the labour force (among whom two-thirds were women).

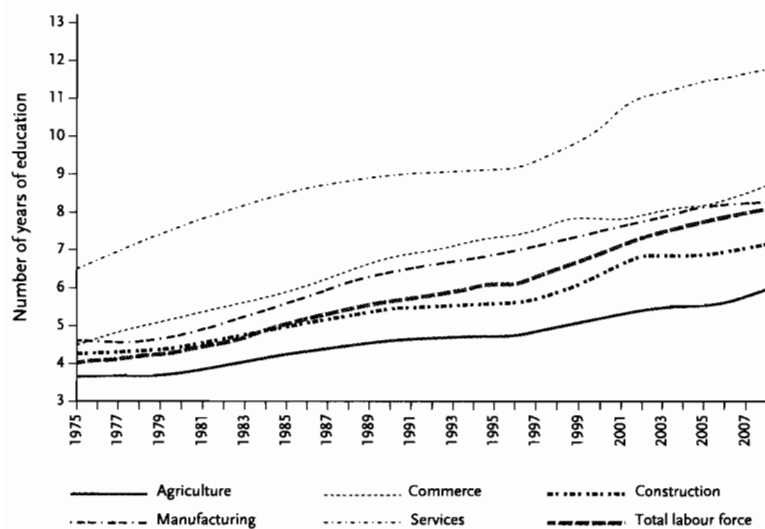
Fig. 7.3. Labour force distribution by educational level in Thailand, 1974–2008



Source: CELS database on education

Note: The CELS database has been capturing the corrected yearly data series from the labour force surveys of the National Statistical Office since 1969 (see NSO 1969–2008).

Fig. 7.4. Average number of years of education of the Thai labour force by industry, 1975–2008



Source: CELS database on education

Table 7.1. Percentage distribution of graduates of higher education by educational level and by sector, 2002

	Total	Doctoral degree	Master's degree	Graduate diploma	Bachelor's degree	Diploma of technical education	Certificate of vocational education
Civil service, education *	38.6	85.3	68.4	68.4	47.5	16.9	8.4
Production †	27.4	12.4	9.9	11.8	21.5	42.5	42.2
Commerce and private sector services ‡	30.9	2.7	20.7	18.3	29.3	36.0	38.7

Source: NSO (2003)

* Public administration and defence, compulsory social security, education (public and private), health and social work, and other community, social and personal service activities.

† Agriculture, hunting and forestry, fishing, manufacturing, construction, and electricity, gas and water supply.

‡ Wholesale and retail trade, repair services, hotels and restaurants, transport, storage and communication, financial intermediation, real estate, renting and other business activities.

8

Liberal versus Vocational Education

ALAIN MOUNIER

In contemporary educational visions and theories, there is a general misconception that education enhances economic growth by meeting the needs of business and industry. This has supposedly been proven, if we are to believe political economic theories. Economic theory holds that education is an engine of economic growth and a means of increasing personal income.¹ Despite evidence to the contrary (Fine 2000; Mounier 2002), this theory exerts an unprecedented and unshakeable influence worldwide (World Bank 1999; OECD 1999; Tan 1999; Psacharopoulos et al. 2002; Hanusek 2005; Hanusek and Woessman 2007) and inspires most education policies (Marginson 1989; OECD 2001). All over the world, education is being blamed on this premise for not meeting the needs of society nor the needs

1. This branch of economic theory is known as endogenous growth theory. Denison (1962, 1967; OECD 1964) is one of the pioneers in relating educational progress, scientific research and economic growth. The correlation between education and economic growth has been theorised by two renowned economists in the postulation that education is a factor of economic growth (Romer 1986, 1990; Lucas 1988). In fact, this theory of endogenous growth is based on the theory of human capital (Schultz 1961, 1970; Becker 1962, 1964; Blaug 1971, 1992) and shares the same limited premises and flaws with the latter. In Thailand, see for example, Rung (2002).

of the economy. It is criticised for neglecting to prepare the national economy for increasingly harsher international competition and the workforce for the transformations in work and technology. Education's primary role is supposedly to produce the skills in demand in the labour market as determined by technology. But it is said to have failed to equip the youth for work by not adequately forming the necessary technical skills and shaping the required work attitudes in them. This is the *discourse of vocationalism* (Blackmore 1997), which has been forged through state policy, the media, businesses and even educational institutions, which together have influenced educational practices and orientations. It has been used to develop an instrumental view of education against a liberal view of education and its advocacy of general education.

Public reforms of education undertaken in the last three decades in English-speaking countries have all adopted this discourse and the consequential education policies. The discourse is evolving towards a new ideological construction, the "knowledge-based society", which connotes not so much the democratisation implicit in liberal education and access to knowledge for private and public purposes but rather the obligation of individuals to learn what they are told to learn for the benefit of corporate interests, which are equated with social and public interests. This proposed shift of education towards a tighter link with—or even subordination to—work and production is legitimised by an alleged decline in the quality of education. This would be a shift towards the re-contextualisation of the whole education system.

Thailand has not been spared from the discourse of vocationalism, which was used as the main, but not the sole, rationale for the education reform undertaken in 1999 and for its amendments implemented from 2002 onwards. As always, the starting point of reform is the drafting of a report about the low quality of education. However, the report has never been clear about what the quality of education should be. Since the desired quality of education

is not clarified, it is feared that reform will be biased towards a “vocationalist” orientation of education. A careful analysis of quality is therefore of paramount importance, and scientific tools have to be elaborated for carrying out such analyses that would at the same time reveal all ideological presuppositions.

To undertake this task, this chapter develops an analytical framework on the basis of world educational history. It then relates the social functions of education to the structures of education systems, which is a preliminary condition for assessing both educational performance and quality.

Two Fundamental Logics of Education

Historically, national education systems have always been shaped by two main logics. The first is a vocational logic, which deals with the utilisation of education for the structuring of a society. The second is an educational logic, which deals with the production and transmission of knowledge for the purpose of emancipating members of a society. We define logic here as the rationale for the organisation of a system, including its institutional forms and structures and its rules governing social interactions. The vocational and educational logics are the fundamental logics which form the cornerstones of modern education, and it is the lack of an understanding of their complementarity that has sidetracked debate. Any assessment of the quality of education requires a deep understanding of the link between the two logics. Moreover, as we will argue below, the relative autonomy of education from vested interests is required for preserving the balance between the two logics. Regrettably, educational debates today tend to ignore the importance of this relative autonomy of education to the ability of national education systems to deliver quality education. Promoting one logic at the expense of the other puts at risk the achievement of high quality education.

The Vocational Logic of Education

As seen in chapter 4, education has historically been put at the service of religions, nation-states, political democracies, welfare states and, today, corporate interests. Through its organisational structure and its rules, the vocational logic of education has always played the role of selecting individuals for specific social positions.² Put simply, an individual's educational level corresponds to his or her social ranking. The education system incorporates a hierarchy which reflects the social organisation of individuals and the hierarchy of social positions. The levels and the streams of education play the role of sifting out the individual best fitted for each social position. The correspondence between educational attainments and social positions is schematically represented in fig. 8.1.

In the figure, the box on the left shows how the selection process operates to distribute students to different social positions. Evaluations and examinations which assess educational attainment are designed to measure and reveal the abilities that students have acquired at school. They act as a stack of filters (or gates) that discriminate individuals according to predetermined criteria of abilities. Students who fail to pass through these filters have to quit their studies and look for jobs, and they are relegated to lower social positions. In the meantime, those who succeed can continue their studies with a view to attaining higher qualifications and higher social positions. Thus, on the basis of their educational achievements, young people are distributed among the whole range of occupations and along the whole range of social positions from the bottom of the social hierarchy (unskilled labourers) to the top (politicians, state administrators, military officers, managers). The paradox is that no vocational criteria are used in the selection for social positions in the sense of assessing students'

2. Social positions refer to a social hierarchy that organises individuals according to their status as classified by heritage, social class, power, income or job.

skills for performing jobs; there are only cognitive criteria. The operating criterion is the acquisition of the knowledge required to remain in the education system. Thus, those who exit at each level of education constitute the residue left on the corresponding filter.

Nonetheless, the selection procedure appears to underpin the widespread belief that education produces skills. This belief has been forged on the argument that, firstly, education provides the credentials for social positions. The longer the schooling, the higher the credentials. Thus, the higher the educational level attained, the higher the social position occupied. Secondly, the hierarchy of social positions is organised based on skills and income. Consequently, skill and income levels correspond with, and are determined by, the length of education.

While the theory of human capital seems to fit with this argument, it is in fact deceptive, in particular the argument that relates social positions to skills. Actually, that education can produce skills is one of the most misguided beliefs about education. Education cannot. We have shown elsewhere that education can only build cognitive capacity, while technical and behavioural skills useful for the production of goods and services are forged only on the job with the experience of work (Mounier 2001).

The system of distributing social positions according to educational achievements has its roots in history. Institutions of higher education were established by the state for the purpose of building the nation-state through the education of men who would manage public administration, national defence, infrastructural development and the economy. In order to distribute these management positions to the ruling class, higher education was reserved for the children of this social class. The legitimacy of such a discriminatory system was built on the assertion that these positions needed the highest skills delivered by the highest level of education. Thus, the vocational role of education was born. Later, it became clear that the institutions of higher education could produce vocational expertise only if

students, regardless of their social class, had undergone lower levels of education. This realisation, as well as the democratisation of society, led to the expansion of access to lower levels of education. Thus was born the system of selection for the whole range of social positions according to educational achievements. This system has given rise to two conflicting beliefs. One is that education operates as a social elevator, so long as it is accessible regardless of the social origins of students. The second belief is that education can be a mechanism of social discrimination that keeps children in their original social class (although there are also other and probably more powerful generators of social inequality and domination). Both beliefs are partially true, although ideologically antagonistic.³

The discourse of vocationalism, to which we have referred earlier, equates education with the production of skills for work. However, it should be noted that formal education has not been intended to replace apprenticeships in crafts and trades (which are supervised and monitored training). Learning by doing on the job—and not education—has always been the main way to develop skills.

Actually, modern education is built on more than the vocational logic; it embodies also the legacy of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, in which knowledge is valued for itself, for the sake of personal blossoming as well as social progress. This ideology, which has shaped the educational logic of education, as we will see below, is not dead in contemporary education but is rapidly receding to the point where some people would even assert that the vocational logic can be separated from the educational logic.

3. Democratic societies deal with these beliefs by rationalising unequal educational achievements. They forge the idea of equal educational opportunity so that unequal educational achievements can be justified on the grounds of differences in individuals' talents and merits, which may themselves reflect differences in cultural capital and social class.

The Educational Logic of Education

When, for political reasons, social positions can no longer be distributed according to privileges and inheritance, education systems have had to pick up the baton by providing a regulatory system that the vocational logic of education requires in democratic regimes. They are expected to select young people for social positions according to their different capacities for acquiring knowledge. The linkage between the vocational and the educational logic lies in the need for an educational logic to inform educational performance as an indicator of students' capacities. The educational logic enables education systems to choose the scope of knowledge to be transmitted, to shape it into relevant forms for transmission, to elaborate methods and devices for transmitting it and to organise the evaluation of learners' ability to acquire it.

The educational logic of education receives less recognition in current social and political debates on education. Perhaps this is because it has been confined to the inner circle of education. Actually, the educational logic of education is the product of an implicit social contract that delegates to the education system the power to manage knowledge for the sake of society as well as to select individuals to fill social positions. In particular, this social contract entrusts educational entities with the responsibility of defining the didactics in relation to the organisation of the education system—especially the organisation of educational levels based on age—and grants education a large degree of autonomy from society. Let us explore these dimensions of the educational logic.

A social contract

Modern education is the result of an implicit “social contract”, in Rousseau's definition of the term, by which society gives to the education system the task of producing knowledge and transmitting

it to its youth. The contract reflects the Enlightenment sentiment that knowledge develops and deepens the humanity of all people. As such, knowledge relies on a major human quality—the ability to think, to reason and to create. The influence of this philosophy over time and across space has established knowledge and scholarship as prominent social values. Knowledge is viewed as a condition of political progress, in particular the expansion of democracy, and as a condition of material progress, in particular the accumulation of wealth. Moreover, knowledge is a condition of individual freedom and achievement, which result from the capacity of individuals to understand the world, to make their own judgement and reason, and to decide on their own actions. Thus, knowledge is valued for its effects and for itself.⁴

A policy of the comprehensive and systematic education of all children may confer on knowledge a paramount social status. This status is that of knowledge as a *public good*, as distinct from a private good that is appropriated and owned privately at the cost of its not being shared and disseminated throughout society (Butler 2001). Education systems arguably should protect the character of knowledge as a public good for the sake of its dissemination. That is, they have the responsibility in knowledge management of protecting it as a public good, as well as collecting it, enlarging and updating it, and giving it the forms fit for its teaching and transmission to the youth of society. The educational logic refers to, and is consonant with, these functions of education systems.

Throughout the history of modern education, a very important principle of didactic autonomy for education systems has been adopted for the sake of safeguarding the quality of education. Didactic

4. In German culture, the concept of *Bildung* refers to human creations such as literature, paintings, music and science. Initiating individuals to these works through systematic education has no other purpose and no other utility than enabling them to enjoy scholarship for itself and allowing their personality to develop.

autonomy, which has shaped the educational logic of education, was progressively established and translated into an institutionalised system of teaching and learning and into a huge administrative system aimed at managing knowledge, staff and facilities. Let us explore these different aspects of the educational logic.

The didactic organisation of knowledge

The educational logic of education deals with producing and transmitting knowledge. To produce knowledge is to add, in particular through research, to the body of human knowledge understood as what humanity knows about itself and its physical or metaphysical environment at a given moment. The transmission of knowledge involves the selection of knowledge to be taught according to the social objectives of education, the shaping of existing knowledge into the forms required for its transmission, and the elaboration of methods for transmitting it. A given configuration of these three dimensions of education constitutes a didactics.

Before the modern era, scholarship and erudition could be attained by autodidacts because the fields and the scope of knowledge were limited. Since the expansion of the sciences from the eighteenth century onwards, the existing body of knowledge cannot be learnt in an individual's lifetime. Today, choices have to be made about what has to be taught within the whole body of knowledge. Decisions have to be made about the relative weight to be given to cultural and social features (language, history, art, social and political organisation, social values and norms) and to scientific disciplines and methods. Decisions also have to be made between transmitting more extensive knowledge, enhancing the capacity to acquire more knowledge (learning how to learn), and developing more knowledge for oneself (analytical capacity) and for society (research capacity). The quality of education, for whatever given educational objectives, depends on these choices. This problem has been extensively discussed by

philosophers of education (see chapter 5). We call these two tasks of selecting and shaping knowledge for transmission the production of stylised knowledge (Chevallard 1990, 1992).

According to the educational logic, curricula are elaborated on the basis of disciplines and according to the development of cognitive processes with the aim of organising the knowledge to be taught in a manageable sequence that allows an efficient progression of learning. The main cognitive principle applied here is that simple and limited knowledge leads to more complex and extended knowledge. For each field of knowledge taught, didactics aims to define the most efficient path of learning from its early and simple stages towards its complex and last stages. This continuous cognitive process of accumulating knowledge in learners has strong organisational consequences, in particular the organisation of levels of education, which will be examined below. Pedagogy, on the other hand, involves the elaboration of methods and devices for teaching according to disciplines and to learners' characteristics and abilities. Pedagogy is defined by the education system itself, that is, by the whole body of teachers and professors, especially psycho-pedagogists. Pedagogy and didactics try to answer the question of how to teach a given body of knowledge so that students can acquire all of it. Studies have shown that students' motivations and cognitive interests, which vary with their age and cultural origin, are crucial factors influencing the cognitive process, so pedagogy is aimed at stimulating motivations and interests.⁵

The institutional organisation of levels of education

The method of transmitting knowledge in a progression from simple to complex knowledge has been developed into an institutional

5. The teaching-learning process and didactic principles are examined in detail in chapter 11.

arrangement of levels and streams of studies with rules and devices built in to determine the progression and the type of studies of students. Within education systems, the hierarchy of educational levels is largely based on this progression of studies, so that the quality of education at each level depends on the accumulation (and assimilation) of knowledge acquired at all previous levels. In this bottom-up chain of dependency of educational levels, the quality of, say, higher education depends ultimately on the knowledge that has been transmitted and acquired at previous levels, namely primary and secondary levels. The institutional problem is how to assess through tests and examinations the knowledge accumulated by students at each level of education (in other words, their acquired cognitive abilities) in order to determine their future path: whether to climb to the next level of education or to go out to work.

Devices for evaluating the knowledge accumulated at each level, generally examinations, constitute the gates between levels depicted in fig. 8.1 above. From the perspective of educational quality, they are crucial. These gates are checkpoints where the knowledge acquired at one level of education is checked to see if passports (diplomas) should be issued to certify the knowledge qualifications of the student. The passport permits its holder entry into the next level of education because it proves that he or she has the requisite knowledge to understand more complex knowledge. Therefore, the quality of education is dependent on the quality of teaching at each level of education, and also on the rigorousness of examinations. A too rigid assessment (narrow checkpoint gates) may be inefficient, resulting in early dropout from school and too frequent repeats and longer studies. Similarly, too lax an assessment may be counter-productive because students may not have adequate cognitive foundations for the next level of studies. The efficacy of assessing knowledge proficiency—which is the very objective of examinations—is therefore an important determinant of the quality of education throughout the education system.

It is useful to highlight at this point that this problem has not been addressed properly in Thailand. The political objectives of the democratisation of education have been superficially implemented because, in an attempt to more quickly reach the target of 100 per cent enrolment for each age cohort, no rigorous selection of students between levels has been undertaken. The performance of the education system is assessed only in quantitative terms by enrolment rates. An adequate test of quality would require assessing continuously the knowledge content of education and the cognitive capacities of students.⁶

Quantitative progress is welcomed, but it may hamper the real democratisation of education in that continuation of studies is not determined by students' educational achievements but by their families' ability to afford education beyond the compulsory years. By not requiring an adequate assessment of knowledge at each gate, not only is the capacity of diplomas to certify the cognitive abilities of their holders undermined, but educational inequalities are also accentuated. Hence, achieving educational efficiency and equity goals requires accurately standardised diplomas that certify the knowledge content of the education leading up to the diplomas. In Thailand, the lax selection of students and the "inflation" of diplomas, in the sense that the knowledge content to which diplomas attest is decreasing (see chapter 9), weaken the educational logic of education and consequently hamper any effort to raise the quality of education.

We have mentioned the bottom-up chain of dependency of educational levels, represented in fig. 8.1 by the ascending black arrow in the educational logic box. We also have to consider the top-down chain, the descending black arrow in the figure. Higher

6. The more or less lax selection of students throughout the Thai education system makes the validity of international comparisons of educational attainments questionable. The rate of enrolment and the length of studies do not indicate the knowledge content of education, while international tests of educational achievement are too partial to give valid comparisons. On this issue, see chapter 2.

education crowns the whole education system, determining not only the outcomes expected of it but also those of primary and secondary levels. It is the function of higher education to produce, and to select, the core of the stylised knowledge to be taught at all levels of education, including higher education itself. It is also its function to produce a great part of all teaching material and to transmit to teachers and professors at all levels of education, including its own, the knowledge they will have to teach and the methods and skills of teaching. In this respect, higher education plays a leading role in determining the quality of education across the board.

The educational logic of education is basically underpinned by the two chains of dependency between levels of education. The existence of two chains of dependency implies that the quality of the whole education system is dependent upon the quality of each level of education. That is why educational quality is so difficult an issue to address and to act upon. Education can be trapped perpetually in low quality because every deficiency and flaw breeds further deficiencies and flaws. This is probably the situation in which Thai education finds itself. Certainly, it is this kind of complex issue which is insufficiently addressed by the 1999 education reform.

The two chains of dependency also determine the pattern of individual progression up the education system's hierarchy and the flow of students from each educational level to work. These patterns can be described as an "education pyramid",⁷ where the number of students decreases going up the pyramid because of diminishing enrolment. This is the result of the complex interplay of demographic factors, education policies, educational achievements, methods of student selection and causes of dropout. Outflows from the education

7. Like the demographic pyramid, the education pyramid, which is constructed based on the number of students at each age (or level of education), may have different forms (pyramid, goatskin, cylinder, etc.) depending on the place and the time. The longitudinal analysis of enrolment by cohort (see chapter 1) gives similar information as the education pyramid.

system mirror the education pyramid, reflecting how the education system fulfils its vocational mission on the basis of its educational logic.

The autonomy of the education system

In modern education, education systems have been granted a large degree of autonomy to enable them to fulfil the task of selecting people for social positions according to their level of knowledge. This autonomy, granted through a social contract entailing strong legal provisions and protected by legal institutions, is today put into question by the discourse of vocationalism. The legitimacy of this autonomy has historically been related to the quality of education. Governments have established general public education systems and granted them a large degree of autonomy from special or sectional interests in order to preserve the quality of education and in particular to protect its fragile educational logic from vested interests.⁸

To maintain this autonomy, firstly, the task of educating children was allocated to professionals. A body of teachers and professors, specially trained for that purpose, was given the power to decide how to teach children. This crucial delegation of power to teachers for the sake of protecting the quality of education has a strong rationale. On the one hand, it is a way of forging national identity by establishing a nationwide teaching body trained to teach the same body of knowledge so as to erase cultural differences between social groups and between regions. On the other hand, it organises an institutionalised relationship between children and adults that offers children and schools protection from the encroachment and

8. In chapter 4, a reference is made to the University of Berlin, which was established in the early nineteenth century on well-defined principles of autonomy for the sake of safeguarding research and knowledge production from vested interests. Contemporary public education systems have borrowed these principles in order to decontextualise public education.

violence of adults, interest groups and society.⁹ Teachers are ordered to be impartial tutors who dedicate themselves to the transmission of knowledge and values, eschewing all manipulation and political motivation in their interactions with children. The teacher is a representative of society to the child and is at the same time the child's defender and intercessor in its relationship with society. In order to play this role, teachers have been granted the special status of civil servants, which precludes social, political and economic interference in their activities. In particular, parents as well as private economic entities that are inclined to attempt such interference have been excluded from the management of schools, not to mention the design of curricula and pedagogy. In the educational arena, a teaching and learning logic has been established and protected from a mere social or economic logic for the sake of a good learning process. From the beginning, a balanced division of labour seems to operate between the political entities defining the curricula, which are expected to reflect societal concerns, and the autonomous specialists in didactics and pedagogy (we call them didacticians and pedagogues here), who are expected to elaborate the best progression of studies and the most effective pedagogical methods. From a different viewpoint, structuring education to fill social positions has necessitated granting the education system and its main actors a large degree of autonomy from society.

Secondly, the relative autonomy of education has been organised through an extended and powerful administrative apparatus for managing knowledge, staff and facilities. In many countries, this apparatus has been granted a quasi-monopoly status to look after

9. Regarding this essential role, which was established by philosophers of education, see chapter 5. In a very interesting book, the French historian Philippe Ariès (1962) notes that in seventeenth-century Europe the social recognition of the child, who had not been distinguished from adults in the preceding centuries, marked the birth of the modern family and coincided with the expansion of schools and the practice of schooling children.

educational matters. This was especially the case in the nineteenth century in Western countries, when comprehensive public education systems were established. The choice of a public administrative system has prevailed in order to guarantee the independence of education from vested interests. The public administration of education systems appears to be a necessary and indisputable condition for sustaining the educational logic of education. We dare say that, without a strong public administrative system, the educational logic of education would not exist. This relative autonomy of education systems is inscribed wholly in the principles that structure and drive the actions of the educational administrative apparatus. These principles are closely connected with one another.

The first principle is unity of the education system in order to erase regional, social and political differences due to cultural and economic inequalities. It has been adopted to develop a national identity for the sake of strengthening the nation-state. Although strictly adopted in centralised states, this principle also applies one way or another in English-speaking countries, where education is generally managed by local authorities. All other principles stem from this one.

The second principle is equal access of all citizens to education, or more accurately equal opportunities in education, which implies a free and public education. This principle seems crucial for underpinning the vocational logic with the educational logic of education. In other words, the selection of students for social positions solely on the basis of a neutral criterion of acquired knowledge seems the only way to eliminate social inequalities due to privileges and discrimination.¹⁰

The third principle is the decontextualisation of education by excluding social actors, particularly parents, businesses and local politicians, from the management of educational matters and

10. In post-war European debates on education in particular, concerns were raised about the education system's missing out the "talented" among the working classes.

institutions.¹¹ This principle is required by the first principle of national unity of education because it guarantees a uniform quality of education nationwide. Moreover, the involvement of non-professionals in educational matters may endanger the fourth principle.

The fourth principle is the professionalisation of the education system by recruiting and organising a body of teachers and professors who are specially trained to elaborate and manage didactics and to interact with young learners. Their status as civil servants gives them the liberty to be dedicated full time to their jobs and prevents them from being agents of outside forces.

These four principles of unity, equity, decontextualisation and professionalism have together underpinned the autonomy of modern education systems. This autonomy is a strictly necessary condition to protect the educational logic of education and, by extension, the quality of education. Today, all four principles are targets of a deconstruction process undertaken by education reforms. Unity is jeopardised by decentralisation. Equity is abandoned in the process of open and rampant privatisation. Decontextualisation is receding because of the increasing involvement of outsiders in educational matters. Professionalism is diminishing with the loss of the civil servant status of professors and teachers. The autonomy of education systems has been put into question, paving the way for the rapid deterioration of educational quality.

11. An interesting reversal has occurred: empowering parents in school matters was a left-wing agenda in the 1970s, but by the 1990s it had become a right-wing agenda.

Unbalanced Educational Logics: Educationalism and Vocationalism

We have seen that the education system is a regulatory system that selects young people for social positions according to the knowledge they have accumulated in their studies. We call this purpose of education the vocational logic. We have further argued that this logic is closely linked with an educational logic.

Maintaining the right balance between the two logics of education requires social and economic regulations designed to avoid the possibility that one logic inadvertently gains dominance over the other. As seen above, the major regulatory mechanism built in for this purpose is the relative autonomy that society has granted to education systems, which relies in particular on the power conferred on educational administrators. Today, the balance between the two logics of education is put at risk by two opposing perils: the peril of expecting too much and the peril of expecting too little from education.

Generally, governments and social actors expect too much when they assume that education can solve major social and economic problems. These problems include waning international competitiveness, insufficient productive skills, weak scientific and technological capabilities, unemployment, social inequalities, violence, cultural decline, political turmoil, environmental degradation, nutritional disorders, health challenges, socialisation problems of the handicapped and so on. At the same time, they expect too little when they accept the deterioration of the knowledge content of education and pretend to tackle this problem by compensating for it with lifelong learning. Expecting too much and expecting too little reflect a dissociation between the two logics of education. When too much weight is given to the educational logic, we have educationalism; too much weight to the vocational logic and we have vocationalism. Either outcome leads to poor quality education.

Educationalism

We define educationalism as a social situation in which an imbalance exists between the two logics of education in favour of the educational logic. The educational logic gains dominance over the vocational logic, which ekes out an existence in the functioning of the education system. The vocational logic is subordinated to the sole concern of producing and transmitting knowledge without any consideration for social needs and expectations. The distance between the education system and the employment and social system is maximal with no bridge linking them.

Educationalism is an exaggeration of the relative autonomy of education granted by society to ensure the quality of education. It may drive the education system towards independence from society. It is well known that the production and transmission of knowledge involves cognitive processes but is inherently independent of social structures, though not from cultural traits. Moreover, it has been instituted in a way to avoid any interference by social actors. Consequently, the education system may well drift from autonomy to independence, and the educational logic may well become the sole logic of education. With pedagogues and didacticians piloting the ship, the selection of students may drift towards a system that is based only on knowledge for the sake of knowledge, and teachers, professors and researchers may become remote and isolated from everyday concerns. The educational authority may operate independently from the rest of the public administration system, which would prevent it from having any interaction with other entities. The education system may offer individuals only scholarly knowledge, which is useless for the social and practical purposes of society. Progressively, didacticians and pedagogues may take centre stage, while political and social representatives are pushed into the wings. When that happens, educationalism prevails. But actually educationalism has rarely prevailed, except in some periods and some countries of Europe and

Latin America where educational trade unions opposed any reform for fear that it would jeopardise the status of their members. Rather, educationalism is a circumstantial argument of vocationalism, as we will see later.

The educational logic of education, which deals with the production and transmission of knowledge, has been analysed mainly by philosophers of education as well as pedagogues and didacticians, whose “educationalist” theories have helped improve the methods of producing and transmitting knowledge. However, the most influential among these theories work implicitly on the postulate that they are themselves universal theories and offer the best educationalist solutions whatever the country of implementation. Actually, the modes of knowledge production and transmission are deeply embedded in the cultural and social characteristics of societies, in which case it is nonsense to claim—as is widely done—that there is only one didactic approach that enables the highest quality of education, a claim which we may call the “one best practice” postulate. The fallacy of this claim is something which would be immediately obvious to sociologists and anthropologists if they were more inclined to look into it. It is worth briefly examining this postulate of universalism and its role in nurturing educationalism.

Most of the time, the quality of education is associated with didactics, which we define as the specific arrangement of the progression of studies, the curriculum and the pedagogy adopted in processes of learning. When analysts associate the term *quality of education* with the *quality of didactics*, they often postulate that didactics is universal and independent from social structures, social concerns and cultures. They believe that there is one best practice of education at a world level. With very few exceptions, theories of curriculum and theories of pedagogy and didactics all take this belief for granted and tend to see only support for it. Today, educators produce textbooks of didactics for every discipline of knowledge that

prescribe international standards for teaching and learning. In this endeavour, they assume that the acquisition of knowledge follows the same path everywhere and always. The “one best practice” postulate exaggerates the autonomy of education and has an educationalist bias in that it assumes education to be also independent of national contexts and of the social objectives of education. To put it another way, the postulate assumes that national contexts and educational objectives either do not matter or are everywhere and always the same. When this happens, the vocational logic of education, which is invariably shaped by the social environment, disappears from the picture, and only the educational logic remains.

The “one best practice” postulate is supported by advocates of educational globalisation. It is neatly aligned with the desire of didacticians and pedagogues—and their publishers—to market the teaching methods they devise and the material they produce for their own profit. To establish one best practice is to establish an international standard for education. From this it follows that poor quality equates the incapacity of an education system to adopt and apply the one best practice (Currie 2003; Brunold 2005). Every international conference on education reforms—as exemplified in Thailand by the annual forum on education that was convened by the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC)—is aimed at urging participants to practise what is preached. Recipes are on offer at such gatherings to propagate the one best practice globally. It seems likely that this attempt at standardising education aims ultimately to develop an international market in educational services for the private benefit of educational institutions and their senior staff (Burbules and Torres 2000). Such international conferences are more like fairs where “international” education experts market their expertise than they are scientific events where the question of educational quality is debated in all its complexity. The widespread acceptance of the “one best practice” postulate is the prerequisite for marketing educational

services to the world, whether by attracting foreign students or by exporting educational services.¹²

Certainly, one cannot deny that there are elements in the process of learning that are independent of place and culture—a combination of accumulated knowledge and experience that didactics can partially reproduce in formal and informal learning processes (see chapter 11). However, what is often overlooked is the crucial point that the process of learning is shaped by local characteristics, culture and history.

In the global context, it is educationalism that is castigated, notwithstanding that it is a rarity. However, advocates of the discourse of vocationalism do not bother with the reality; they would rather invent a situation that supports their stance. They take the evidence of a weak educational logic, represent this weakness as educationalism and exploit this last claim to legitimise the discourse of vocationalism. In Thailand, such manipulation is very common, with the low quality of education attributed to educationalism when in fact it is due to the weak logic of education. It is the common rhetoric of vocationalism. Let us turn now to the analysis of this rhetoric.

Vocationalism

We define vocationalism as the state of affairs in which there prevails an imbalance between the two logics of education in favour of the vocational logic. Vocationalism is the other side of the coin to educationalism. Within vocationalism, education is dominated by

12. Education is becoming more and more a form of merchandise to be sold on the market. Even institutions of public education are moving in this direction. It is worth noting that the Department of Export Promotion of the Thai Ministry of Commerce has, in the framework of an export-led growth strategy, launched an international campaign inviting foreign students to study in Thailand. The aim is evidently to attract foreign currencies. Australia's systematic implementation of a similar policy has put into question the quality of education, an issue that should be considered carefully.

concerns about social and economic needs with little or no consideration given to producing and transmitting knowledge. The distance between the education system and the employment and social system is minimal. The latter system tends to dominate the former, and vocational logic takes command, opening the way to maximal interference by social actors in educational matters. When vocationalism reigns, the system of selecting students is subordinated more to pure vocational criteria borrowed from labour management and the labour market.

Vocationalism in this form is increasingly adopted and has numerous advocates, but it is hidden behind the “educational” vocabulary. It can be recognised in a series of related recommendations for the reform of educational institutions and policies. The major characteristics of vocationalism are as follows. First, the knowledge developed is limited to its “usable” dimensions, and this impedes its development. Today, for practical purposes, knowledge is made out to be composed of simple elements. These elements are considered as “skills” or competencies, such as writing, reading, arithmetic, problem solving, taking initiative and group interaction. These skills and competencies have become the selection criteria of education systems. This change, vocationalist in essence, supposedly will facilitate the teaching of what society needs. But it offers only an impoverished vision of knowledge and weakens the educational logic of education. The same criteria are often used by educational institutions to assess their own performance, which in turn reinforces vocationalist strategies.

Secondly, education systems increasingly select students for higher educational levels according to their fitness for jobs or their working experience instead of their cognitive abilities and knowledge accumulation, as if working produces the same knowledge as scholarly activities. The notion of employability (fitness for the jobs available in the labour market) is pervading the whole education system, a trend that international organisations recklessly advocate (ILO 1998; OECD 2001; World Bank 1999, 2000). This tendency is particularly evident in higher education. Although they do not impose the same

entry requirements as conventional universities, open universities claim that they confer diplomas of the same standards. Thus, they contribute to the devaluation of diplomas, which were originally granted based on the criterion of accumulated knowledge, and to the decline of the practice of knowledge-based student admission. Ultimately, they help drive higher education towards an exclusive vocational logic.

Similarly, the criteria for selecting students are increasingly derived from the criteria for recruiting workers instead of those based on knowledge accumulation. The trend towards incorporating professional training and apprenticeship schemes into university courses shows that the approach to knowledge is reduced to learning what is of short-term utility. The process of learning is shortened by narrowing its scope to practical and immediately useful knowledge, more akin to know-how than to cultural and scientific scholarship. As knowledge of that nature becomes obsolete rapidly, the consequence is that workers are obliged to undertake lifelong learning. However, as shown by most studies almost everywhere, lifelong learning is most of the time equated with training for work; real updating of knowledge is minimal (Tanguy 1986; Field 2006; Aspin and Chapman 2007). There are of course exceptions, as when scientists attend international conferences to update themselves on scientific research rather than to upgrade their work skills.

Fourthly, the criteria for evaluation of teachers and professors are shifting from internal evaluation of knowledge-based expertise by superiors to external evaluation of value-based yields by stakeholders. In particular, students—considered as customers of educational services—are asked to evaluate their professors and teachers. The instruments for evaluation are borrowed from business marketing. This system of evaluation also contributes to the decline in the status of teachers and professors. It implies that they are no longer considered as guardians of knowledge—something which students would not be in a position to assess anyway—but rather as mere dealers in educational services. Educators, disheartened by their

declining social status, become more inclined to be content with mediocrity. Moreover, students as clients of educational institutions are in a better position to bargain with the weakened teachers and professors for the scores they want and, at the end of the day, their diplomas. In this bargaining and for the sake of their own profit, administrations of educational institutions support quite often the claims of students for better scores against their teachers.

At the same time, the civil servant status of educational professionals is being undermined by the introduction of corporate managerialism. This is evident in the adoption of corporate management styles and results-based remuneration systems as well as in the freedom for employers to break labour contracts. All this tends to make teachers and professors more vulnerable to the power of the administrative section of educational institutions while enabling the latter to make greater demands on the teaching staff to engage in administrative, social and income-yielding activities instead of full-time teaching and supervision of students.

Another characteristic is that the autonomy of educational institutions from vested interests is waning with the increasing involvement of social actors (families, businesses, local lobbies) in educational matters, particularly in the design of curricula and the funding and management of educational institutions. To allow the closer involvement of local vested interests in the direction and management of educational institutions, the administration of public education is being decentralised. This is the purpose of decentralisation in vocationalism, although decentralisation can also play a positive role in terms of the educational logic, which happens when the goal is to achieve a better mix between formal and informal learning via an immersion of schools in their immediate environment (see chapter 11). When the purpose or significance of decentralisation is not clearly defined, as often happens, public debates on this issue are often ambiguous, misleading or useless. And when decentralisation is enforced under unclear rules, it makes education a pawn in local politics.

Finally, rampant privatisation of educational institutions is occurring mainly through two channels. The first is through the funding of public institutions with private money. Private investors expect returns on their investment, either directly in the form of monetary rewards or indirectly through a greater say in education policy. As such, profit can gain primacy in the formulation of public education policy. The second channel is through the establishment of an increasing number of private schools, colleges and universities, local as well as foreign, which are subject to weak state control and regulation. Both channels reinforce a profit-driven vocational logic of education and promote the development of an internationalised education market. The privatisation of education, in whatever form, entails private appropriation of stylised knowledge, which hinders its equal dissemination among the population. It denies education as a public good. Often, though not always, privatisation leads to a lower knowledge content of education, as student-customers are entitled to demand to learn only knowledge that is tradable in the labour market. The logic of education shifts from a rationale based on the acquisition of knowledge to a rationale of supporting individual career expectations, which are often limited to finding well-paid jobs.

All these changes have been promoted and implemented through education reforms in many countries, including Thailand, particularly in its 1999 education reform. They all reflect and reinforce the discourse of vocationalism. This discourse justifies the claim that only privatisation, market regulation and competition are able to improve the quality of education. In this endeavour, proponents of vocationalism criticise the autonomy granted by the public status of education systems as inevitably leading to educationalism. They incriminate educationalism as a major contributor to the low or declining quality of education. In their view, autonomous public education systems cannot be sensitive to social needs, especially those stemming from economic changes. They cannot guarantee freedom of educational choice. Only market signals can re-establish

this sensitivity and this freedom, and this implies boosting private education. The general rhetoric promoting vocationalism hides an agenda to eradicate public education, which is supported by both cynical and naive advocates, as part of the intended dismantling of welfare states and even—for some extremists—of nation-states.

Today, with the worldwide advocacy of lean states, governments are urged to retreat from education and to create conditions for the development of education markets,¹³ which are supposedly better able than national planning to match the supply of educational services to their demand. This evolution has occurred most extensively in English-speaking countries, where comprehensive education reforms have taken place (Berman et al. 2003). These countries have put into question the autonomy of their education systems and reinforced social control over them for the sake of what they believe their economies require (Halsey et al. 1997). Their policies are aimed at delivering only the knowledge which has practical and immediate utility and at opening up the possibility of shorter and less expensive education. They try to subordinate the educational logic of education to its vocational logic, probably at the expense of the knowledge content of education, that is to say, at the expense of its quality. The quality of teaching and learning required by the educational logic of education hardly matters anymore. Instead, the *rhetoric* of quality is used to impose objectives quite alien to the educational logic of education.

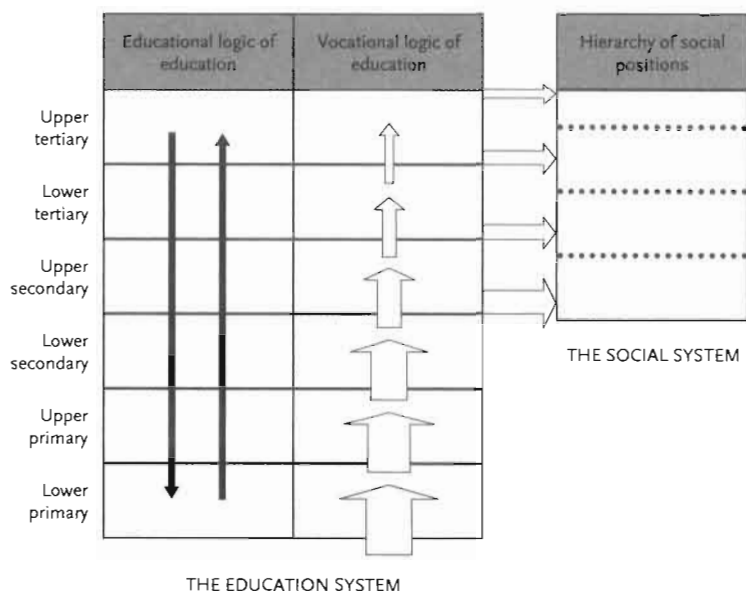


13. An ideological movement for “educational freedom” was founded in 1977 by the creation of the Cato Institute in Washington, DC. This movement advocates precisely the major characteristics of vocationalism. It considers public education as an unwarranted monopoly and wants to promote education markets as the way to educational freedom (Coulson 1999, 2004; Tooley et al. 2003). It is well known that those viewpoints are also the position of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on education, which it has often imposed on governments as part of the conditions for financial aid. This has been the case in Thailand with IMF’s structural adjustment programmes since the 1980s and especially after the 1997 economic crisis.

We have noted in this chapter that education systems have been granted autonomy to ensure the quality of education, where education is understood as the process of transmitting and acquiring knowledge. Arising out of ideology, or perhaps cynicism or ignorance, the discourse of vocationalism is inclined to deny the educational logic of education in favour of the total subordination of education to a vocational logic.

By giving primacy to the vocational logic of education, by trying to keep the state out of education, by opening the educational arena to profit-driven private interests, and by transforming educational services into commodities, contemporary advocates of vocationalist education reforms seek to undermine public education. They have somehow succeeded through their influence on education reforms. In an attempt to deceive opponents of their dogma, they resort to wordplay. One prominent example is the “autonomy” of educational institutions, which actually is a reorganisation that leads to their re-contextualisation. It really means autonomy from centralised administration, a prerequisite for the eventual subordination to vested interests from inside and outside educational institutions. Another is the exaltation of “knowledge” using fashionable terms such as “knowledge society”, “knowledge economy” and “learning organisation”, when in fact knowledge is losing ground as the objective of education and as a criterion of educational quality.

Concerns have continually been voiced about the danger that the discourse of vocationalism poses to education (Vermilye 1977; Blackmore 1997; Cobb 2002; Mounier 2006 a). Vocationalism is nevertheless expanding and turning more radical by putting skill production and education commodification at the forefront of its advocacy. Knowledge is bowing out of education. Were vocationalism to prevail, education would become impossible!

Fig. 8.1. The link between the two logics of education

- ↓ = Top-down relationships within the education system: production of knowledge, training of teachers and professors by higher education institutions and the definition of curricula for each level of education
- ↑ = Bottom-up relationships: accumulation of knowledge by students through learning
- = Gates of educational levels: knowledge filters (in the form of evaluations and examinations) that control students' access to higher levels of knowledge
- ⇧ = Selection of students (who pass through the knowledge filters) for proceeding to higher levels of education
- ⇨ = Selection of students for exiting the education system (to go to work or otherwise)

PART IV

THE KNOWLEDGE–DIPLOMA DILEMMA

9

Credentialism and the Diploma Disease in Higher Education

PHASINA TANGCHUANG

It is our view that the rapid expansion of primary and secondary education and the push for higher education in Thailand¹ has taken place at the expense of the quality of education. This stance may appear paradoxical. We do not dispute the need to expand educational access in general and at the tertiary level in particular. The establishment of numerous diploma and degree as well as postgraduate programmes is laudable. However, questions about the quality of these diplomas arise precisely from the surge of higher education enrolment. In a field survey that examined master's and doctoral programmes in the social sciences and the humanities, it was found that a great proportion of the programmes do not meet international standards and they award diplomas too easily for work with very low knowledge content and of low quality (Phasina 2007).

The pursuit of diplomas for themselves and not for knowledge has been labelled the “diploma disease” by Ronald Dore in a highly acclaimed book written about thirty years ago. Dore (1976) claims that the aims and motives of schooling have changed, and it is becoming

1. See chapter 1 for an analysis of the quantitative growth of the Thai education system.

more and more a ritualised process of accumulating qualifications aimed at raising one's earning power. He examined the educational histories of Britain, Japan, Sri Lanka and Kenya, and came to the conclusion that competition for jobs has created a "backwash effect" on the quality of education.

This chapter looks at the spread of diploma disease in Thailand, particularly in postgraduate studies. Changes in the aims and motives of schooling have occurred alongside soaring enrolment and diploma inflation—increasing numbers of diplomas being awarded at the expense of their quality. After establishing the fact of diploma inflation, we explore the social mechanisms by which this phenomenon occurs. The theory of credentialism accounts for most of these mechanisms, and explains why diplomas are valued for the economic and social advantages that they can bring rather than for the evidence of scholarship that they provide to their holders (Slaughter 2006).

We will see that credentialism and vocationalism have the same roots and are mutually reinforcing, being underpinned by the same belief and claim. This belief is that higher education delivers the high skills needed by the economy, when, on the contrary, there is a growing consensus that productive skills cannot be learnt in school but on the job. Our observation of the proliferation of master's and doctoral programmes and the factors behind this growth leads to the conclusion that credentialism is as prevalent in Thailand as elsewhere. And we raise the same criticisms as those raised elsewhere, including in the West (Dore 1976; Collins 1979, 2002; Bourdieu 1988; Brown 1995; Labaree 2007; Steven 2008). The danger of credentialism is that it diverts higher education institutions from their paramount role of monitoring and fostering the quality of education across the board.

Diploma Inflation in Higher Education: A Matter of Declining Quality?

Let us establish the fact of the inflation of diplomas in higher education by comparing enrolment growth between schools and higher education institutions over three decades. The findings are quite impressive.

Escalating Postgraduate Enrolment

Time series data from the Centre for Education and Labour Studies (CELS 2008) reveal the rapid expansion of the education system and the surge of higher education enrolment over the last three decades. From 1974 to 2007, total enrolment in all levels of education increased twofold from about 7.8 million to 14.5 million students, while enrolment in higher education alone rose fourteen times to more than 2.4 million students in 2007. Fig. 9.1 shows the steep growth of higher education enrolment relative to lower levels of education (see also Varaporn 2006).

Enrolment in higher education was equivalent to about 1% of total enrolment in primary and secondary schools in the 1970s. It grew to 5% in the 1980s and jumped to about 25% in the 1990s, or 10% and 50% respectively of secondary school enrolment alone in those decades. However, the pattern of higher education enrolment has changed significantly over time.

Growth in higher education enrolment is commonly attributed to increased enrolment in secondary education, in particular the last year of secondary school (year 6). This is only partly true. In Thailand, the value that society attaches to higher education influences higher education enrolment far more than enrolment at the secondary level does. During the 1970s, first-year university enrolment relative to final-year secondary school enrolment, which is the rate of survival of secondary school students to tertiary education, declined from about

100% to 40%. This decline was due to the fact that a rapid increase in secondary school enrolment was not matched by a corresponding increase in university enrolment. During that decade, the rate of economic growth fluctuated between 5% and 10% (about 7.5% on average), there was more or less continuous full employment, and the ability to find jobs was only loosely related to educational achievements. In the 1980s, the secondary-to-tertiary survival rate remained well below 50% despite stagnation in secondary school enrolment. This was because, firstly, education was still not a requisite for getting a job. Credentialism had not reared its head. Secondly, a slowdown in economic growth to an average annual rate of 5% from 1979 to 1986 robbed families of the motivation and means to send their children to upper secondary school and beyond. Then from 1987 onwards, enrolment started to make a U-turn when the economy recovered to register annual growth rates exceeding 10%. The secondary-to-tertiary survival rate crossed the threshold of 100% to reach an average of 114% in the 1990s and even stayed at about the same level during the 1997 financial crisis. Despite an economic slowdown brought on by the crisis, with the annual growth rate hovering around 5%, the survival rate increased to more than 130% between 1997 and 2003, indicating that a growing number of young people were pursuing higher education presumably to obtain higher qualifications.

Both open and private universities have become important actors in this evolution. Policy and structural changes in higher education—in particular the easing of university entrance criteria as well as the introduction of evening and weekend classes for working adults—have been both contributors and consequences of society's infatuation with diplomas. The diploma chase has turned out to be independent of economic circumstances. It signals the rise of what Randall Collins (1979) calls the "credential society", as we will show below.

The race for diplomas is fierce, particularly when it comes to master's and doctoral degrees and graduate diplomas. Enrolment in

these programmes grew forty-one times between 1974 and 2007 to about 230,000 students. This figure included all higher education institutions, be they public or private, traditional or open universities as well as Rajamangala technical colleges. However, this growth was accompanied by a decline in the ratio of graduates to enrolment. In traditional public universities over the period 1985–2002, this ratio shrank from about 50% to 40% for bachelor's degrees, fluctuated around 35% for master's degrees, and declined from 15% to 10% for doctoral degrees.

As one may expect, the graduates/enrolment ratio varies with changes in student admission criteria and the length of studies (on average, four years for bachelor's, two years for master's and at least three years for doctoral degrees, but in certain cases it can be longer). The persistent decline in the ratio indicates that increases in enrolment have a negative impact on educational achievements. When increasingly more students proceed to higher education after secondary school, it seems the majority of them drop out before obtaining their diploma. The declining ratio in traditional public universities also reflects a growing trend of students moving from public to private institutions or to open universities in order to obtain a diploma more easily.

Is the growth in master's and doctoral programmes affecting their quality? This is an important issue because there may be a trade-off between quantity and quality. One way to find out is to compare the standards of these programmes against international standards. This analysis has been carried out here for PhD programmes only, but it should be extended to master's programmes as well.

The Evolution of the Doctorate

The term *doctor* comes from the Latin word *docere*, which means “to teach”. A doctor is one who teaches and has the knowledge and experience to do so. In the Middle Ages, the meaning evolved towards

that of a scholar renowned for his scholarship. Today—or at least until the emergence of professional doctorates—the title “Dr”, certified by a diploma, implies the possession of both scholarship and teaching skills. The first doctoral degrees on record were awarded in Paris around 1150 in the fields of theology and the humanities (Leonard 2001). In Europe, PhD degrees were soon awarded in the sciences too (Hill et al. 1974). In the United States, they were conferred following the nation’s independence. It is interesting to note that the doctorate was first conferred in Australia as late as 1948; prior to that, such studies were done in England. Thai people had, and still have, the same tradition of furthering their studies abroad. As with Australia, this has delayed the development of PhD programmes domestically.

The concept of a doctorate, for Continental Europe in particular, is rooted in the traditions of both antiquity and the Middle Ages. These traditions held that the highest diploma of higher education required scholarship and the ability of scholars to master almost exhaustively the whole body of knowledge of at least one discipline and to make additions to this knowledge by way of their own research—in the form of a dissertation or thesis. Through their scholarship, “doctors” were also supposed to be the best professors in their discipline. This philosophy behind PhD programmes is still embraced in the majority of countries, even if it has been adapted to cover a more extended and complex range of knowledge. Today, PhD holders are managing the quality of higher education at the top of the educational hierarchy, where most knowledge is accumulated, updated and enlarged, where teaching skills are formed for all levels of education, and where material and equipment are organised for research and teaching. As has been emphasised in other chapters of this book, the quality of education across the board depends on the quality of higher education, which is measured by its capacity to perform scientific research, to train teachers and professors, and to present knowledge in forms that are appropriate for its dissemination. This role of higher education is of paramount importance, according to the educational

logic of education.² As much of this role of higher education depends on the quality of doctoral graduates, the quality of the whole education system is underpinned by the quality of doctoral programmes.

The standards of PhD degrees are, however, declining as a vocational logic is introduced into educational objectives and curriculum design. This has been brought about partly by the rise of professional doctorates alongside the PhD (Doctor of Philosophy). Medicine has traditionally been a profession which sets high standards for earning the title of “Dr”. In some but not all countries, medical students have to also obtain a professional doctorate, the MD (Doctor of Medicine), to be allowed to practise. High standards are necessary for a profession dealing with the health and lives of people. However, as we will show below, these high standard requirements reveal more a credentialist strategy today than a real concern about professional skills. The professional model originating in medicine has been borrowed by other professions as a way of diversifying the means of obtaining the title of “Dr” (other than the long PhD pathway) and making it accessible to people who are already working. The model has been widely adopted in the United States. In Australia, EdD (Doctor of Education) courses are conducted part time, attended particularly by part-time teachers wanting to update their knowledge and skills (Berman et al. 2003). Professional doctoral programmes focus on the application of knowledge and on workplace problems. In Britain, professional doctoral courses have been developed in clinical psychology, education, business studies and even engineering. In Thailand, the supply of EdD courses is also expanding. We believe that professional degrees are part of the current trend towards the development of the vocational logic of education, including in higher education, a trend which jeopardises the quality of education across the board by neglecting its educational logic.

2. See chapter 8 for a discourse on the educational logic versus the vocational logic of education (vocationalism).

It is a great pity that graduates are seduced by professional and financial rewards away from PhD studies. Institutional effort and public money should be invested in PhD programmes instead of professional doctorates with the clear objective of enhancing the quality of higher education for the benefit of the whole education system. The flow-on benefits for society as a whole would be much greater than can be obtained by serving personal and corporate interests in the name of economic growth.

The number of doctoral programmes in Thailand, both PhD and professional kinds, is multiplying so rapidly that one must wonder whether there are enough resources to ensure the quality of such programmes. Evidence of serious flaws—assessed against international standards and practices—points to a negative answer.

Supply and Competition

Our field survey of ten universities in the country shows that the recent surge of doctoral programmes, both the professional and PhD kinds, offered by universities old and new, public and private, puts severe pressure on the resources needed to run these programmes. Resource scarcity has in turn intensified competition between institutions, leading some of them—especially those that are new to the doctorate scene—to resort to unacceptable practices to overcome the shortage. Many programmes are conducted off-campus or in “one-room universities” during evenings and weekends in order to attract working people. The shortage of supervisors is met by hiring retired and part-time professors. Some institutions do not hesitate to inflate the credibility of their programmes by including non-existent staff on their list of supervisors. Well-known professors, attracted by high monetary rewards, often work for several institutions simultaneously and may be described as “jet-setting professors”. They are rarely on campus and cannot adequately supervise the work of their students. They are often asked to supervise a large number of students in order

to overcome staff shortage or to maximise revenue. A great number of programmes in new or small universities, short of academic resources, borrow part-time staff from other institutions and urge their students to use Internet resources and/or the libraries of public universities. Curricula are hastily and carelessly designed, and the standard of dissertations drifts from sound research to plagiarisms. It appears to be convenient for both these institutions and their students to accept low standards. An air of secrecy surrounds these questionable practices as institutions attempt to conceal them.

Competition between suppliers necessitates the recruitment of customers. Advertising becomes a common practice as in business. The chase for paying students leads down undesirable paths. A growing practice is to allow part-time studies for working people seeking to raise their own social status, particularly those who are willing to pay high tuition fees. The deal is often to guarantee these students a diploma in three years after completing a programme that emphasises coursework rather than research and dissertations. In effect, PhD programmes are becoming increasingly like professional doctorates such as the EdD, JD (Doctor of Jurisprudence) and DBA (Doctor of Business Administration). Such studies have little potential for contributing to higher education itself. There is a trade-off between business revenue and educational logic, and increasingly the balance is tipping in favour of the former. As we could observe in our field survey, this development is not being controlled. Instead, it is becoming increasingly acceptable throughout the academic community.

Some analysts have denounced these practices and labelled such diplomas as “fake doctorates” (Sermak 2000), but their targets tend to be the marginal higher education institutions driven by a business orientation where bad practices are conspicuous. An honest and rigorous analysis, however, would show that even well-established public institutions are tempted to resort to some of these practices in their eagerness to introduce doctoral programmes. When we point to

an inflation of doctoral programmes in Thailand, we are not concerned about the number of programmes offered per se, or the number of doctoral graduates. We are concerned about the serious shortage of professors and researchers compromising the delivery of quality. We are concerned, by the same token, about the proliferation of doctoral studies causing the depreciation of knowledge as well as research and teaching skills that the programmes are supposed to deliver. (The concern is not limited to doctoral studies.) Ultimately, the low quality of doctorates will adversely impact the whole education system, something that the country cannot afford.

The current race to grab a share of the doctoral market is responsible for most of these problems. Competition is increasing in both the professional doctorate and the PhD markets. One consequence is the devaluation of all higher education diplomas and, with it, a fall in the social status of teachers and professors. The decline of the teaching profession may lead to a supply crisis, which could occur when the older generations of teachers and professors are retiring. Falling standards at the doctoral level can be expected to have a domino effect on master's and bachelor's degrees as well. And the task of bringing about a desperately needed improvement of the quality of education across the board would become doubly hard. At the same time, national policy which aims to discourage studies abroad would be undermined by the depreciating local doctorates in comparison to foreign doctorates. Foreign universities looking for private sources of finance are stepping up their recruitment drives to entice overseas students. No doubt affluent families would prefer an overseas education for their children if they are convinced of the superiority of foreign degrees over local degrees. Local universities would be trapped in a vicious cycle if increasing competition with foreign institutions were to lead them to resort to more and more unacceptable practices.

To find the solutions to this critical issue, we need to explore the factors underlying the inflation of diplomas, particularly

doctorates. All these factors are related to what has been criticised as credentialism.

The Major Factors of Diploma Inflation

How can the surge of higher education enrolment and society's infatuation with higher degrees be explained? Three main factors are at play: the pursuit of revenue by higher education institutions, government policy on higher education, and the social value attached to higher education. These three factors act in synergy to produce credential inflation in Thailand. In our view, the leading actors are the institutions of higher education.

Institutional Strategy: Revenue Seeking

Since 1973, an increasing number of higher education institutions in Thailand have introduced doctoral programmes (Sermsak 2000). Enrolment growth in doctoral programmes accelerated from the beginning of the 1990s, the result of three trends: (1) a larger number of institutions offering doctoral studies, increasing 1.75 times among public universities between 1993 and 2002; (2) a wider range of programmes offered, expanding 2.25 times over the same period; and (3) a greater number of students per programme, growing 1.78 times in that period. Expansion and diversification in the supply of courses together boosted enrolment by a factor of 7 (Phasina 2007).

In 1973, Mahidol University became the pioneer when it conferred eight PhD titles in medical sciences. Three years later, in 1976, Srinakharinwirot University conferred three EdD titles in research and curriculum development. Since then, increasing numbers of public universities and their faculties have established doctoral programmes in the hope of boosting their resources and elevating their reputation. For example, Ramkhamhaeng University, the

larger of two open universities in the country, introduced eighteen doctoral programmes in 2000 and received 983 applications as early as 2001, of which 66% applied to study for a doctorate in business administration. Even new public universities—mainly through the conversion in 2004 of Rajabhat and Rajamangala institutes into universities—are actively establishing master's and PhD programmes. Close to half of the forty-one Rajabhat universities are now offering PhD and EdD programmes.

Private universities have also jumped onto the bandwagon. In 2005, among the private universities, only nine institutions among sixty-four accounted for 38% of total enrolment and 50% of graduates in bachelor's programmes; 42% of total enrolment and 58% of graduates in master's programmes; and 100% of total enrolment and 100% of graduates in doctoral programmes. These nine universities are Assumption, Bangkok, Christian, St John, Mahanakhorn Technic, North-Eastern, Rangsit, Siam, and Wongchawalitkul. An interesting observation is that these nine universities have higher graduates/enrolment ratios for their bachelor's and master's programmes than private universities without doctoral programmes. This may suggest that doctoral degrees are both a consequence and a cause of higher quality of bachelor's and master's programmes. As a whole, private universities have a much lower graduates/enrolment ratio than public universities—12% versus 40% for bachelor's programmes, and 22% versus 30% for master's programmes. It may indicate that competition between universities for recruiting doctoral students—in order to generate more income—has generally lowered the standard of entrance requirements for this level of education.

Offering doctoral studies is part of universities' strategy to increase income and profit. A large number of students and working people are willing to pay high tuition fees for a doctorate, provided that the studies are not too demanding and lengthy. As higher education institutions depend increasingly on private sources of income, including tuition fees, they are more and more inclined to lower their

standards, accepting applicants without the required credentials or the right motivations for doctoral studies. Confronted with increasing competition for postgraduate students, they tend to grant master's degrees and doctorates, including PhDs, far too easily. Thus, these diplomas overstate the scholarship of their holders and do not certify achievement of that level of scholarship. Contrary to the rhetoric of advocates of education markets (Tooley et al. 2003), competition between universities for students and funds leads to discounted diplomas and contributes to the declining standards of postgraduate degrees. This competition sparks a race to the bottom of educational standards that is only weakly held back by fears of a loss of reputation on the part of graduates and university recruiters.

In defending their expanding offerings of postgraduate programmes, universities argue that they are merely complying with government education policies and responding to the demands of families and businesses. That is, they claim that supply is demand driven and not the other way round. Let us consider these claims.

Government Policy: Fostering Domestic Doctorates

Until 1997, when the financial crisis struck, the elite usually sent their children abroad for higher education, particularly to Western countries. This long-standing practice had obviously hampered the domestic development of higher education, in particular doctoral programmes. The government had exacerbated this situation by granting generous scholarships for overseas studies, particularly doctoral studies. The Royal Jubilee Scholarship Programme, for example, selects the best Thai students for studies in prestigious foreign universities. The rationale for this policy was that it was the most efficient method, at least in the short term, of building the well-educated elite that the country needed. Consequently, the development of domestic postgraduate programmes was neglected.

In recent years, a growing number of Thai academics and education experts have called for the development of national higher education as well as postgraduate studies. Prasert (1999) urges the government to develop and strengthen made-in-Thailand PhD programmes instead of relying solely on sending students abroad. The rationale for a shift from external to internal higher education also extends to qualitative concerns. It is claimed that foreign-trained doctoral graduates are not sufficiently informed about Thai society and culture and not adequately prepared to contribute to solving national problems. For example, Prasert argues that local graduates would be more able to adapt technological innovations and scientific applications to the national context and to the needs of the country's economy. Sippanonda (2000) follows the same line of argument when he asserts that Thailand, being a newly industrialising country, needs a large number of researchers since the present ratio of researchers to the total population is only 2 to 10,000, while it should be fifteen times higher, or about 30 to 10,000. Sippanonda's views coincide with Prasert's in that they both believe the number of doctoral graduates should increase especially in the field of science and technology. Sermsak (2000) urges that the range of doctoral studies should be broadened to include new disciplinary specialities, while MuangKeo (cited in Sombat and Arunee 2003) advocates also the development of postgraduate programmes in mathematics and physics.

In addition, Prasert and Sippanonda assert that financing doctorates within the country would be a better use of the national budget. Sippanonda estimated that the cost of sponsoring a PhD course of study at one of the reputable US universities was around 10 million baht (US\$250,000) per student, while it was about 1 million baht at national universities. Thus, shifting from overseas to domestic studies would permit ten times more doctoral students to be trained. Moreover, a substantial number of overseas students are reluctant to return home after graduation, attracted by the higher pay and wider opportunities in the host country. A last argument is that there is a

need to catch up with international levels of enrolment in this area (Sippanonda 1999; Uthai 2003).³

The pressures from various quarters and the 1997 economic downturn finally convinced the educational authority, if not to give up the programme of scholarships for overseas studies, to at least foster the development of domestic postgraduate programmes. This and other reforms deemed necessary culminated in the National Education Act of 1999. Recent prime ministers had also played a part by repeatedly recommending that research institutes and universities confer a greater number of doctoral degrees. Helped by the escalating cost of overseas studies, concerns about the inadequacies and irrelevance of studies abroad, and worries about the “brain drain” and its negative consequences, along with the support of public policies, local universities finally won the day. The new education policy has, however, bred a credentialist leaning at universities.

Social Forces: Supply and Demand in the Diploma Market

It is our contention that the increased social demand for diplomas is actually driven by the suppliers of diplomas. The push comes first from domestic educational institutions as well as from foreign institutions which “go global” in order to increase their share of the world education market. In the virtual market on the World Wide Web, you can even get within a day the diploma you want, provided that you pay. Credentials have become commodities being traded in a big international market. This has happened according to the plans of educational institutions, as we have established above, notwithstanding strong criticism of credentialism (Collins 1979; Brown 1995).

3. For example, France, which has about the same size of population as Thailand, has each year about 64,000 existing doctoral students, 16,000 new doctoral students and 11,000 doctoral graduates (one-quarter of them foreign students).

The claim that the increased supply of diplomas arises from the demand of businesses, professions and families is an illusion. Firstly, the reality of the need for an educated workforce has to be explored. In the case of highly skilled workers and professionals, higher education qualifications are welcomed as proof of intellectual abilities but not as indicators of the possession of practical skills. All employers will assert that practical skills—technical and behavioural—are acquired on the job through learning by doing (Mounier 2001; CELS 2007; Phasina 2007). The state is at the forefront of recruitment in requiring tertiary qualifications of applicants for civil servant positions (see chapter 7). This requirement has nothing to do with productive and administrative skills. Diplomas are seen as useful as a means of selecting between numerous applicants for jobs that require intellectual and social skills. Businesses have to follow suit in order to compete with the state and between themselves in recruiting intellectually capable managers and engineers. Businesses did not spark the inflationary trend in diplomas; they were just followers.

Secondly, skilled craftsmen and professionals try to restrict entry to their professions by organising themselves into exclusive associations (in effect, trade unions) that play the same role as did guilds in the Middle Ages. Membership of the associations is strictly conditional, and this control serves to maintain the associations' power and their capacity to keep their members' incomes and social status high. Today, the professional associations of lawyers, medical doctors, teachers, professors and architects establish the educational qualifications required for entering these professions (Collins 2002; Steven 2008). They cite the need for specialised skills in order to ensure social acceptance of their monopoly strategy, although all of them learn their professional skills on the job (e.g. internship for medical practitioners and apprenticeship for lawyers and architects). In fact, pressure from professional associations is one of the main factors of credentialism in Thailand as in other countries.

Thirdly, families and individuals consider diplomas as tools that raise their social positions (see chapter 8). Education has become a means by which families compete for social positions—competition which actually reproduces the prevailing social hierarchy. Research in the sociology of education has firmly established that educational achievements are largely determined by the social origin of students. Children of the elite and the middle classes tend to perform well at school and so they remain in the same higher social strata as their parents, while children of the lower social classes perform less well and consequently they stay in the same lower classes as their parents. Stories of exceptional successes of children from poor backgrounds nurture the belief that education acts as a social elevator that can improve an individual's standards of living. This belief pushes families to keep their children in school as long as they are financially able to. But what really matters in this inter-family and inter-individual competition is not education itself but educational qualifications, to which social positions are attached. In this regard, the analysis of Labaree (2007) on the US credentials race applies quite well to Thailand. The motivation for study is the diploma and not scholarship or intellectual appeal. Individuals' strategies for easy procurement of diplomas converge with universities' strategies for increasing income.



As elsewhere, Thailand has become a “credential society”. The diploma inflation and credentialism is fuelled by the commercialisation of higher education together with short-sighted public policies and self-serving businesses, professionals, families and individuals. However, the supply-driven inflation of credentials would effectively come to a halt, and the competition between universities, businesses, professionals and individuals cease, if public policies discourage such activities. The major problem of credentialism is that educational quality is sidelined.

The effect of credentialism on the quality of education is deleterious. Not only does credentialism greatly reduce quality, mostly in connivance with vocationalism, but it also negatively affects the whole education system. Today, most higher education institutions try to wriggle out of their major social responsibilities. They try to ignore the fact that their most crucial role is to help raise and monitor the standard of education across the board. They disregard the fact that their highest diplomas—master's and doctoral degrees—are meant to groom men and women into elite scholars who will be charged with the responsibility of managing the knowledge content of education, training educators, and certifying and improving the quality of education at all levels. This immensely important role involves, normally, the enhancing and updating of knowledge, producing new material for teaching and learning, training teachers, developing teaching methods and tools, and assessing educational achievements. Absorbed in selling diplomas, though, higher education institutions have defaulted on this noble mission. Instead, credentialism and vocationalism emerge as their dominant ideology, according to which the aim of higher education is to maximise short-term individual or corporate economic gains. Only a deep and radical change of this attitude towards education will allow the total realignment of higher education to a knowledge acquisition perspective.

Before this change can happen, it is essential to look carefully into the ability of higher education institutions to meet the great demands of conducting postgraduate programmes, in particular the knowledge content of these programmes. To promote the expansion of postgraduate education without scrutinising its quality would be to create an illusion of progress.

This relatively pessimistic view of the state of higher education is shared by the government. In 2005, the Higher Education Commission tried to stem the devaluation of doctoral degrees by mandating that a standing committee of five people responsible for quality must be appointed for each postgraduate programme. The

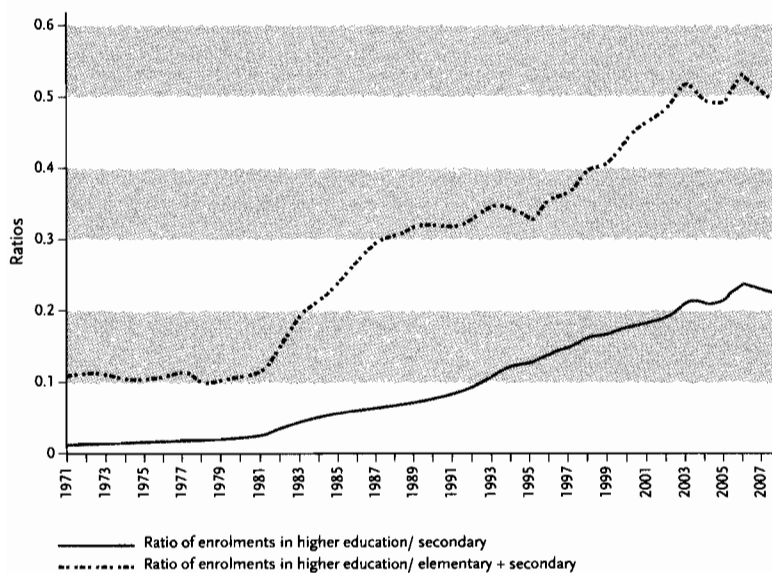
five people must be well qualified, they must hold a doctorate or occupy the position of associate professor or professor, and they must be employed on the permanent staff. The appointees are not allowed to sit on any other academic committees. In addition, there must be a chief thesis advisor on the permanent staff. This regulation of doctoral programmes is very relevant, timely and beneficial. It should also be adopted for master's programmes. It is, however, limited to administrative obligations and may turn out to be insufficient in itself to radically change the situation. In particular, it should be extended to scientific and academic aspects, which is crucial for controlling the quality of doctoral studies from a knowledge perspective.

Given the scarce resources that can be mobilised for doctoral studies, the major universities should focus on the development of high quality master's and PhD programmes that will enhance the knowledge and skills of teaching and research staff at higher education institutions. This recommendation implies that the programmes should be supported by research centres as in most developed countries. In this respect, we share the view of Wiwut (2000), who recommends an emphasis on research in upgrading doctoral studies in Thailand.⁴ Indeed, good doctoral studies must be backed by research centres which can offer facilities, materials, equipment, fieldwork opportunities, a place for debate and training, as well as the supervision that PhD candidates need. Research centres involved in PhD programmes would benefit from students' research and from

4. Wiwut (2000) proposes key measures to be taken to upgrade doctoral studies in Thailand: (1) recruiting high-calibre students with attractive research assistantships and scholarships, (2) upgrading research facilities and infrastructure, (3) deepening the level of existing international and national linkages and collaborations, (4) setting appropriate rewards in terms of income and career to faculty members who devote themselves to research work and serve as thesis supervisors, (5) developing effective teamwork among staff and students, (6) enlarging social and institutional networks, (7) identifying and strengthening key research centres involved in doctoral programmes, and (8) developing a new spirit where personal integrity of professors and students is rigorously required.

supervisory activities. Therefore, improving PhD programmes for the sake of raising the quality of the entire higher education system ultimately depends on the government and universities setting a bold policy agenda which steers the development of research capacities towards international standards.

One of the measures that Wiwut proposes is to select the best students as PhD candidates. This is certainly necessary. Universities would, however, find themselves constrained by the current education system. Indeed, just as the quality of primary and secondary education depends on the quality of higher education, the quality of higher education depends on the quality of primary and secondary education. By the same token, only good bachelor's graduates can be good master's students and only good master's graduates can be good PhD candidates. This bottom-up interdependence of levels of education may provide a quite limited breeding ground for PhD candidates. In view also of the inverse top-down interdependence of educational levels (i.e. only good researchers and good teachers can deliver good quality education), the success of educating the limited pool of PhD students is dependent on the success of improving all levels of education. This requires upgrading teacher training, improving the quality of studies at all levels of education, and producing high quality teaching and learning materials. Step by step, the limited teaching capacities will be overcome at each educational level so that each level can support other levels and in turn benefit from them. It would be nonsensical and socially very costly to upgrade only PhD studies; it has to be done along with the upgrading of all other levels of education.

Fig. 9.1. Structure of enrolment, 1971–2007

Source: CELS database on education (for secondary education, adjusted series for legal changes in the definition of levels of education)

Is Vocational Education Vocational?

PHETCHAREE RUPAVIJETRA

Vocational education in Thailand is as complex as the national educational history. In the past, vocational schools were often set up by the state and its various ministries to produce whatever sort of educated workforce and staff most needed at the particular time for the development and strengthening of the nation-state. This was the case with police and military academies, for instance, as well as agriculture-related schools such as for forestry or irrigation. However, since the 1960s, vocational education has been mainly integrated under the Ministry of Education with the creation of the Department of Vocational Education. From then on, the importance of vocational schools outside the jurisdiction of the ministry relative to those under its jurisdiction has fluctuated between 10 and 30 per cent of total enrolment in vocational education. This percentage increased when new initiatives were undertaken by specific ministries and decreased when subsequent reforms brought these new schools under the education ministry. Thus, all initiatives designed to expand vocational studies are eventually subsumed within the general education system.

Worldwide today, vocational education tends to lead general education. Our question here is whether or not this, too, is the case in Thailand. We will also evaluate the influence of the vocational stream

of education on the whole education system. For this purpose, we need to understand the major institutional organisation of vocational education, the evolution of its enrolment pattern, and its importance relative to general education. This background to the real situation of vocational education will shed light on the vocational discourse in Thailand. This discourse has been sensitive to the current worldwide advocacy of vocational education, showing that for current Thai policy-makers—in fact much more than for the advocates of the 1999 education reform—the education system should be tilted towards a vocational orientation. It is interesting to note that advocates of vocational education readily ignore criticisms that have long been levelled against vocationalism. The fundamental criticism of vocational education is that, leaving aside the misleading label, it selects children as well as general education does for social positions but does not develop in them vocational skills.¹ Rather, vocational education, as well as general education, transmits knowledge and develops the ability to understand and give meaning to the world.

Our stance on this issue is that the major focus of all education, including vocational education, is (and should be) educational and not vocational as is generally believed. The purpose is to develop cognitive abilities. This may appear paradoxical, especially when vocational education is already so well established. However, as Lewis (1997, 1998) has suggested, a distinction has to be made between vocational education for jobs and vocational education about work. It is the latter aspect that allows us to understand vocational education as general education. In the same vein, vocational education is the greatest contributor to equal educational opportunity by realising the democratic objective of making quality education available to all so that they can maximise their potential. This contribution of vocational

1. See chapter 8 for a discourse on the educational logic versus the vocational logic of education (vocationalism) and the role of education in selecting young people to fill the hierarchy of social positions.

education is made possible by the use of a specific and fitting didactic approach designed for this purpose². This purpose is what should inform education policy as regards vocational education.

The Quantitative Characteristics of Thai Vocational Education

Criteria of Measurement

For our measurement purposes, vocational education has to be distinguished from general education. As statistical data which make this distinction are based on the criteria of jurisdiction, we are obliged to adopt the same criteria. Roughly, what distinguishes these two streams are their names, as vocational schools always bear names that indicate clearly their vocational orientation. There are the technical school/college (*witthayalai theknik* in Thai), vocational education college (*witthayalai achiwasueksa*), professional college (*witthayalai achiwa*), commercial school/college (*witthayalai phanit*) and polytechnic college (*witthayalai saraphatchang*). On the other hand, schools providing general education are always called *rongrian* (school) followed by a proper name, such as names of kings, queens, great persons or places: for example, Rongrian Watthanothaipayap and Rongrian Yupparaj Witthayalai.

Of course, the distinction between the names of schools is substantiated by more significant differences, in particular by the presence or not of workshops for practical teaching or, even more importantly, by distinct didactics, as we will highlight later.

Students can opt for vocational education only after completing compulsory education. Compulsory education arose out of the

2. For a detailed presentation of the didactic approach of vocational education see chapter 11.

political will to give an identical basic education to every citizen. It was extended to nine years in 1992 up to the lower secondary level. Today, it is still nine years, although the National Education Act of 1999 provides for further extension to twelve years. The completion of secondary education for vocational school students is the attainment of the diploma of *powocho*. *Powocho* holders can continue their studies for two years at the tertiary level and obtain the diploma of *powoso*, which is the highest diploma of vocational and technical studies below the degree of engineering. An increasing number of vocational and technical schools are extending their curricula to the *powoso* level.

Curricula also distinguish vocational and general education. For public schools, this distinction is made at a national level by the government. The curriculum of vocational schools is composed of 102 credits³ classified into three main groups of subjects: general, occupational and elective subjects (which belong to either one of the other two categories). There are one semester of industrial training and two hundred hours of extra-curricular activities. For example, in the mechanics course with a major in automobiles, the curriculum is structured as follows: not less than 26 credits in general subjects including Thai language for work, English for communication, basic sciences, applied mathematics and biology; not less than 66 credits in occupational subjects with training in crafts such as welding, basic sheet metal work, basic automotive work and basic mechanical work; and not less than 10 credits in elective subjects, which are related to the vocational subjects. It is clear that the emphasis is on vocational knowledge and know-how rather than on liberal education.

3. A credit is equivalent to two hours of coursework per week.

Enrolment in Vocational Education

The very scattered system of vocational education in Thailand makes measurement of its enrolment difficult and unreliable. According to our analysis, secondary school enrolment stagnated between 1980 and 1990, and then expanded suddenly at a quite rapid pace until 1997. This expansion was of course related to the lengthening of compulsory education in 1992.⁴ Enrolment in vocational schools followed roughly the same trend as general education until 1997, when it began to fall considerably behind (fig. 10.1). This lag alarmed the educational authority and lent weight to the call for a clearer vocational orientation to the whole education system.

During the 1970s, the number of students in the vocational stream was about the same as in the general stream, but it has fallen further and further behind since the early 1980s except for a rebound between 1990 and 1998. The year 1998 was a turning point, which may be linked somewhat to the economic crisis that exploded in 1997 to the extent that surging unemployment may have encouraged longer studies for the time being and therefore for general rather than vocational education. Thus, from 1997 onwards, attending the general stream rather than the vocational stream delayed the confrontation with an unfavourable employment situation. However, this downturn was more likely due to the rapid expansion of places in general education at the secondary level, as noted in chapter 1. It was also due to the increasing preference for entering the job market as late as possible, as our field surveys have confirmed.

During the last decade, enrolment in vocational education has remained at a level of about 60 per cent of enrolment in the general stream. According to the authorities, this is below what is needed by the economy.

4. On the effect of compulsory education on enrolment, see chapter 1.

Regional Distribution of Public and Private Vocational Schools

In 2005, the Vocational Education Office distinguished six educational regions with twenty-eight areas of management and 410 public vocational schools in the country. There were, in addition, 336 private vocational schools. Public and private vocational schools are unevenly distributed in the country. Private vocational schools are concentrated in and around Bangkok, while the largest number of public vocational schools are located in the Northeast, the poorest region (table 10.1). This correspondence between the regional level of income and the proportion of public vocational schools applies also to the Northern and Southern regions. It confirms the very well-known fact that public vocational education tends to cater to the poorer population. The fact that Bangkok has fewer vocational schools than many other regions and its population is better off than the rest of the population in the country is further evidence of this link.

Two other observations about vocational education can be made from the distribution patterns of public and private vocational schools. While public vocational schools are mostly located in poor and rural areas, private schools are concentrated in the affluent areas of the country. It can also be noticed that neither public nor private institutions are concentrated in industrial regions, as exemplified by the Eastern region, where a very important part of the national industrial capacity is located. It seems that vocational schools are more suited to rural activities than urban activities and manufacturing. This finding is remarkable in that it reveals the real—as opposed to the assumed—role of vocational education. Vocational education is more concerned with educational issues than with productive issues. We can assume at this stage that, contrary to the general belief in the political and even the academic circle, vocational education in Thailand is more an opportunity for the children from poor families to study than it is a general means of developing and enhancing the productive

skills needed by the economy. We will verify our assumption in the rest of the chapter.

The Discourse of Vocationalism and Its Influence on Education Policies

As revealed in chapter 8, the discourse of vocationalism is expanding worldwide under the influence of two major factors. The first is the widespread belief in the emergence of a knowledge-based economy where knowledge and skills define international competitiveness. The second factor is more complex to grasp, which comes, in fact, from the neo-liberal advocacy of the state's retreat from education. Neo-liberals, by asserting that the skills and knowledge needed by the economy can only be produced in vocational education and/or outside the formal settings of education (adult education, training facilities, learning organisations and other informal settings), proclaim that the bulk of general education provided by the public education system is no longer needed. As they see it, since enrolment in the general stream of education seems to expand spontaneously more rapidly than in the vocational stream everywhere, including in Thailand, the role of the state should be to mitigate this undesirable evolution by limiting its involvement to vocational education while allowing the market to regulate general education.

Vocationalism Worldwide

As competition becomes more intense under the pressure of globalisation, proponents of vocational education are growing louder. They argue that vocational education develops the abilities and skills that the population needs to deal with the economic and technological challenges ahead. The International Labour Organization (ILO) states in its 1998–1999 World Employment Report that “the heightened

competition and economic change that result from the combined forces of global economic integration and technological advance can cause instability and difficulties in maintaining the employability of large segments of a country's labour force" (ILO 1998). That could be overcome, the report adds, by vocational education and training. This is nowadays the politically correct position regarding education and skills. It is repeatedly cited as the only truth without a second thought by so-called experts in the international literature, conferences and meetings (see, for instance, Tang 2001; UNESCO 2001, 2005). Clearly, international organisations such as UNESCO generally hold firmly to the idea that technical and vocational education and training has a crucial role to play, not only in preparing young people for employment and for a fulfilling and good life but also in fostering socio-economic development in all countries. Vocational education is perceived as a decisive factor in the enhancement of national economic growth and/or international competitiveness (Harding 1995; Finlay et al. 1998). The simple fact that the content and meaning of skills are a social construct that changes over time because of social and technological changes is ignored. This characteristic makes it difficult both to define skills on a universal basis and to compare them over time and between places (Mounier 2001; Nickson et al. 2003; Warhurst et al. 2004). This difficulty, however, does not stop all the talk about the necessity of upgrading skills, nor the belief that vocational education can do the job (Ainley 1994; Raggatt and Williams 1999). New terms such as *competencies* that have emerged in place of *skills* have more to do with policy formulation than with any redefinition of skills, the nature of which has not really changed at all.

The discourse of vocationalism—advocating vocational education for the sake of upgrading skills and at the expense of liberal education—has had a strong influence all over the world by inspiring numerous education reforms over the last two decades, in particular in English-speaking and Asian countries. Chappell (2003) notes

that all these reforms give greater emphasis to learning processes that occur outside educational institutions, mentioning in particular the increasing role of learning organisations, informal learning, learning in the workplace, lifelong learning and so on. The belief that vocational schools deliver skills leads to performance assessments being made in terms of skills development and in comparison with workplaces. If learning is just about skills, it is obvious that vocational schools cannot stand the comparison because producing skills is not their purpose. Surreptitiously, through the widely shared belief that learning is about developing skills, the school is devalued as the major place of learning skills. In this perspective, giving more importance today to vocational schools would be only a step towards the post-modern advocacy of the elimination of formal education and of schools which deliver it. If the opposite is true and schooling is about building knowledge and cognitive skills, schools can easily stand the comparison with their alleged competitors outside educational institutions.

Vocationalism in Thailand and Public Policies

We saw above that enrolment in vocational education followed the broad trend of general education until 1997 but has since taken a downturn. Vocational education has always been a great concern for successive governments, which have regularly called for international cooperation—whether bilateral (in particular with Germany and Japan) or multilateral (in particular through ILO and the Asian Development Bank)—in order to improve and develop vocational education. In our view, these policies have not been very effective, because enrolment in vocational education is on the decline rather than on the rise and because the model chosen for improving the quality of vocational education has proved unsuitable to the Thai context, as we will show below.

Major flaws in vocational education are generally used as arguments by advocates and recent governments as justification for boosting

vocational education. For example, the vice president of the Federation of Thai Industries⁵ declared that because of the low quality of vocational education management, the graduates tend to be poorly skilled or their skills do not meet employers' needs. Therefore, educational institutions and workplaces need to cooperate to set the curriculum together. This declaration is a good example of the general belief that the formation of skills should be the only purpose of vocational education. It has been shown in various chapters of this book that such an assertion must not be taken at face value. Advocacy of vocational education stems from the confusion between, on the one hand, criticism of the low quality of Thai education—which is justified—and, on the other, criticism of an education system that fails to produce the skills demanded by employers—which cannot be justified if the skills are formed on the job and not at school.

Actually, all successive education ministers have implemented the recommendations of one of them, Jaturon Chaisaeng, who proclaimed that “the share of students in vocational education nowadays decreases while the labour market’s demand for graduates from vocational education is still high, so we need to encourage students to study vocational education up to a proportion of 70% of upper secondary education” (Jaturon 2005: 6). Whether or not he knows the extent of the labor market’s demand for vocational studies, Jaturon expresses a general belief. Under the strongly held, although mistaken, conviction that Thai education is most in need of the development of its vocational stream, the government has created the Vocational Education Office within the Ministry of Education. Although there is no specific provision in the 1999 Education Act for expanding vocational education (Chinnapat 1999), the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC) urged the Vocational Education

5. The vice president of the Federation of Thai Industries, Mr. Nipon Surapongrukchareon, is also a member of a committee tasked with establishing professional standards in Thailand.

Office to formulate an active development policy (Chinnapat 2005). The new office came into operation in 2003, and the Vocational Education Commission has proposed three main guidelines for it to follow in developing vocational education (OEC 2004).

- The first guideline focuses on the quality of classroom teaching and workshop learning within educational institutions. It is aimed at meeting employers' needs for a skilled workforce.
- The second guideline focuses on the relationship between vocational education institutions and enterprises, as well as on the learning process in the workplace. It is expected that a closer cooperation between educational institutions and workplaces would improve the fit between workshop teaching and the needs of the workplace. This guideline addresses a major issue in vocational education in Thailand.
- The third guideline focuses on the objective of education to prepare children for their future life as adults in society. It re-introduces in vocational education the concern about delivering more comprehensive knowledge than just know-how.

In addition to these guidelines, the Vocational Education Commission has formally established the Professional Standards Office, whose role is to constantly update the structure of vocational education in order to keep pace with changes in the workplace. This office has been given the responsibility, in particular, to define and update the curricula of vocational studies so that they remain relevant to social and economic needs.

In response to the vocational discourse, the Vocational Education Commission has taken a balanced position that addresses the major problems with this stream of education in the country. However, if the Commission is able to contribute to some extent to improving the quality of vocational education, it is not able to determine the

relative weight that vocational education will have within the national education system in the future, and it does not propose to influence households' decision on the choice of education for their children. Currently, households give greater weight to general education than to vocational education.

The more radical advocates of vocationalism recommend that the current structure of enrolment should be reversed with one-third going to the general stream of education and two-thirds to the vocational stream. As we will argue below, we agree with the urgent need to upgrade and develop vocational education, as addressed by the Vocational Education Commission. We see it as decisive in contributing to the improvement of educational quality across the board. We are, however, against a "pure" vocational education system. This would be a great mistake and would come at too high a cost. The real issue is not the relative weight of vocational education in comparison with general education; it is the spirit of its development. The best contribution that vocational education can make to education and to economic and social needs is to serve the educational logic of education for students from poor family backgrounds, rather than serving merely vocational needs. Let us turn now to this analysis.

Can Vocational Education Serve an Educational Logic?

The 1997 international standard classification of education adopted by UNESCO makes a clear-cut distinction between general education and vocational education on the basis of their respective objectives (UNESCO 1997). General education is aimed at leading students to a deep understanding of a subject or group of subjects, while vocational education and training is aimed at equipping students with practical skills, know-how and an understanding of a particular occupation or trade (Moodie 2002). In this perspective,

vocational education has the clear task of producing skills relevant to the needs of the labour market. The *Free Encyclopedia* defines vocational education in very general terms as education that prepares learners for vocations—that is, for professions, trades and occupations. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines vocational education as “instruction intended to equip persons for industrial or commercial occupations. It may be obtained either formally in trade schools, technical secondary schools, or in on-the-job training programs or, more informally, by picking up the necessary skills on the job”. It is interesting to note that in both definitions very little effort is made to distinguish vocational education in a formal setting, such as vocational schools, from mere training in training sessions or in on-the-job learning or “learning by doing”. Therefore, according to the definitions, vocational education is to be confined to the development of skills for performing a job. The definitions reflect the general view that everybody takes for granted. The analysis of the difference between general and vocational education requires going far beyond this very superficial view.

The Difference between General and Vocational Education

When we consider the social contract by which society grants the education system the power and responsibility to select people for jobs according to their educational achievements, the distinction between general and vocational education becomes blurred because actually both streams have major vocational roles. What can therefore distinguish general and vocational education? Why develop vocational education? To make it easier to understand our argument, it is perhaps necessary to anticipate a little of our own answer to this question: we think that vocational education is essential but that it should have a purpose other than developing skills. By offering a different way of acquiring knowledge from that of general education, vocational

education is very valuable and its main purpose can be elevated to that of providing equal educational opportunity.

In the first instance, we can substantiate our position by exploring further what distinguishes vocational education from general education using the systematic approach of Hager and Hyland (2003). In their comparison of general and vocational education, they identify four areas of difference—institutional setting, didactics, nature of output of the learning process, and sociological characteristics of students. In the following, we summarise their findings and add some of our own insights (GE stands for general education and VE for vocational education):

A. Institutional setting

- GE:** (1) Education delivered only in the classroom at school. (2) Long duration of studies. (3) Teachers with theoretical and disciplinary skills.
- VE:** (1) Education delivered alternately in the classroom and the workshop (or workplace). (2) Short duration of studies. (3) Teachers with practical and technical skills.

B. Didactics

- GE:** (1) Didactics based on a large array of disciplines arranged in a sequence to facilitate the learning process (curriculum) and on pedagogy that fits this sequence (theoretical approach, reasoning, capacity of understanding, giving meanings, scholarship). (2) Learning by learning. (3) Input: “intellectual” materials (books, articles, lectures).
- VE:** (1) Didactics based on a large array of disciplines arranged in a sequence to facilitate the learning process (curriculum) and an attempt to adapt the curriculum to a pedagogy that alternates between theory and practice. (2) Learning by doing. (3) Input: work equipment, tools and machines.

C. Output: Nature of expected knowledge delivered and acquired

- GE:** (1) Ability to learn without tutor; general and “declarative” knowledge: understanding meanings using different systems of symbols and representations. (2) Motivation for study: upward mobility.
- VE:** (1) Ability to do tasks without tutor; specialized and “procedural” knowledge: know-how; (2) Motivation for study: acquiring skills in preparation for a particular vocation.

D. Sociological characteristics

- GE:** (1) Origin of students: middle and upper classes. (2) Studies undertaken with a view to getting highly regarded social positions and well-paid jobs (managers, engineers, professionals).
- VE:** (1) Origin of students: working classes engaged in small crafts and trades. (2) Studies undertaken with a view to getting skilled jobs (skilled workers).

This ordered comparison of the two streams of education shows clearly the links between these four areas which make coherent the differences between the streams. More precisely, by using the analytical frameworks described particularly in chapters 8 and 11, we can see from this comparison that their specific didactics (B) and the corresponding institutional arrangements (A) have been designed for students endowed with different capacities and ways of learning that are rooted in their distinctive social origins (D) and in their corresponding distinctive expectations (C). The distinctive outputs of general and vocational education which can be characterised by the distinctive knowledge acquired are also underlined by numerous other authors (e.g. Blunden 1995; Stevenson 1995). However, in our view, what matters in distinguishing the two streams of education are the distinctive didactics that underpin their distinctive outputs. This

is the discriminating factor that allows an understanding of the real social function of vocational education.

What Is Vocational Education For?

The overall conclusion of this comparison is that the purpose of what is known as vocational education is clearly to increase the opportunity for less well-off children to study by adapting didactics and the institutional organisation of studies to their capabilities, their way of learning and their expectations. In other words, it offers an opportunity for continued education to segments of the population that would not get such an opportunity from the general stream of education and would otherwise drop out earlier from school. This is why vocational education is often conducted in informal settings in order to adapt the selection of students and the criteria of admission to different individual educational trajectories. Hence, vocational education is not about skills; it is about equal educational opportunity. The logic of vocational education is educational (as for general education) and not vocational as its misleading name may suggest. As with general education, vocational education is about selecting students for jobs and social positions—not according to their vocational skills and productive abilities but according to their educational achievements and cognitive skills. Lewis (1997, 1998) shares this unusual perspective on vocational education. Let us first elaborate a little more on this perspective in order to understand its implications.

In our field surveys, we discovered that students in vocational schools usually pursue their studies as far as they can. This is precisely what has been advocated by progressivist streams of educational philosophy: give every citizen the opportunity to study to the maximum of his or her educational potential. Very often, in fact, students of vocational schools continue with *powoso* after obtaining their *powocho*, and then to bachelor's degrees and even beyond. Hence, the vocational stream

opens a path towards higher educational attainments for the children of poor households. Generally, parents—not schools—make the decision for their children to enter the vocational stream. In a study conducted in 2002–2005, the author systematically interviewed students who took the business administration programme at the Faculty of Education, Chiang Mai University, about their motivations. The students indicated that their decision to enter the vocational stream was made with their parents and motivated by the short duration of study, low tuition fees, easier studies than in the general stream, and more opportunities to get a job after graduation. However, as we have already mentioned, they preferred in general to continue to the bachelor's level after graduating with a *powoso* rather than applying for a job. Their justification for doing so is interesting. They (and their families) felt that they would be too young when they graduated and had no need to work. Hence, as students in general obtain their *powoso* at 20–21 years of age and are about 23–24 years old when they go to work after their bachelor's degree, entering the job market at 23–24 years old is becoming the norm. This new social norm points to stronger family protection, with students feeling like and treated as children until a later age than before. Actually, besides pushing back the working age, this norm acts as a strong factor in the social demand for lengthening education. In Thailand, the main purpose of vocational education proves to be primarily educational; only its didactic device is vocational (we will return to this issue later).

For Skilbeck (1994), whether the two streams of education have an educational or a vocational flavour is the result of national history and tradition. This is a judicious remark that accounts quite well, for example, for the different situations between France, where vocational education is school based, and Germany, where vocational education is workplace based. Nevertheless, it does not disprove the fact that vocational education has an educational rather than a vocational nature. Vocational education is indeed a sort of social answer to educational inequalities stemming from social inequalities, as stressed

especially by educational sociologists. According to their analysis, children are culturally endowed according to their social origins and their family educational styles. The elite has their own subculture which they transmit to their children, while lower social classes have a different subculture, in general more practical and less intellectual than the elite's. Since within democratic political regimes schools are designed to transmit the subculture of the elite to the whole population, the differentiation in the cultural capital of children explains why children from lower class backgrounds perform poorly at school whereas children from the elite and upper classes perform much better. Vocational education is in great part underpinned by the adaptation of didactics to the cultural capital of children from lower social classes, in particular by a systematic alternation between the hands and the mind, between practice and theory, between doing and thinking, between inductive and deductive approaches to reality and to knowledge. It uses informal learning and learning by doing with a view to enhancing formal learning and knowledge (see chapter 11). Once more, we must stress that vocational education is not about skills but a specific way of acquiring knowledge and cognitive abilities.

There is another side to streaming, however. In Thailand, as elsewhere, the selection of students for the vocational stream after lower secondary school is a "negative" process to a degree: those students who do not perform in the general stream have no choice but to enter the vocational stream if they want to continue their studies. It would appear from our survey that, instead of schools streaming students according to their performance, going to vocational schools is the choice of parents and students themselves. However, even if the heads of poor families justify their decision for choosing the vocational stream by the shorter and cheaper studies (Thammarak and Worswick 2003), most of the time previous school performance has a greater weight in this decision. Actually, when children achieve good performance in the vocational stream, they often try to extend

their studies as far as possible by returning to the general stream when they can.

In fact, the vocational stream appears to be a social device to prevent a segment of the population from studying for too long so that the poorer members of the population (poorer in income and in elite cultural capital and life choices) can be steered towards lower social positions. As a matter of fact, the discourse of vocationalism advocates the abandonment of liberal education as provided by general education in favour of vocational and technical studies, which it insists can deliver skills. Underlying this discourse may well be a hidden agenda to divert an adequate portion of students away from long studies, thus not only weakening the competition for high social positions but also ensuring the continued supply of students for lower social positions selected on the basis of their educational achievements. In the view of vocationalists, the way to ensure that working class people remain in lower positions is to encourage them to undertake vocational studies.

The hope of each and every household is that the new generation will eventually undertake the extended education so clearly associated with higher social positions. The government has responded to this hope by reinforcing the vocational orientation of the whole education system. The paradox is that a response that seems to be fair should lead to the neglect of existing vocational schools, an existing effective means of promoting equal educational opportunity. It leads paradoxically to the development of new informal learning processes inside and outside the education system, and in doing so it diverts attention from vocational schools. Quite the opposite should occur. These schools should be cherished and nurtured in order to compensate them for educating the lower-performing students from poor backgrounds.

The Need to Rehabilitate Vocational Schools

We fear that in Thailand the real problem of vocational education will be left unaddressed while policies are based on misconceptions. In our opinion, in the past two decades an endeavour to promote the German dual system has been based on a misunderstanding of vocational education in Thailand. Thai vocational education has been traditionally structured according to the school-based model, which adopts an educational logic of education. We believe that acknowledging this characteristic is necessary in order that the correct policy measures aimed at significantly improving vocational education in the country can be taken. Let us evaluate the suitability of these models for Thailand.

Can the German model of dual education help?

Since 1985, Thailand has tried to incorporate the German dual vocational training model. Documents from the Vocational Education Commission indicate that vocational education institutions have been urged to adopt the German model. What is this model? Has it expanded in Thai vocational education? Has its implementation in Thailand yielded good results?

Some authors distinguish between two models of vocational education: the school model and the workplace model (Skilbeck 1994). It corresponds to the distinction made by others between the school-based model found in the United States and the United Kingdom and the work-based model found in Germany, Switzerland and Austria (Buechtemann and Verdier 1998). Very briefly, both models alternate theoretical courses in the classroom and practical courses in the workshop. The difference is that, in the first model, learning proceeds from the school towards the world of work, and it involves adding workshops to classrooms in the premises of the school. Conversely, in the second model, which is known as the dual model,

learning proceeds from the workplace towards the world of education. In this model, learning on the job is designed in a systematic and explicit way and occurs in the workplace, while theoretical courses are delivered by schools.

The German dual model of vocational education has been influential at a world level because the strength of German industry has been attributed to it. In fact, it goes back to the Middle Ages when all over Continental Europe a system of apprenticeship prevailed. In this system, craft skills were transmitted through strictly organised and controlled training conducted by craftsmen belonging to guilds and trade unions. To this practical training—which gave trainees the practical skills and secrets of fabrication—Germany added in the nineteenth century more liberal and scholarly learning related both to the crafts and to the body of knowledge that a civilized citizen should acquire. This addition to learning on the job proceeded from a general move towards the school and the development of modern education. From this evolves an education that is delivered at two learning sites—the enterprise where the trainee usually works and a public vocational training school where the trainee acquires more scholarly knowledge. The two sites of the learning process—the classroom and the workplace—are governed by different authorities and different laws. Federal law applies to workplace training and Lander (state) law to schools. This model was reinforced in the 1969 Vocational Training Act.

In the dual system, the largest part of learning takes place not at school but in the workplace, such as on the shop floor of factories or in the office of companies. The students are at the same time trainees in the enterprise for three or four days per week and students at a vocational school for one or two days per week. In the enterprise, they are tutored workers who learn under real conditions. The tutors or coaches are themselves workers; they are constantly confronted with new technical requirements, so they can introduce them directly and in real time to the students. In the classroom, students learn the way

they do in any classroom and are instructed by teachers with higher education qualifications (Phetcharee 2004).

In a nutshell, what characterises the dual system is the alternation between the workplace and the classroom. Learning on the job provides the real skills, while the school is separated from the place of learning by doing and delivers general education.

Attempts to develop a dual vocational education in Thailand based on the German model were originally made in 1985 after education experts undertook a series of overseas study tours, in particular to Europe. In this period, some schools were set up successfully, such as King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Ladkrabang, and Taluang Technical College specialising in industrial maintenance. More schools followed later, such as the Chiang Mai Vocational Education Institute in 1996. In Thailand, the dual model was systematised in 1995 for its implementation. Since then, numerous studies have been undertaken to assess the results. All in all, the implementation of the dual model has not been very successful.

Altogether, the main studies underline major flaws in the implementation of the dual model in Thailand, due either to the school or to the workplace. The first major flaw is the very ambiguous motives of students in the vocational stream. They and their families have chosen this stream, but they do not like the training in the workplace very much. In fact, they hope to later return to the general stream in order to study longer. In other words, the real motive of students is educational rather than vocational, and it is to undertake long studies using the vocational stream as a stepping stone to their ultimate goal. Our own survey found that a large percentage of students continued to bachelor's degrees after completing the *powoso* level at the vocational school. A significant proportion of vocational school students are not motivated at all for vocational studies and even less for the dual system's emphasis on workplace learning. The best motivated are students who plan to work in their parents' business after graduation. A second major flaw is the weakness of teachers, who

have not been specifically trained for the didactics required by the dual system. We will return to this problem later because it is the cause of the very low quality of vocational education. This problem may be compensated in some cases by the better and more intensive tutoring of students in vocational schools than in the general stream. These two flaws are school-related, but another major flaw is workplace-related. It is a problem that cannot be easily remedied by schools and public policies.

The workplace problem is twofold. On the one hand, enterprises that agree to participate in the dual model and therefore to take in students as trainees tend to be few. On the other hand, these few enterprises would accept students even if they have no real tasks related to the training for the students to do. For some analysts, this problem is particularly serious in Thai enterprises because of their management style. Very often, and this fact has to be emphasised, the training contract between the school and the enterprise is signed on the initiative of the school rather than the enterprise. This contract contains very loose provisions. Schools find it advantageous to be known for having many and good connections with industry. By the same token, enterprises find it advantageous to publicise their goodwill and their concern for education and the community. In reality, neither schools nor enterprises have a real educational motivation when they sign the contract. Most schools are at fault because they do not assess the negative impact of their lax attitude. Because of it, students have bad experiences in the workplace, particularly because they are often kept from the real jobs. Hence, they feel that they are not learning anything useful for themselves and are also useless to the enterprise. This feeling has a devastating effect on students' motivations and therefore on the effort they put into their studies.

However, when the dual system is employed by businesses as part of their training programmes, as is the case with the true German dual model, it seems that the results are much better (Bode 2004). The same good results are obtained when schools impose a clear

training contract on employers and closely supervise its enforcement in the workplace as do the Maisons Familiales Rurales schools in France. This model is rarely used in Thailand. Enterprises more often prefer to have their own in-house training programmes because they produce technical and behavioural skills that better fit the specific characteristics, organisation and culture of the enterprise and the workplace. Technical skills have to be fine-tuned to meet the requirements of each workplace. Behavioural skills have to be formed to suit the culture and strategy of each enterprise. Therefore, contrary to the discourse on the eminent role of schools in the learning society, enterprises are very reluctant to let vocational schools train their workforce, and influential labour management methods—such as those of Japanese car manufacturers—favour in-house training. Conversely, when workers ask their employers' permission to attend vocational school in order to upgrade or diversify their skills, employers prove generally to be very reluctant to allow them time off work to do so. The reason is not so much because of short-term labour cost considerations but mainly because employers are afraid to increase the instability of their workforce, which is already high, and to lose their workforce through a “training channel”.⁶

Our conviction is that the dual model cannot work in Thailand because of the attitudes of both partners—reluctant employers and lax schools. Except in very special and limited conditions, it should *not* be the model for vocational education. The case for a dual system in Thailand on the grounds that it is efficient in Germany is flawed because the model is alien to Thai culture and institutions. In particular, strong and expanded apprenticeship schemes that are able to underpin a feasible dual model of vocational education do not exist in Thailand as they have in Germany and some other parts of

6. The analysis made in this paragraph is based on the results of a comprehensive study of skills and labour management in Thai industries carried out by the Centre for Education and Labour Studies in 2004–2006 (CELS 2007).

Europe. By the same token, industrial relations in Thailand are very poor and weakly regulated, so that coordination between employers, trade unions and the government, which is a strong requirement for the creation and viability of the dual model on a significant scale, is not possible. In our view, it is much more sensible to improve the existing model of vocational education in Thailand, which is a school-based model, rather than to import a new one which would be almost impossible to fit into the national cultural and institutional framework. This school-based model is better placed to improve the quality of vocational education in Thailand—an improvement which is sorely needed.

A school model of vocational education for Thailand

There is no doubt that the tradition of vocational education in Thailand is the school model (Varaporn 1989; Tilak 2002). It seems, therefore, worthwhile to improve the functioning of this model rather than make vain efforts to develop the dual model. Such a focus would allow concentration of national effort on the weaknesses in the existing structure of vocational education in order to overcome its major flaws. It would also yield far better results for less cost.

The main problem of vocational education in Thailand—in particular in public schools and colleges—is the tremendous lack of resources. If the purpose of vocational education is to give equal educational opportunity to children from poor family backgrounds, a sincere policy position—going beyond just a demagogical stance—should be of the “affirmative action” kind. Affirmative action in this case would consist of allocating more resources to vocational schools compared with schools of general education, to compensate for the handicaps they face.⁷ The real function of vocational education is to implement

7. Of course, affirmative action could also apply to schools of general education in poor areas, which face the same handicaps as vocational schools do.

specific didactics suited to children from poor backgrounds and to children whose intelligence is of a more practical than theoretical kind and who are used to learning by doing. Understanding vocational education in this perspective would contribute significantly to the improvement of educational quality. For this purpose, three areas in particular should be investigated and supported by the educational authority at both national and local levels: the school workshop, the didactics in the classroom, and the teacher. Resolving these three issues would give the quality of vocational education a boost and would probably attract more students than are enrolled today.

In vocational schools, the workshop is a key didactic device which develops in students a real motivation for studying. It should be paid much greater attention both in terms of equipment and of teachers. In our field surveys, we have generally observed that the workshops of vocational schools are under-equipped. For example, the computers designated for clerical skill training, such as in typing and accounting, were often insufficient (frequently out of order because of a lack of maintenance), and students had to share the equipment during practical exercises. In fact, in workshops, it is usually a small group of students monopolising the scarce equipment so that their peers can only watch passively. By remaining idle most of the time, the majority of students cannot properly understand the exercises, because it is precisely in the workshop that understanding begins by knowing how to do things; this is the very process of learning by doing things (trial and error). A second problem with the school workshop is that very often the equipment at the disposal of students is obsolete compared with that in the workplace. Of course, the machinery used in the workplace cannot be reproduced as such in the school. But if students feel that they are learning outdated skills that will be of little use when they go out to work, they can be disheartened. Training facilities in enterprises—which do not replicate plant machinery but give an emphasis to the understanding of procedures—could be a good model for setting up school workshops. This would also avoid

leading students into believing that they are learning technical skills. They should be told that workshop learning is a first step in a different but not inferior learning process. They would then appreciate that vocational education offers the advantage of more diversified didactics that matches their specific strengths.

From our viewpoint, the main characteristic of vocational education is that its didactics differ from that employed in general education. Its didactics comprises a mix of practical and theoretical teaching and learning strategies that use the hands in developing the brain. To understand its didactics, the concepts of agency and reflexivity are useful (see chapter 11). Agency is about doing things, using the hands and the body. Reflexivity is about the assessment of one's own actions using systems of symbols and representations. In these terms, the didactics of vocational education are underpinned by agency with the objective being reflexivity. The use of informal learning methods fosters a formal learning process. Students take a path which goes from learning procedural knowledge to learning declarative knowledge. Efforts are made to develop implicit knowledge acquired by doing in order to make it explicit. This process of making knowledge explicit is a genuine first step in the process of learning. As a matter of fact, making explicit implicit knowledge is discovering the meaning of an action, the reasons behind a gesture, or the meaning of a procedure or practise by being able to express it within a system of symbols and representations. This is the learning process supposedly used in vocational schools. It would seem that a great many disciplines should be taught in this way, that is, in a way whereby knowledge acquired in the workshop is made explicit in the classroom. By explaining how things work, a path can be found from practice to theory, from procedural to declarative knowledge. This didactic approach can be developed for all disciplines, provided that relationships are firmly established between studies in the workshop and those in the classroom. As establishing these relationships should be at the heart of the didactics of vocational schools, this learning process should

not be left solely to students as it is today. On the contrary, it should involve the entire school machinery. In this endeavour, teachers are the key to success.

This didactic approach is very demanding because it requires teachers to work together, to meet regularly to discuss the progress of their own teaching and to coordinate their endeavours. Teachers need to have not only a strong commitment to their teaching, to their students and to the school, but also an accurate understanding of the relationships between practice and theory and how these relationships are established in different ways by each student, so that they can effectively play the major role of guidance. In other words, in order to apply the specific and demanding didactics of vocational education, schools should be staffed with exceptional teachers with a strong motivation for teaching and supervision. Regular training sessions should be organised to maintain and update their teaching skills as well as to instil the spirit of teamwork. It goes without saying that the dedication and professionalism required of these teachers should be reflected in their pay and rewards. Until now, vocational education in Thailand has received very little attention from society and consequently has been staffed with teachers who are poorly trained and not highly regarded. This has to change radically.

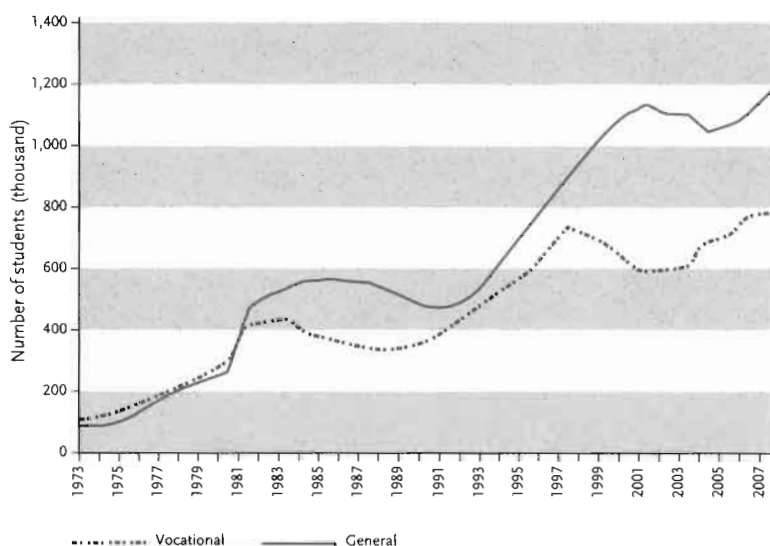


Vocational education provides practical knowledge for vocations and therefore eases somewhat the integration of students into the workplace. For this reason, it is thought to deliver skills specific to jobs. This is not the case for vocational education in Thailand. Because of its failure in this regard, it can neither be compared to nor aligned with the German dual model. Therefore, expecting vocational education to match the demand for skills in the labour market can lead to a dead end and may even prove to be detrimental. In other words, Thai vocational education is not vocational. It serves the same

purpose as general education. Vocational education is a valuable asset that increases the educational opportunity of disadvantaged students. We need to stress again here, as it is done throughout this book, that genuine educational equality is dialectically a condition for and a result of the improvement of educational quality, which Thailand badly needs.

This chapter has shown that vocational education contributes most to equal educational opportunity. It motivates students through better educational achievements enabled by a didactic approach that combines formal and informal learning methods to suit the capabilities of these students. Vocational education, therefore, opens the door to poorly endowed students to go beyond compulsory education. This calls for high priority to be given to vocational education (together with rural basic education, which we have not considered here), particularly by endowing this stream with the best equipment, didactics and teachers that the country can afford. Policy-makers should abandon the view that a discounted education is enough for poorly performing students. Instead, they should take the opposite stance that these students need an education of high quality to compensate for their handicaps so that they can help the nation meet its need for educated workers and maintain social balance. In this perspective and under the far-reaching conditions stated in this chapter, vocational education can be the most powerful lever to accomplish the goals of equal educational opportunity for all and improved quality of education across the board.

Fig. 10.1. The enrolment patterns of vocational and general education, 1973–2007*



Source: CELS database on education (raw data)

* Upper secondary enrolment in number of students

Table 10.1. Geographic distribution of public and private vocational schools, 2005

Region	Private	Public	Total	Public/Total
1. Northern	43	72	115	63%
2. Central	91	85	176	48%
3. Bangkok	95	29	124	23%
4. Northeast	54	107	161	66%
5. Southern	53	80	133	60%
6. Eastern	0	37	37	100%
Total	336	410	746	55%

Source: CELS database on education (data drawn from the Vocational Education Office)

The Teaching and Learning Process: A Theoretical Perspective

ALAIN MOUNIER

The analysis of the teaching and learning process has been at the heart of the science of education since the nineteenth-century construction of comprehensive national education systems. As early as 1872, Alexander Bain's *Education as a Science* had been published in England, and his theories and concepts were then rapidly disseminated worldwide. The science of education has been more or less broadly understood according to national traditions. Educational treatises and encyclopaedias of education have dealt with various areas, including the history of education, which is concerned with the progressive organisation of national education systems; the philosophy of education, which deals with the moral and political foundations of education; and the sociology and economics of education, which considers the relationship between education and society (e.g. Husen and Postlethwaite 1985). All conceptions of the science of education deal also, of course, with the core body of theory regarding the teaching-learning process and, more or less extensively, address its major dimensions. These dimensions are pedagogy and curriculum, which are largely founded on psychological and epistemological theories; teachers' education, which is meant to deliver the scholarship and skills of instruction to teachers; and

educational evaluation, which aims to measure students' educational achievements (Pinto and Couso 2007). Of course, education can be delivered without apparent theory, and some educationalists preach empiricism (Carr 2006); but theory and theoretical debates illuminate educational choices, which are the deciding factors that determine the quality of education.

This chapter is a small window into the black box of education, the process by which knowledge is taught and learnt. It is an elementary guide to the extensive and labyrinthine literature which has explored that process. What happens in this box is decisive for the quality of education, and this is why it is so important to be aware of relevant perspectives and debates. Thai researchers, in particular, have to deepen their acquaintance with the contents of the box.

Historically, there are two ways of analysing and understanding the teaching-learning process in the formal setting of education. The first is "dualistic", in the sense that it considers teaching and learning as two separate acts. The second is "interactionist", in the sense that it considers this process as one of complex interactions between knowledge, the teacher and the learner. However, the teaching-learning process has also been analysed in informal settings such as the workplace. These different perspectives allow the exploration of the possible and dynamic interactions between teaching-learning processes in formal and informal settings and over time.

Teaching and Learning as a Dualistic Process

As has been shown in earlier chapters, the development of mass education has become the affair of professionals and a matter of systematic and scientifically based methods. In the course of this development, two questions have recurred in debates: what to teach and to learn and how to teach and to learn. The theories of curriculum have tried to answer the former question, the theories of pedagogy,

the latter. These theories are dualistic in two ways. On the one hand, they examine separately the two questions of what and how. On the other hand, they investigate separately the question of the teacher and the question of the learner.

What to Teach and Learn? Theories of Curriculum

The curriculum is a course of study consisting of organised and stylised knowledge (defined in chapter 8) to be taught and learnt. It is organised in disciplines or according to subject matter. It appears in general as the instructions of national or local educational authorities or in terms of the educational offerings of educational institutions. It is most of the time defined for each level of education (and thus for the corresponding school age) and made available in official texts, textbooks and syllabuses. The elaboration of curricula has been influenced, rather than really underpinned, by curriculum theories.

Theories of curriculum treat the same questions and therefore encounter the same dilemmas as do philosophies of education (see chapter 5). There are prescriptive and descriptive theories. Prescriptive theories, which are probably in the majority, try to characterise and legitimate what *should* be taught. They appear in different guises, such as, in Schubert's (1986) terms, "content or subject matter", "program of planned activities" and "intended learning outcomes". In regard to what should be taught, there have been two opposing streams of thought since the foundational work of Ralph Tyler (1950). The first gives priority to social and political goals that the curriculum is meant to achieve. The curriculum is part of what Eisner (1985) calls the "educational technology" that enforces the path to achieving externally set educational goals. In that perspective, the curriculum is "instructional" and heteronomous, meaning that it is external to the learner and therefore mandatory. The second stream gives priority to the learner and establishes the learner as a source of the curriculum, in the Deweyan and Piagetian perspectives of cognitive development

(see below). The curriculum is negotiated between the teacher and the student; it is a fluctuating compromise.

Descriptive theories of curriculum analyse what exists empirically, that is, what is really taught and learnt. They often raise the same questions as does the sociology of education, and in particular they explore the extent to which the content of the curriculum leads to different educational achievements on the part of students according to their family backgrounds and/or their educational biographies (Giroux 1979). This kind of analysis has been carried out by radical educationalists, who highlight the fact that students are segregated according to social classes (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Willis 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Apple 1990; Hallinan 2000). Existing side by side with the official curriculum is a “hidden curriculum”, which is what is really taught and learnt in the classroom, and it may differ substantially from the official curriculum. Anyon’s (2000) survey of classrooms in five elementary schools located in contrasting neighbourhoods, from working-class to affluent communities, uncovered enormous differences in practice, from pure instruction to total freedom for students to choose pace and fields of studies. Today, the growing literature examining the history of curricula shows that curricula are compromises between different political projects and educational doctrines (Kliebard 1986; Tanner 1990; Pinar 2003). It highlights the fact that there is no ideal or universal curriculum but simply different curricula fitting different contexts (Cornbleth 1990). This fact poses cultural challenges to students studying abroad on the one hand, and to strategies for the internationalisation of education on the other (Varaporn et al. 1996; Rizvi and Walsh 1998; Leask 1999; Rizvi and Lingard 2000; Annop 2006).

In reality, the curriculum selects the disciplines with which a student will have to become acquainted in his or her studies and decides the depth and progression of this acquaintance. The decisions regarding which disciplines are to be taught are not really made on a scientific basis; rather, they are made on practical grounds according

to political and social educational objectives and the accumulated experiences of teaching. Moreover, they are subject to power struggles, since they actually distribute relative powers between disciplines within and between educational institutions—and this is of course a very sensitive matter (Groux et al. 2002; Leutenegger 2004). While any curriculum theory would emphasise that the elaboration of curricula is or has to be founded on principles established by the philosophy of knowledge, philosophers have never actually exerted more than a very indirect influence over the decisions of educational authorities and administrators regarding the selection of disciplines. Although epistemology and the philosophy of knowledge have divided the whole body of knowledge into broad areas of scholarship or disciplines—the humanities and the sciences—in fact those in charge of the elaboration of the curriculum pick and choose within this available knowledge. This is the manner in which, over time, the boundaries between disciplines and the number of disciplines change and thus curricula evolve.

The task of a highly systematic elaboration of curricula is huge and complicated. That is why curriculum reforms are actually marginal changes to existing curricula. Within the formal organisation of studies with their different levels and streams, curricula select not only the disciplines to be studied but also the links between and the sequences of disciplines as well as the progression of studies within each discipline. An important constraint is that the knowledge transmitted at each level of education has to be coherent with the preceding and next levels. The elaboration of curricula has also to consider what knowledge students who leave the education system to begin working have to take away with them. These are key decisions regarding the quality of education (Bell et al. 1976; De Landsheere 1992). The history of curriculum is in general very illuminating, but little work on it has been undertaken and then only recently.

In Thailand, as elsewhere, there are very few historical analyses of curriculum (Mulder 1997). Such analyses should be one of the

priorities of research in education. It is necessary for the proper assessment of whether the 30 per cent local content prescribed for the curriculum by the 1999 education reform is appropriate and if the influence of foreign curricula, in particular American, on the national curriculum has positive or prejudicial effects on the quality of Thai education.

How to Teach and Learn? Theories of Pedagogy

The question of how to learn is actually answered (beyond the matter of curricula) by the pedagogy of teaching, which is generally based on a scientific understanding of cognitive processes. Over time, three major theories, tenets or traditions have influenced pedagogy with their postulates of what the concrete operations of the brain are in the learning process (Giordan and Girault 1996; Giordan 1998, 2001; Ruano-Borbalan 2001).

Learning as recording information

The first and most influential tenet regards learning as a mechanism for recording information, a view inspired by Locke's philosophy of knowledge. Locke (1760) states that the mind is a blank slate that the learner has to fill with the knowledge and information provided by a teacher. It is a pedagogy which postulates a one-way and linear relationship between the transmitter and the recipient and does not differentiate between information and knowledge. It is typified by the lecture and the conference. This "full frontal" teaching is still a common pedagogical practice, particularly at higher levels of education. It can work provided the teacher and the learner ask the same questions; that is, the message will be understood if it is expected! Under such conditions, this approach is an efficient means for transmitting large quantities of information in short time periods. In essence, it is based on the common experience that recounting a

narrative is sufficient to make it understood. It generally does not work well with children.

Learning as rehearsal

The second tenet considers that learning is the same as training. The pedagogy is based on the rehearsal of questions followed by immediate answers being provided, a practice reminiscent of religious indoctrination. This approach relies on repetition as the pathway to knowledge. It is based on behaviourist psychology, particularly the work of Skinner (1971), who showed that by reacting to stimuli, particularly rewards and sanctions, learners' performance improved. Conditioning the learner in this way may accelerate the acquisition of knowledge. Together with lecturing, this pedagogy is the main teaching approach used in most countries, including Thailand. Its foundational principle is that only behaviours, not the mind, can be observed, and these can be acted upon only through conditioning and training. This means that the work of the mind remains a black box.

Pedagogy of the construction of cognitive capacities

The third tenet is the constructivist pedagogy, which aims at revealing the workings of the mind. From within this Kantian perspective,¹ reason is regarded not as an innate human quality, as asserted by Enlightenment philosophers, but as an individual construct. Reason is the basis for all understanding, and understanding is an individual construct of reason. Consequently, in this tenet, the human subject plays the leading role in his or her own cognitive development. The major representatives of this tenet are Piaget in Europe, Vygotsky in

1. In particular, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason: Reason as the Ground of Understanding* ([1781] 1934).

the former Soviet Union and cognitivists in the United States. Let us examine their contributions very briefly.

The Swiss pedagogue Piaget (1970) proposes a constructivist pedagogy as a *decontextualised* project—a pedagogy independent from the economic and social context of teaching and learning and based on a postulated universal way of learning—which is a more accurate formulation of a pedagogy originally largely developed by Dewey (Hickman and Alexander 1998). Rather than seeing learning as resulting from an encounter of an ignorant learner with a knowledgeable teacher, this tradition regards learning as primarily stemming from the independent will and action of the learner.

It is well known that individuals do not passively receive external raw data; rather, they select and process data in order to assimilate them. The learner is thus the major actor in the process of learning. The learner learns because he or she wants to, because he or she shows interest in discovering, creating and behaving freely. The act of learning results from an individual project and is based on the representations that the learner has of knowledge and of its role. In Piaget's view, learning leads to the progressive logical organisation of individual knowledge through two complementary activities of the learner: *assimilation* of data coming from the environment into his or her own knowledge structures, and *accommodation* of his or her own structures and modes of thought to the environment. Learning reveals this independent activity of the learner, which is based on his or her capacity for sensory perception and on his or her symbolic and conceptual schemes.

Vygotsky proposes pedagogy as a *contextualised* project. Whereas for Piaget learning is an individual decontextualised logical-scientific process, for Vygotsky it is an individual contextualised process entailing interactions with a given social environment (Vygotsky 1978). In other words, learning entails interactions with others, with peers and teachers in the classroom and with adults in daily life and in the family. From this perspective, it is embedded in a culture. In

particular, language inherited from the environment is a major vehicle for learning and for the development of the child (Vygotsky 1982). Vygotsky's position is consistent with sociological analyses showing that students' families and cultural origins, and their interactions in the classroom, impact on individual educational performance.

Constructivist models have offered a decisive insight into the act of learning. They have started a powerful stream of "new pedagogy" across many countries, in particular the child-centred pedagogy, an ambiguous approach which argues that learning processes are similar among individuals and yet are also specific to each individual. Notwithstanding the real analytical progress they have made, constructivist models remain rudimentary, even in their latest development.

In line with Piaget's theory, cognitivists, or psychologists of cognition, have tried to observe the operation of the learner's mind in order to design effective methods of teaching and learning. They have explored from a neuroscience perspective the activities of the brain, such as perception, memory, thinking and language (Malim 1994; Reed 1996; Reisberg 1997). Memory plays an important role in their theories, whether it is short-term (work) memory or long-term (storage) memory. For them, memorising is not the passive assimilation of knowledge as is generally believed; rather, it is an intense activity of the brain as it processes external information. Many cognitivists postulate that the brain works in the same way as a computer and that thinking is similar to computation. The theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner 2006) states that the individual has various intelligences which are independent of each other and which differ according to the field of knowledge. This theory attempts to systematise the common observation that there are different individual endowments of talents. Research in this area may provide a scientific basis for the practice of streaming in education systems.

Pedagogical theories emphasise mainly the methods of teaching that have to be adapted to the workings of the brain. To a certain

extent, they assume that the ways of teaching and learning are independent of the knowledge to be transmitted. Those are severe limitations that interactionist approaches expose and avoid, which we now turn to.

Teaching and Learning as an Interactional Process

The assumption that teaching and learning is the result of interrelationships and interactions between knowledge, the teacher and the learner is the foundation of the discipline of didactics. In that regard, didactics inherits this vision of interactions from philosophers and cognitive psychologists.

Interactions between the Learner and Knowledge

The acquisition of knowledge is a complex process which is dependent on both the content of knowledge and the learner's personal and cultural characteristics. The philosophy of knowledge and cognitive psychology have highlighted this dimension of learning.

Bachelard: Learning as deconstructing and constructing knowledge

This stream of thought is exemplified by the philosopher Gaston Bachelard's (1938) theory that new knowledge, produced by scientific research, can only develop in opposition to pre-existing knowledge. This applies to the teaching-learning process too. Contrary to what is commonly believed, learning is neither a continuous nor a linear accumulation of knowledge with new layers simply added to previous ones. Learning is a much more complex process entailing two contradictory phases. First, the individual must deconstruct previous knowledge in order to make room

for new knowledge. Then, the individual must acquire the new knowledge.

While constructivist models have identified how individuals build knowledge with others through logical and interactive processes, they have only implied the complex interaction between the internalised previous knowledge of the learner and the new external knowledge being acquired. Existing conceptions and schemes of thought incline the learner to reject any new information which does not fit comfortably with them. Therefore, new concepts, new approaches, and new schemes of thought are not directly built on pre-existing knowledge.

There is always a disconnect between what is already known and experienced by the learner and what is new. This is why learning is somehow painful and destabilising. Moreover, because of this gap, and the understandable reluctance to abandon previous knowledge, neither deconstruction nor reconstruction can happen spontaneously. A facilitator, a mediator between the old and new knowledge, is needed. That is, learning cannot bypass teachers; formal learning processes require specially trained experts, namely teachers, who will build a bridge linking the learner's existing knowledge to the newly found knowledge. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development is based on the same observation and leads to the same conclusion. The zone of proximal development refers to the gap between what an individual can do independently (using previously accumulated knowledge) and what he or she can do with someone else's help (that of a teacher). In this didactic view, distance learning can supplement, but cannot replace, face-to-face teaching when it comes to transmitting knowledge and forging understanding.

Bruner: Learning as a process embedded in the culture of the individual

The most promising cognitive pedagogy is based on the idea that the interaction between the individual and knowledge—the process

of deconstruction and reconstruction—is actually embedded in the culture of the individual. Influenced probably by the American tradition of cultural anthropology, the American psychologist Jerome Bruner, considered the father of cognitive psychology, argues that individuals are active learners, rather than the passive individuals posited by behaviourism. In the course of this activity, learners elaborate the meaning of their own existence and of their environment (Bruner 1990). For Bruner, the workings of the mind cannot be isolated from the learner's cultural environment. The learner uses the system of symbols of his or her own culture to understand events by giving them meanings or, as Bruner (1986) puts it, to build “possible worlds”. In this endeavour, language is a crucial tool; it is the main heuristic means for developing meaning.

Bruner criticises the views of those cognitivists who regard the workings of the human mind in processing external data as simply a form of logical computation. In his view, elaborated on the basis of Cole and Scribner's work, the learning process is also a cultural act in which learning involves “negotiating” meanings and representations, through which a culture is both transmitted and transformed (Cole and Scribner 1974; Bruner 1990, 1996). Meanings and representations can be classified into two categories. The first concerns the representation of physical phenomena; it is amenable to logical-scientific thought in which knowledge is coded and conceptualised, and it is governed by a system of formal rules and theoretical schemes. This knowledge is abstract and decontextualised. In Bruner's opinion, Piaget focused only on this first category. The second category concerns the representation of human beings and their relationships; it is amenable to narratives in which events are the product of human memories, past experiences, current actions, hopes, feelings, passions and interactions. This is a highly contextualised knowledge which is shaped by cultural traits and human mores and relationships (Light and Butterworth 1992). Therefore, the understanding of human actions and works requires the recognition of representations and

symbolic systems embedded particularly in language. This postulate of Bruner has been developed further by his disciples (Jorna 1990; Altarriba 1993).

In this regard, Thailand offers a singular situation. In Thailand, in contrast to Confucian and Western societies, scientific and academic knowledge is not highly valued because there are no strong traditions of studying, writing, reading and debating. Learning at school, reading and reflecting are felt to be unnecessary, painful and even uninteresting per se. Curiosity about the world's body of knowledge is limited to a few "interested" people. This situation may arise from societal patterns, and this singular social relationship to knowledge may be underpinned by hierarchical social relationships (see chapter 5). Thus, to blame the national education system for these social attitudes towards learning amounts to scapegoating the system. In reality, it is cultural and social factors which are responsible, although they operate behind the scene. To confront these factors openly would entail a change in social attitudes towards knowledge, and this would imply getting rid of hierarchical social relationships, a truly radical change in society. The low esteem for knowledge within dominant Thai beliefs, values and behaviours leads to a curious paradoxical social phenomenon: diplomas are highly valued as indicators of social status and as access to well-paid jobs, while the knowledge they are supposed to embody and to certify is not (see chapter 9).

Learning by using systems of symbols and representations

The discovery that learning is embedded in culture because it manipulates (by using, abandoning, transforming, enlarging, etc.) systems of symbols and representations can be traced back to cultural anthropology (Geertz 1973; Cuche 1996). It is among anthropologists that this fundamental aspect of knowledge and its acquisition through learning has been most fully explored. In the educational field, Vygotsky was the first to emphasise that the

learner is learning through social interactions by using and enriching language (Vygotsky 1982; Wertsch 1985). For Bruner, however, the recognition of representations and symbolic systems goes far beyond language. In fact, the sciences and narratives use a great diversity of systems of symbols and representations.

Nevertheless, until now only a few educational prescriptions have been drawn from this fundamental approach. One is that the humanities, based on narratives, should be taught alongside the sciences, because they are crucial in developing the learner's mind and providing access to meaning. This goes against the general trend that gives primacy to the hard sciences, subjects which are supposedly more useful for social and economic development. In some aspects, the perennialist philosophy is reinforced by Bruner's insight that a major role of education is the reproduction of a society's culture, particularly the view that pedagogy and educational achievements cannot be isolated from the cultural heritage of students (a view which converges with Bourdieu's). Within this perspective, education aims to socialise the individual by sharing the culture of his or her community, and through this it enables individuals to achieve psychological comfort. In other words, education invariably follows social and economic transformations rather than precedes them. Consequently, education cannot fundamentally transform an existing culture; it can only help to slow phenomena of acculturation. Nor can it be enlisted in attempts to solve economic or social problems.

Moreover, this cultural approach validates the exploration of comparative learning processes in different cultural contexts. It provides the basis for exploring the social relationships to knowledge which are shaped by cultural traits. This suggests that learning processes are to some extent distinctive to each culture (Cole and Scribner 1974; Cole and Means 1981; Raveaud 2007). This approach suggests caution when it comes to the internationalisation of education, since local cultures stand in the way of the international marketing of education.

The Didactic System

Didactics is a discipline of educational science that explores and explains the relationships between knowledge, teachers and learners (Joshua and Dupin 1993; Schulman 2004; Veillard and Neubert 2007). These relationships together form a didactic system. As a scientific discipline, didactics is the science of the didactic system. It focuses on the black box of the teaching-learning process, analysing it concretely and in depth by observing the actors in action and their interactions. More precisely, it explores how knowledge is acquired through these tripartite relationships. In this view, knowledge is characterised both as scholarship and as the capacity to understand and construct meanings in whatever the domain—language, mathematics, science, history, geography, technology, arts and so on. It is structured by the symbols and systems of representation that underpin communication and understanding in each domain.

As opposed to pedagogical theories, the didactic approach stresses that teaching and learning are acts which cannot be isolated from knowledge. Teaching and learning actions are not understandable in themselves but only in relation to the content of the knowledge, that is, to the discipline which is meant to be taught and learnt (Pinto and Couso 2007; Tiberghien and Malkoun 2008). The idea is that the epistemology of any discipline is the same whatever the circumstances and conditions of teaching. The epistemology of a discipline is the singular organisation of knowledge within this particular domain of knowledge, with its own notions and concepts, symbols and signs, as well as systems of representation and their articulation into theories. Theories are necessary for constructing meanings and developing the understanding of things. Contrary to the developmentalist theory of curriculum described earlier, teaching and learning are not entirely circumstantial and have to follow “robust” sequences in order to efficiently understand and teach the inner logic of a given discipline.

Didactics focuses on processes and is able to measure and explain the gap between what is meant to be taught and learnt and what is really taught and really learnt (Stigler and Hiebert 1999). It explores a didactic system through the analysis of six major relationships between knowledge, teachers and students. These relationships are articulated and explained by six corresponding theoretical frameworks.

The transposition process

The process of transposition analyses the relationship between knowledge and the teacher. It is the way teachers translate scholarly knowledge into teachable knowledge. This process can be analysed precisely by observing the task of lesson-plan preparation. In this task, teachers are helped by the curriculum of the discipline, textbooks, teaching material, and their own experience and understanding of the discipline (Chevallard 1991, 1992, 1997). However, beyond their own understanding of the discipline, teachers actually take into account numerous contextual factors which are not related directly to the knowledge to be taught but nevertheless influence the content and the way of teaching (Perret-Clermont 1979; Coppé 2007).

Teacher-student interactions in the classroom

The second relationship, that of the interactions between the teacher and students within the classroom, has been extensively analysed. These interactions are key actions of both the teacher and students. They produce results that may be different from the expectations of both parties. Observing the behaviour of the class is to observe the concrete, here-and-now didactic relationship. These observations may allow a classification of classroom organisation and behaviour to be built according to criteria related to the discipline, the lesson plan, pedagogical choices (individual work, group work, exercises, problem

solving, emphasis on memorising or on understanding, etc.), the duration, regularity and relative importance within the curriculum of instruction, as well as contextual factors such as the social origins of students, their prior knowledge, the size of the classroom, the conditions of learning (space, available materials and equipment), administrative constraints, directives and orders and so on (Schön 1991; Sensevy and Mercier 2007; Schwarz et al. 2008).

The didactic contract

The didactic contract established between the actors in the classroom provides the framework regulating their interactions (Brousseau 1984, 2002; Amigues et al. 1988). It is an implicit agreement on key dimensions of the didactic relationship between the teacher and students. In the classroom, the teacher and students agree upon and enforce progressively implicit relations, rules and regulations concerning behaviour and knowledge. The didactic contract is concerned with the kind of behaviours which are allowed in the classroom, relating, for example, to the teacher's style—benevolent or authoritative—and students' discipline and participation. It defines the objectives of the teaching-learning process (e.g. succeeding in tests and examinations). It delimits within the constraints of the curriculum the scope and the depth of knowledge which is transmitted in lessons. In fact, the didactic contract also regulates the transposition process by exerting a feedback effect on it.

Naive knowledge and the sociological component of didactics

This relationship establishes the links between the student and knowledge. In the transposition process and in the classroom itself, teachers have to take into account the initial knowledge of students. Didactics suggests, in line with Bachelard's and Bruner's postulates, that when entering the classroom students are already equipped with

prior knowledge as well as their own understanding of scholarly disciplines. This knowledge is called naive knowledge (Tiberghien et al. 2002; Kucukozer 2005; Veillard et Coppé 2009). Naive knowledge is made up of different and often incoherent systems of signs, symbols and representations. It is built by the child himself or herself on the basis of personal experiences, informal knowledge provided by peers, the family, the neighbourhood and occupational environment, and his or her understanding of the knowledge acquired in previous formal learning at school. Teaching is meant to deconstruct and transform this naive knowledge so that more accurate and more scholarly knowledge can be acquired. In fact, the naive or previous knowledge of students tends to dictate their way of learning new knowledge at school, and may lead to misconceptions and misunderstandings. The goal of teaching is to bridge or at least narrow the gap between the initial or naive knowledge of students and the scholarly knowledge they are expected to acquire. Teachers have to be aware of this gap in order to guide students towards a true and deep understanding. At each level of education, and according to social origins, the gap between naive and scholarly knowledge is different for each child, and this may partly account for differences in educational achievements.

Acquisition of knowledge and situated cognition

The relationship between the student and knowledge also has to be analysed from the perspective of the outcome of the teaching-learning process. Such analysis explores the very process of students' acquisition of knowledge through transforming and expanding their previous knowledge (Stigler and Hiebert 1999; Hiebert et al. 2003; Tiberghien and Malkoun 2008; Schwarz et al. 2008). Culturalists and cognitive psychologists offer a fairly good characterisation of what is true acquisition of knowledge: it is the capacity to understand events and phenomena, which means to make sense of them and to construct meanings, by using systems of symbols and representations.

This applies to both scientific and narrative knowledge, as termed by Bruner. Teaching and the assessment of knowledge acquisition have both to rely on this characterisation. True and deep understanding is the capacity to cross Vygotsky's zone of proximal development so that students are able to update and expand their knowledge without the help and guidance of a teacher. It is a condition of durable knowledge.

When this is not the case, it is difficult to transfer and apply new knowledge to contexts other than school or even the classroom. In trying to explain this phenomenon, some educationalists have borrowed the theory of situated cognition from research into the difference between the human mind and the computer (Clancey 1997; Salembier et al. 2004). Situated cognition refers to the difficulty of applying a given body of knowledge in changing circumstances. Many students find it difficult to transfer the knowledge acquired in a particular discipline and in a singular context (the lesson, the classroom, the school) for use in other disciplines (e.g. using mathematical concepts in physics) and in other contexts (e.g. applying scholarly knowledge in the workplace). Outside the classroom, knowledge acquired at home and in the workplace tends to prevail over scholarly knowledge acquired at school (Veillard and Neubert 2007), and scholarly knowledge tends to be forgotten eventually. Illiteracy among educated people is partly explained by this phenomenon of situated cognition. For these reasons, evaluating what knowledge has been really understood and assimilated by students is a highly challenging task. This is the important task of assessing educational achievements.

Evaluation: Exercises, tests and examinations

Evaluation is a key component of the didactic system. Organised through exercises, tests and examinations, it acts upon and shapes all other relationships between knowledge, teachers and students.

There are few studies looking at the effects of evaluation on the didactic system, although obviously the matter is of paramount importance.

Evaluation has an effect on the transposition process. In the classroom, the teacher constantly evaluates how well students understand, through exercises and tests that have been designed in the preparation of the lesson plan. The kinds of exercises and tests (multiple choice tests, experiments, problem-solving tasks, dissertations, etc.) are indicators of the transposition process. Testing how well students have understood the knowledge taught involves the assessment of various capacities, such as memory, reasoning, understanding and even the capacity for self-learning. Based on the results of these evaluations, the good teacher promptly adapts his or her way of teaching (e.g. by way of further or different explanation and illustration) and takes into consideration these results in the preparation of subsequent lessons (Coppé et El Mouhayar 2007).

Evaluation is a key dimension of the didactic contract. There is an implicit agreement between teacher and student on the objectives and methods of evaluation. In the didactic contract, evaluation of knowledge acquisition can be more or less rigorous, tests can be of narrow scope and easy or broad and difficult, and the score system can be harsh or lax. A student who achieves good scores tends to go on to get further good scores and vice versa, thus a sort of hierarchy of students is established within the classroom. Evaluation influences greatly the depth and scope of study of a subject matter. In particular, it is well known that the implicit understanding between teachers and students may emphasise the preparation for tests and examinations so that students can pass and continue to the next level of education. Tutorials in school and private tuition may be stressed over real understanding and acquisition of knowledge.

How tests are taken and how scores are given depend very often on contextual variables. When it comes to evaluation, the didactic contract takes into account a range of benefits accruing from good

results and high scores to students, teachers, families, schools and even communities. Very often, and more often with the increasingly business-like management of schools, contextual factors count more than academic factors in evaluating achievements. By giving primacy to scores over knowledge acquisition, the quality of education will be sacrificed.

In conclusion, formal learning may be characterised by four main dimensions:

1. the systematic transmission of knowledge for the sake of its dissemination
2. a formal organisation of knowledge (its selection, transposition, stylisation, progression and depth, and evaluation) and a theorised didactics
3. the mediation provided by a teacher between the learner and knowledge
4. teaching-learning processes that are mostly decontextualised, except for the influence of culture

This characterisation of formal learning and didactics becomes clearer when we contrast it with informal learning and informal didactics.

Informal Learning

In contrast with formal learning, informal learning is a highly contextualised process that limits the extent and use of knowledge to quite unique situations. It therefore conforms much more than formal learning with the rules of situated cognition. We analyse this contrast by examining the content of knowledge, the pedagogy, and the mediation between the learner and knowledge in informal learning settings such as the workplace.

Procedural Knowledge

John Anderson (1983) defines two ways of acquiring knowledge—declarative and procedural—and describes the knowledge thus acquired as *declarative knowledge* (or factual knowledge, both logico-scientific and narrative, according to Bruner's distinction) and *procedural knowledge*.

Anderson defines declarative knowledge as the stock of available information. Residing in long-term memory, it can be refreshed through rehearsal and mobilised through reflection and reasoning. It is built through a process of understanding which occurs by relating events to their causes and by constructing new meanings using representational language and symbols.

As for procedural knowledge, Anderson regards it as the mastering of procedures through usage and control. Procedural knowledge is similar to know-how (e.g. how to ride a bicycle), which is learnt through practice. Doing and practising is a generally underestimated way of learning. Procedural knowledge can be equated with informal learning leading to implicit knowledge. By doing and practising, the learner comes to know how to do things without necessarily knowing why. The learner may not question why some procedures are better than others but simply become expert in their use by applying them repeatedly. Thus, the accumulation of procedural knowledge is the result of a process of learning by doing. Informal didactics is not organised in a systematic sequence of learning, as formal didactics is. Instead, the content of the acquired knowledge is constrained by the field of experience, say, by the particular job and the actual tasks performed. For example, for engineers who rise to the position of manager, while their initial engineering education is obviously useful in understanding the technology of work processes, their managerial skills are acquired later through the experience of running a plant or a company. The same can be said for “unskilled” workers who pick up specific skills through work.

Learning by Doing as Informal Didactics

For economists, learning by doing—highlighted by observations in the aircraft industry and theorised by Kenneth Arrow (Arrow, 1962)—is considered from the perspective of the enterprise as a whole. The productivity of labour in the firm or in the national economy is related to its experience in producing (the learning curve), measured by accumulated production over time (Lamoreaux et al. 1999; Chichilnisky 1999). This approach has led to a new theory of economic growth (Solow 1997). It has also produced the notion of the learning organisation. Here we refer to learning by doing at the level of the individual or the work team on the shop floor, which is mainly studied by psychologists and ergonomists.

Dynamically, learning by doing is not a continuous learning process. What is learnt in the workplace is only what is taught by technology in general and jobs in particular. Learning by doing is constrained by the technology and the organisation of labour in the workplace. From this limitation arises the question of the types of skills formed. More generally, working in real conditions, and in the concrete and unique context of a given workshop or engaging in a given activity, entails learning how to operate according to the standards of the profession. It involves penetrating the “secrets of fabrication” in a very specific work process. Clearly, the content learnt is very specific and narrow. In contrast to schools, the workplace is characterised by a highly contextualised learning process, something emphasised by cognitivists (Martin et al. 1995; Linhart and Radner 1999). In the workplace, the knowledge acquired through learning by doing is determined by the precise context of the job, by the company’s management style and by the technology used (Whiteman 1981).

The pedagogy of informal didactics is doing things and experiencing, which the term *learning by doing* highlights. To a certain extent, informal learning in the workplace can be compared to learning an art, where acquiring the know-how depends on constant practice as

well as on possessing talent and aesthetic sense. The major pedagogy of learning by experiencing is repeating a task, observing errors made and then correcting them in order to improve the performance of the task. For the individual, this involves trial and error (Astofli 1997). By experiencing, the learner improves his or her procedural knowledge. By producing, the worker discovers how to fine-tune existing processes, tools and machinery, as well as to make improvements in his or her cooperation with co-workers. Actually, learning by doing is the discovery and application of infinitesimal and often imperceptible innovations within the constraints of a technology and of a certain organisation of labour. It is a source of improvement of labour productivity (CELS 2007). In the workplace, learning by doing is both an individual phenomenon—the face-to-face encounter of the worker with the task—and a collective phenomenon which entails fine-tuning the micro-division of labour within the work process. That is, it involves refinement of the tacit division of labour between workers within the same shop floor or the same work team, the outcomes of which reflect individual leadership, skill and experience.

In fact, learning by doing is a by-product of sensitive labour management practices. The more autocratic the management, the lower the learning and vice versa. Learning by doing results from trial and error, and how much freedom and responsibility is given to workers determines if it is fostered or hindered. It has been observed by industrial sociologists that the existence of strong and authoritarian foremen reduces the frequency of micro-innovations because workers are not confident enough to challenge orders and decisions, even when they feel that these orders or decisions are not appropriate. In other words, the company culture, reflected in the management style, determines if the workplace promotes learning by doing.

While an important characteristic of formal didactics is the need for a mediator between the learner and knowledge, this is not so for informal didactics in theory. In practice, however, the theory does not quite apply. Individual learning by doing is very often a process of

imitating an experienced worker or a leader. Hence, somebody plays the role of a model. Much of the time, the apprenticeship of craftsmen is based on imitation, with the master giving advice and teaching the skills from time to time. In the factory, new workers observe experienced workers and often receive guidance and help from them. As with formal learning, the “tutor” embodies the state of the art, but his or her mediating role is neither systematic nor regular. The goal of the workplace tutor is the correct performance of the task, rather than the improvement of the worker’s conceptual understanding of the task. The worker is expected to quickly assume his or her role in production and in the division of labour. In the case of informal learning, Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development is obviously very narrow.

In conclusion, informal learning may be characterised by four main propositions:

1. Informal learning deals with how to do things and is based on practice and experience. It is essentially learning by doing. Conceptualisation of knowledge can take place but remains contingent on the context.
2. The accumulation of knowledge is not an objective of learning by doing; such learning is always a by-product of the work process, a reality ignored by management ideologues when they assert that contemporary firms are “learning organisations”.
3. Informal learning is a highly contextualised learning process.
4. It is the tool or the technology, rather than a teacher, which mediates between the learner and knowledge.

The obverse of each of these propositions characterises formal learning. For analytical purposes, we need to distinguish between formal and informal learning, but in practice there is no such clear-cut distinction because they are closely linked. Indeed, linking them in the right way can improve the learning process, both at school and in the workplace.

Dynamic Links between Formal and Informal Didactics

In all concrete learning situations, formal and informal didactics are used in combination, although with varying weightings. In each combination, the links between formal and informal didactics constitute continuities between thought and action, theory and practice, and conceptualising and doing.

Agency and Reflexivity

Two major concepts—agency and reflexivity—are useful in studying the links between formal and informal learning. The concept of agency refers to the individual's ability to act, while the concept of reflexivity refers to the capacity to assess an action, a capacity exercised through the use of symbols and representations.

There is a two-way interaction between agency and reflexivity which is typical of human thought. From one direction, we observe that the use of the hand, the body and the senses together with practice (procedural knowledge) gives rise to concepts and explanations, as well as to meanings and understanding, of events and the environment (declarative knowledge). In other words, as Anderson's architecture of cognition suggests, declarative knowledge can be built upon procedural knowledge. This takes place as an inductive process of knowledge acquisition where reflexivity is nurtured by agency. From the other direction, we observe that a conceptual framework—expressed using systems of representations and symbols—provides meanings for the physical and social environment, and it may guide the hand and the body, as well as actions and feelings. It is the development of procedural knowledge based on declarative knowledge and is a deductive process of knowledge acquisition where reflexivity drives agency.

These two ways of knowing can be made explicit to learners when they learn to assess by themselves how they come to understand and learn. This self-assessment—knowing about knowing—has been called *metacognition* by cognitivists (Brown 1975; Weinert and Kluwe 1987; Metcalfe and Shimamura 1994; Hartman 2001). Learning processes, both formal and informal, within the family, the school and the workplace use both these ways of interaction between agency and reflexivity, although the primacy of the one in relation to the other varies. In school, for example, primacy is given to the reflexivity-to-agency pathway, whereas in the workplace the direction is usually reversed, from agency to reflexivity.

Didactic Links between Formal and Informal Learning

In school, where formal didactics prevails, practice and informal didactics are also used as a way of checking whether the theoretical knowledge transmitted in class has been mastered. Practice and learning by doing are employed in order to arouse the curiosity and interest of students in theoretical matters, or to develop the reflexive capacity of students by invoking their previous experiences. In this way, personal experience serves as a device of formal didactics, an approach commonly observed in vocational education. In the workplace, of course, training also provides formal knowledge, although it does so on the basis of experience and with a view to serving immediate and practical purposes.

Reciprocally, formal didactics can be put at the service of informal didactics. In the workplace, where the latter prevails, employers use indicators of formal knowledge acquired at school (e.g. diplomas) as the major criteria for recruiting new employees. They know from experience the extent to which certain types of formal knowledge and cognitive abilities can be employed in certain jobs and can foster learning by doing. The role of initial formal knowledge in

facilitating the learning of specific techniques and behaviours on the job corresponds to the cognitive dimension of skill.

Therefore, improving learning processes, whether formal or informal, implies a better coupling of formal and informal knowledge. The problem is that most people approach this link from a vocational, rather than an educational, point of view (see chapter 8). Within vocationalism, the goal of preparing learners to become immediately efficient in a job leads to an emphasis on informal learning, both at school and at university. Its strategy of improving this link between informal and formal learning is not geared to enlarging the knowledge base of students as one might expect. Rather, it is driven by efficiency goals and is intended to make students better suited to jobs and to reduce the time it takes to acquire the real skills on the job. Instead of widening the scope of an individual's explicit and declarative knowledge, informal learning actually reduces this scope. In other words, the lowly contextualised learning situation of schools is increasingly constrained by the highly contextualised learning situation which prevails in enterprises and organisations. What this means is that the avowed goal of improving the quality of education by basing formal didactics on informal didactics—to be achieved through opening up educational institutions to business—in fact retards the acquisition of knowledge in school. As such, vocational education should be conceived as a system where the acquisition of formal knowledge is based on informal didactics and deductive methods. This could be the condition for providing the same educational opportunity in both the general and vocational streams of education. This orientation of vocational education would significantly contribute to the improvement of educational quality for socially disadvantaged children (see chapter 10).

The Dynamics of Knowledge Acquisition: The Teaching-Learning Cycle

Dynamically, the teaching-learning process is a succession of teaching-learning cycles which constitute the educational biographies of individuals. Each cycle takes the individual from one level (and structure) of knowledge to another, and the succession of cycles is the way by which knowledge is accumulated. The starting point of a cycle is the knowledge that the individual already possesses and the means that are mobilised for reaching the target knowledge; these are the inputs into a teaching-learning cycle. The quality of the didactic system depends on the quality of these inputs. The expected result or output of the teaching-learning process is the new knowledge acquired by the learner. If the teaching-learning process continues, the outputs become the new inputs for further learning. So we can define the teaching-learning process as a chain of cycles sequenced as follows: *inputs 1* → *didactic process 1* → *outputs 1* = *inputs 2* → *didactic process 2* → *outputs 2* → *etc.* The segment of the chain *inputs 1* → *didactic process 1* → *outputs 1* constitutes one cycle of the teaching-learning process. The chain may continue throughout the life of an individual or it may end at the end of schooling. Thus, we can understand the teaching-learning process as a social dynamic in which the outputs of a cycle are the inputs of the next cycle. Therefore, the relationships between the knowledge, teachers and students of a didactic system involve in fact two forms of knowledge: knowledge as an input of a cycle and knowledge as an output. This means that the quality of education determined by the teaching-learning process is dependent not only on the quality of the didactic process itself but also on the quality of its inputs and outputs.

Knowledge as input

The inputs of the teaching-learning process are of three types. The first is the previous knowledge of learners together with individual or collective schemes of thinking. French historians of the *Ecole des Annales* have called these schemes *mentalités*, mentalities that are time-specific patterns of thinking of a person or a group. American anthropologists have added that these patterns are characteristics belonging to cultures and subcultures. They are ways of understanding and building meanings by means of symbols and representations. All these traits are mostly shaped by the environment and the culture of the learner and by previous learning processes. They evolve slowly. The second type of input is tools configured by the individual himself or herself, or by institutions, which in fact delimit the knowledge to be acquired in a teaching-learning cycle. These tools are curricula, textbooks, information, data, discourses and equipment (i.e. laboratories) in the case of formal learning. The third type is the skills of teachers and coaches, that is, both their expertise in the discipline to be taught and their pedagogical skills. In fact, all these inputs have to be previously produced; they are in fact the outputs of previous teaching-learning cycles.

Knowledge as output

The outputs of the teaching-learning process are the knowledge acquired by learners, that is, their educational achievements. There are implicit and explicit outputs because knowledge can be implicit and tacit or explicit and codified (Dienes and Perner 1999; Rolf 2002).

Implicit outputs are mainly newly structured knowledge of the individual reflected in changes (preferably strengthening) in his or her schemas of interpreting, explaining and handling systems of symbols and representations. This structured knowledge remains most of the time implicit as a new attribute of the individual (self-

achievement, new skills and know-how, new behaviour, enhanced scholarship, new schemes of thought and of constructing meanings). Implicit knowledge remains mainly in the private sphere, even though it is used by the individual in public activities. Generally, even if there is no formal recognition of this knowledge, particularly in the case of a self-taught person and of informal learning, it is always socially acknowledged. Implicit outputs of teaching-learning processes are individual and can only be used by the individual for further learning. But this implicit knowledge necessarily disappears with the disappearance of its bearer because it cannot be transmitted, except for a small part in the process of raising children or coaching colleagues on the job. In the long term, accumulation of knowledge can occur only if the outputs of teaching-learning processes are made explicit so that they can be available as inputs for subsequent cycles.

New knowledge can be made explicit through procedures of social recognition, that is through translating a culture into *oeuvres*, codes and standards. For example, in educational settings, examinations, tests and diplomas make acquired knowledge explicit; as does the certification of experiences, skills and competencies in workplace settings. Explicit knowledge takes the form required by its dissemination (textbooks, publications, databases, scientific discourses and narratives, patents, equipment and machinery, etc.). Because it is made independent from its bearers, explicit knowledge can be deployed for further learning; it becomes public and can be accumulated over time by its transmission from generation to generation.

Bruner (1996) uses the term *externalisation* to describe the process by which any society makes explicit at least a part of its implicit knowledge in order to preserve and transmit it. Borrowing from the work of French cultural psychologist Ignace Meyerson (1948), Bruner states that externalisation is the process of translating a culture into works, or *oeuvres*, such as narratives, arts and techniques. Writing, printing, and today the electronic storage and transfer of information are certainly *les oeuvres* (the works) that have historically contributed

the most to the externalisation of knowledge, making possible its transmission from generation to generation. Turning to Hannah Arendt (1958), we find that she distinguishes two postures in ancient Greek culture: *vita contemplativa*, where the act of contemplating (thinking) prevails, and *vita activa*, where the act of labouring prevails. Knowledge acquired through thinking and labouring disappears with the body and the flesh of the thinker and the labourer, unless the outputs of those activities are crystallised in works that may endure for eternity. *Homo sapiens* and *Homo laborans* can “survive” and make history only if they become *homo faber* through their creations or oeuvres. Together they constitute the culture of a society that can be transmitted to later generations.

In summary, the accumulation of knowledge only takes place through works. In terms of education, the explicit outputs of teaching-learning processes, which in turn become inputs, are largely crystallised in texts, documents, blueprints and databases that research makes available. Explicit outputs are also embodied in the narrator, the teller, the teacher or the tutor. Research and the teacher in all these different guises are the crucial factors and actors in the externalisation and transmission of accumulated knowledge and culture. Without researchers and without teachers, knowledge would remain largely implicit and would be lost to future generations.



The education system can deliver education of good quality provided that the teaching-learning process can remain lowly contextualised. This is a requisite that can be better appreciated after the above analysis. Educational institutions provide the only context where the teaching-learning process meets the conditions of a systematic, comprehensive and effective transmission of knowledge. They are the only institutions where knowledge is organised into curricula and programmes of studies, where teaching skills are forged and systematically mobilised,

where knowledge as an output is accumulated and transformed into new inputs for further learning, and where the experience of didactics is harnessed, assessed and continuously fine-tuned. They are the only context where the teaching-learning process can be socially organised with efficiency and equity. They are the only institutions which can cooperate for the sake of realising this purpose under the coordination of a dedicated administrative apparatus able to manage millions of people who are part of the system. No other institution can do that, and families and businesses in particular cannot. No market regulation, no encroachment of economic interests, no involvement of partial parents and no isolated local authority can offer the same comprehensive organisation and experience or can achieve the same performance.

In Thailand, the Brave New World of education is certainly not perfect and the task to make it paradise is certainly an unachievable chimera. But improving the quality of education across the board is certainly possible. Among other things, researchers, educational actors and the authorities have to join hands to improve first of all the teaching-learning process in all its dimensions.

Conclusion

This book explores the four dilemmas that Thai education has been facing since the beginning of the 1970s: quantity versus quality, perennialism-postmodernism versus progressivism, work versus education, and diplomas versus knowledge. Our diagnosis is that the first alternative of each conceptual pair has been continually favored and chosen by society and government. Herein lies the explanation of the low quality of education across the board. This low quality of education is by far the major problem the country faces and has to solve. Let us briefly summarise the main findings of our research regarding the largest flaws in the orientation of the Thai education system. They represent formidable obstacles to the improvement of educational quality. Only a deep understanding of these flaws and obstacles can help overcome them.

Inequality against quality

In many ways, the development of Thai education during the last four decades, in particular its very rapid democratisation, has been outstanding. Invariably, there have been shortcomings too. The

poorest children of the country have been left behind and have not benefited from schooling. These are children from the hill minorities along the borders, from the Deep South and from immigrant families. Some observers view this failure as a scandal and even a political crisis. The cause of the problem is commonly identified as the unavailability of educational services to these children or the inability of their parents to pay for their education. It is certainly an injustice to deny some children the same opportunity in education as others have, and this situation must be rectified. But the solutions will not be straightforward. Believing the contrary is being unrealistic. It should not be forgotten that in certain cases the problem may arise from a lack of interest on the part of parents. It may also be due to the rejection—explicitly or implicitly depending on linguistic considerations—of the dominant education system. No matter how serious educational inequalities are, and no matter how difficult they may be to remedy, however, concerns over this issue have focused on the quantitative aspects of education in debates about education and have worsened another problem, namely the costly and worthless inflation of credentials. By contrast, we have shown throughout this book that the major problem of Thai education is the quality of education. This is not to deny the importance of cost efficiency, of course; but quality has to improve whatever the resources allocated to education. And, more importantly, it is also a question of social justice and equity: the delivery of the same quality of education—and the best possible—to all children of school age. This question will be the major challenge of Thai education for a long time to come.

Throughout this book, we have urged readers to abandon the usual ideas about education and to suppress the tendency to take things for granted. To be understood correctly, education merits examination from a long-term and comprehensive perspective; it requires deep analysis and critique of conventional discourses. This is not often in evidence. It has been our intent to point out the need for further and comprehensive research on education and on the directions to take.

This book is about the quality of education, the necessity of it and the ways to improve it. This is a complex issue, and it cannot be tackled and solved once and for all. Efforts have long been made in this area, as in particular the education reform initiated by the National Education Act of 1999 has done. Along with the various revisions and amendments that have been made to it, this education reform has attempted usefully to build a bridge between traditional and modern education, but its objectives and directions remain blurred and contradictory. The lack of clear-cut and coherent objectives makes it difficult to define the quality of education that the country needs. Beyond its rhetoric of preserving national culture and strengthening social cohesion, the education reform cannot conceal the fact that economic concerns are its priority, in particular concern about Thailand's competitive advantage in the world economy. These concerns and the ways the education reform have tried to deal with them have given rise to serious flaws in the orientation of the education system. A preliminary analysis of these flaws has been presented in the chapters of this book. This analysis has to be deepened and broadened with in-depth research in order to obtain a more accurate and comprehensive picture of the state of education in Thailand. This is a task that academics, education experts and policy-makers have to jointly undertake to secure the future of education.

The major flaws revealed in this book arguably constitute seven powerful impediments to the improvement of educational quality. Besides inequalities and unequal opportunity to study, they are commodification, localism, vocationalism, credentialism, conformism and pedagogism. They may form the major themes and directions of ongoing and future scientific research. In our view, the first five flaws have resulted from the adoption of neo-liberal education policies. The other two flaws are probably linked to Thai culture and its unique relationship to knowledge.

It is quite paradoxical that neo-liberal policies should have prevailed in a country like Thailand where the state has traditionally been

strong. Neo-liberal policies have been implemented and advocated all over the world by countries where there has historically been a deep-rooted prejudice against the central state system. Initiated by the Thatcher and Reagan governments in Britain and the United States respectively at the beginning of the 1980s, neo-liberal policies have pervaded all spheres of social life and have prevailed in almost all countries worldwide up until the present time. That neo-liberalism should sway Thailand's public education policies is not surprising. Thailand has been subject to the continuous direct influence of the United States since World War II along with indirect influence through the Washington Consensus and international organisations such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The United States has trained generations of Thai education specialists and academics, provided a model for the organisation and operation of the Thai education system, and proposed education reforms. In fact, these reforms, in particular that of 1999, have been imposed by the World Bank and IMF as conditions of their structural adjustment programmes and economic rescue packages.

Commodification

With neo-liberalism, education has been transformed from being a public service offering a public good into a more or less private activity offering a commodity. Education as a public good is universal and free; as a commodity it is sold and bought for money on a market that may be domestic or international. This has been brought about by the rampant privatisation of education and the rapid development of private education. Rampant privatisation of public institutions is taking place in the name of making schools "effective" and universities "autonomous". These public institutions are increasingly adopting business management methods and embracing the logic of profit-

making organisations. Schools are becoming educational service producers. Teachers and professors are downgraded to mere skilled employees. They are no longer accountable to society but to their employers only. They are paid according to their performance, subjectively evaluated by their students. Students are no longer learners and human beings cared for by their teachers. Their status is to be mere clients or customers who have to be serviced according to what they pay. This model is totally contradictory to and probably incompatible with the Thai spirit and experience of respect for power, seniority and scholarship.

Commodification through rampant and open privatisation is detrimental to the quality of education for at least two major reasons. The first has to do with the content of education, which is becoming superficial and utilitarian by virtue of the demands of students and families as customers. In fact, these customers do not seek knowledge but passports to well-paid jobs and higher social positions. The programmes of business schools are the archetype of this newly evolved content of education. The second reason is that commodification enhances inequalities in education. Privatisation may reverse the trend of educational democratisation and discourage the poor from sending their children to school.

Concealed behind this threat of educational inequality is a wider and more serious danger. There are already signs that commodification of education is breaking the national education system into different parts dedicated to different segments of society. Broadly speaking, education is in the process of being divided into two distinct systems. The first consists of private and “reserved” or selective public institutions offering expensive education of good quality to the rich. The second is composed of open public institutions providing cheap education of mediocre quality to the poor. The elitist education system will adopt an international culture, while the public and disadvantaged system will preserve national and local cultures. This divorce may build on the educational divide a deep social divide.

Unfortunately, the secession of the elite and the middle classes from public education is not the best way to improve the quality of education across the board nor is it in the national interests. Policy-makers may believe that mobilising private funds from corporations and households ensures the quality of education. But if enlarging the sources of funding beyond the public avenues means privatisation and commodification, it will turn out otherwise. Relying on public revenues derived from taxes contributed by all households and businesses according to their incomes is socially less costly for the country than is private funding. In any case, it is a fairer way of developing education and of guaranteeing its quality. Future research should further explore these issues of commodification with a view to reversing the trend or regulating it for the sake of the quality of education.

Localism

Localism is the ideology that supports decentralisation through the transfer of power from the national administration to local authorities. Up until the present, the only concession made by Thailand's education reforms to localism has been the de-concentration of central administration by the creation beginning in 2002 of 175 educational service areas, which are actually local representatives and arms of the Ministry of Education. The present debate is about going further by devolving the function of educational administration to local authorities. This further concession to localism would shift this function from an academic logic to a political logic. However, this is by no means what is needed to improve the quality of education. The persistent complaint about the inefficiency of the Bangkokian bureaucrats of the Ministry of Education may be justified, but in that case the logical course of action should be to propose the reorganisation of the ministry's administration in order to improve

its efficiency. Such a proposal has never been put forward. In fact, the complaint is but a convenient argument for justifying devolution; it is asserted that this is the best way to improve the quality of education. We seriously doubt it. The complaint is borrowed from the neo-liberal-inspired argument that the devolution of administrative power to local authorities closes the distance between the service providers (in the present case, the educational service providers) and the stakeholders. This has never improved the quality of education anywhere around the world.

The truth lies in the opposite. Devolution means “contextualisation” of education: it submits educational institutions to their surroundings, to the will of local authorities, to external influences and pressures and to local particularities. Improving the quality of education requires, on the contrary, the “*decontextualisation*” of the teaching and learning process. Decontextualising means that educational institutions have to be protected and managed according to academic objectives and criteria. With devolution, education would become a pawn in local politics, threatening the independence of schools and of their personnel to the detriment of academic standards. Moreover, the necessary competencies and expertise currently available in the central administrative body of education cannot be replicated in every local authority. The demands and costs are immense to provide every local authority with the skills necessary in the recruitment and training of teachers, the design and development of curricula and textbooks, and the organisation of national tests and examinations. In fact, devolution would cause a general decline in administrative efficiency and increasing differentials in the quality of education between localities. What is needed are ways of making quality *more* even across the country.

More research is needed on this difficult issue, and it should explore further the effects of alternative ways of organising educational administration on the quality of education. It should in particular expose the political motivations and benefits that actually underpin

the arguments and rhetoric on both sides of the debate about de-concentration or decentralisation.

Vocationalism

The most popular and widely held belief regarding education throughout the world is that education produces the skills in demand in the labour market. Its impact on the quality of education is devastating. Thailand is not spared from this myth. Although the majority of employers assert that productive skills are much better forged in the real conditions of the workplace through learning by doing than in the education system, they are not listened to. Curiously, the propaganda of educational institutions has convinced not only students but the stakeholders of education in general and even experts of education that the opposite is true. The propaganda claims that improving the quality of education requires reorienting education towards a vocational mission so as to better satisfy the needs of the economy for productive skills. Trying to build ready-to-employ manpower, unfortunately, means that educational institutions adopt vocational instead of academic objectives.

This orientation is senseless for at least two reasons. Firstly, education is not equipped for developing work-related technological and behavioural skills. In fact, when educational institutions attempt to do so, they offer only a poor substitute made up of practical knowledge of narrow scope and short-term relevance. Basic job skills can be learnt in vocational education, but the real skills required can only be acquired on the job. Moreover, the rudimentary skills and little know-how that students have learnt at school will soon become obsolete with the rapid pace of technological change, making the efficiency of vocational education particularly low. Secondly, when educational institutions adopt a vocational orientation, they neglect or even forget what should be their major vocation: to forge cognitive skills.

Cognitive skills comprise, on the one hand, scholarship and, on the other, the ability for self-learning without the guidance of a teacher. In our view, the main purpose of vocational education must be the same as for general education. That means the role of vocational education must be the transmission of knowledge, albeit by using a different didactic approach from that of general education. Its didactics uses an “inductive” rather than a “deductive” approach to learning, which is better adapted to students with practical intelligence.

In other words, under the influence of vocationalism, educational institutions tend to choose the wrong way to improve the quality of education. They twist the mission of vocational education to fit a purpose that it should not have because it cannot fulfil it: that of delivering productive skills. Moreover, educational institutions align their strategy with the alleged technological needs of something (the economy) that they know only very superficially. By doing so, they lose the autonomy they need for organising the systematic development and transmission of knowledge. They thus fail in their major social role. As educational institutions, including vocational schools, are the only entities that can deal systematically with this social task, their misdirected orientation will ultimately harm the quality of education.

Vocationalism is put on centre stage by the other five flaws in educational orientation while at the same time reinforcing them. Further research should look more deeply into this two-way relationship between vocationalism and the other flaws in Thai education and also find ways to lead education back onto the right track.

Credentialism

Credentialism, which refers to the inflation of credentials, has its roots in three sources. The first is the demand of employers—

in particular that of the state in recruiting civil servants—for increasingly higher educational qualifications of applicants for the same job positions and for the performance of the same or equivalent jobs as previous generations of workers. Secondly, the democratisation of education has intensified competition between households for social positions, which has in turn triggered a race for higher diplomas. Thirdly, educational institutions are granting more and higher diplomas without ensuring that their graduates have acquired the level of knowledge that the diplomas certify. This inflation of diplomas has been called the “diploma disease”, a condition characterised by the multiplication of diplomas with weakened scholarly value.

The leading forces behind credentialism are educational institutions themselves. They seek to create a demand for longer studies and higher diplomas among employers and households and they lobby governments to support what they want. For their own purposes, they continue to feed the public’s confusion over the quantitative and the qualitative achievements of education. Educational institutions perceive their challenge as quantitative, which means how to increase their enrolment, from which profit and fame are to come. The way to increase enrolment is to offer more programmes—more options and streams in schools or master’s and doctoral programmes in universities. In order to attract a continuous stream of applicants on a long-term basis, they must ensure that all their students will eventually get a diploma whatever their educational achievements. This implicit deal becomes even more crucial when fees are high and students are viewed as customers. The deal can be honoured by lowering the standard of diplomas and relaxing the criteria of assessment. This is obviously detrimental to the quality of education across the board. More research is urgently needed in this area, in particular to find out who the leading actors are and what the leading factors are at play in this race to the bottom of quality.

Conformism

Conformism and mimicry are two prominent characteristics of Thai education. They have been heavily criticised, as they go against the prevailing one best practice of teaching and learning that is allegedly applicable to the entire world. In fact, the critics apply culturally specific criteria originating from Western individualistic societies. The criticisms actually amount to advocating a cultural revolution in Thai society far beyond what education can bring about. They echo today's pet themes of learning: critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork. But by doing so and by turning these themes into slogans, the critics deride genuine attempts to improve the quality of education. More importantly, they are exposing their own incapacity to understand the complex links between culture and knowledge.

These links deal with dominant and prevailing social relationships to knowledge. These relationships reflect the common understanding, symbols and representations attached to knowledge. They shape the behaviours and actions of the majority of social actors, particularly in regard to research and education. In Thai culture, knowledge is the prerogative of a few—the scholars and the elite. The common people feel that acquiring knowledge is a bold and subversive act which puts into question the social hierarchy and order and is a display of immoderate personal ambition. Asking questions is questioning somebody's knowledge and his or her social status. Questions are therefore taboo and are barely part of the teaching-learning process. Instead, learning is repetition and rehearsal; it is conformity and mimicry. It is not about enlarging an individual's systems of symbols and representations that enable understanding, making sense and giving meanings. It is not about securing access to those systems, which are the key to knowledge.

The distribution of knowledge among citizens is a privilege of the higher social classes and has to be protected from mass education. Mass education has to be confined to the promotion of conformism

and mimicry so that the social order can be preserved and the revolutionary effects of knowledge acquisition can be avoided. Diplomas can be given to a growing section of the population provided they do not change the social distribution of knowledge. Disconnecting diplomas from any serious assessment of scholarship makes it possible to remain on safe social grounds. This social conception of knowledge is certainly changing with the evolution of social relationships resulting from forces other than teaching and learning and with inevitable acculturation. It will be a while, though, before its changes can enhance the conditions for improving the quality of the teaching-learning process.

Research is crucial to explore further the relationship between knowledge and culture as well as between knowledge and social relationships. Cognitive psychology, anthropology, the philosophy of education and the philosophy of knowledge are major disciplines that have to be mobilised for this purpose. Thailand's research capabilities in these disciplines are still embryonic.

Pedagogism

Beyond administrative and school reform, the 1999 education reform has promoted two other important transformations: of curricula and of teachers' training and status. These two areas of reform are supposed to be the basis for a major shift in the teaching-learning process from a teacher-centred approach towards a learner-centred approach. This change is supposed to introduce into the classroom a progressive pedagogy where the role of the teacher is to adapt the progression of studies to every student's abilities within the constraints of the curriculum. Encouraged by the enactment of a law to enforce this change, numerous teachers have opted for a much more active pedagogy where students are to be more active participants in the classroom and, to achieve this, methods of stimulating a constant

interest in students are to be employed. This change is certainly necessary and it is a first step away from conformism. It is, however, far from being a panacea for improving the teaching-learning process. A risk of adopting this orientation is to dissociate the ways of teaching and learning from the disciplinary knowledge which is taught, so that innovations are limited to changes in pedagogical methods. This is the risk of pedagogism. With innovations in pedagogical methods made merely for the sake of innovation, there is no guarantee that new pedagogies are not put at the service of conformism and mimicry. A real step towards the improvement of the quality of the teaching-learning process is to adopt a didactic approach.

By didactics, we refer to the science concerning the relationships between knowledge, the teacher and the student, a discipline which opens the black box of the teaching-learning process and explores it from within. These didactic relationships are crucial factors of the quality of education. It is our contention that none of them have received sufficient attention in Thailand. Our view is that how each relationship stands at the moment is a cause of the low quality of education in the country. This assumption has to be firmly supported by comprehensive and ambitious research focusing on these different didactic dimensions. This research would greatly contribute to improving the quality of education across the board.



In conclusion, a real improvement of the quality of education throughout the country requires more than rhetoric, criticism and precipitate action. Major flaws have to be investigated scientifically and deeply to bring about real remedies instead of patches and placebo effects. The unique characteristics and realities of Thai education have to be explored and understood instead of blindly implementing imported and fashionable ideas. By calling attention to seven major flaws in the orientation of Thai education, we have also pointed out

seven major themes of research that have to be developed urgently and comprehensively, if the continually reasserted social and political will to improve the quality of education is also honest and sincere.

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EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE IN THAILAND

The Quality Controversy

Alain Mounier and Phasina Tangchuang, *Editors*

If an observer asked today whether Thailand is becoming a "knowledge-based society", the reply might be yes—provided that the country continues to invest in the education of her citizens.

Yet the authors of this book take a strongly critical view of Thai education. Investing more money in education is certainly essential, but it will not automatically lead to a knowledge-based society. On the contrary they say, current changes in policy and approach are actually moving Thai education away from transmitting and producing knowledge and scholarship, away from developing and honing individual abilities to think and learn. This failure parallels world trends: the uncontrolled and unbalanced increase in enrolment; the interference by political and economic interests in the orientation and management of educational institutions; and the commodification of education—in particular, privatisation, internationalisation and vocationalism. These symptoms are diagnostic of the so-called diploma disease which pervades the system. Public policymakers in Thailand are unfortunately too quick to compromise and may be unable to reverse this trajectory.

To overcome obstacles to a quality education, a society must place the transmission and production of knowledge at the core of the educational endeavour, genuinely and authentically, without making concessions to lesser aims and rationales. This commitment would give present and future Thai students the skills and abilities they need to master their own future and contribute to the destiny of the nation.

The book is a lively interplay between theory and well-documented facts. It offers a quantitative and qualitative analysis which is fundamental to understanding the overall situation of Thai education, to advancing the debate on educational quality and to charting a course for the future. It will appeal widely to educators, students, parents, academics, researchers and policymakers who are concerned about the state of education in Thailand.

ALAIN MOUNIER is director of research at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD) and has served as an adviser to several governments in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia. **PHASINA TANGCHUANG** is a senior researcher and director of the Centre for Education and Labour Studies (CELS), and an associate professor in the Faculty of Education, Chiang Mai University.

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