

Holistic Learning for Sustainable Development

According to the notion of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

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Abstract: Holistic Learning is considered to be the processes of learning appropriated for promoting sustainable development. This paper aims to identify the three main components of holistic learning; the concept of deep learning, learning by doing (in real sector) and the interconnecting communication-based learning of which encourage learners, both from formal and non-formal education system, to share and learn with their learning partners. In building the real education for sustainable development, the cluster of learning practice is presented to be an example of opened learning process. The result from this practice will be the emerging change agents as well as the learning reform.

Part I “Education for Sustainable Development means Self Learning” (for Thai society)

Since the notion of sustainable education has been introduced and emphasized in chapter 36 of Agenda 21(UNCED 1992), it was understood that everyone already agreed to the concept of sustainability. Especially the educational sector, who is a critical element for promoting sustainability and a driving force for the change needed.

There is a paradox in Thai society that, while the mainstream economy and formal education is monetary oriented, the self sufficiency economy is also promoted following the King’s concern about sustainable development and the people’s well being. Unsurprisingly, we do have the promotion of greening the ground and saving the world, the environmental and energy saving, the social awareness for responsible and sustainable behavior, the changing of consumption patterns, the improving resources management policy and practices and other humanized programs. While at the same time, our country

has lost the national resources in proportion to trade her economic growth (GDP).



Pic. 1 student working in rice field at Roong Aroon school



Pic. 2 Bio-fertilizer made from food waste by Soi3 Sai4(left) school



Pic. 3 Bio-fertilizer is used on vegetable plots and raising young plants. These are sold to earn educational funding for students. Soi3 Sai4(left) school



Pic. 4 Bicycles are adapted into “paddle mill” to add oxygen into the waste water treatment system. Soi3 Sai4(left) school

Part II Holistic Education for promoting sustainability

The Education Reform Act (ERA) in 1999, in some extent, has been prepared for sustainability. It opened the opportunity for everyone to learn in different kinds of education programs and curriculums. For example, home schools, non-formal education, and life-long education etc.

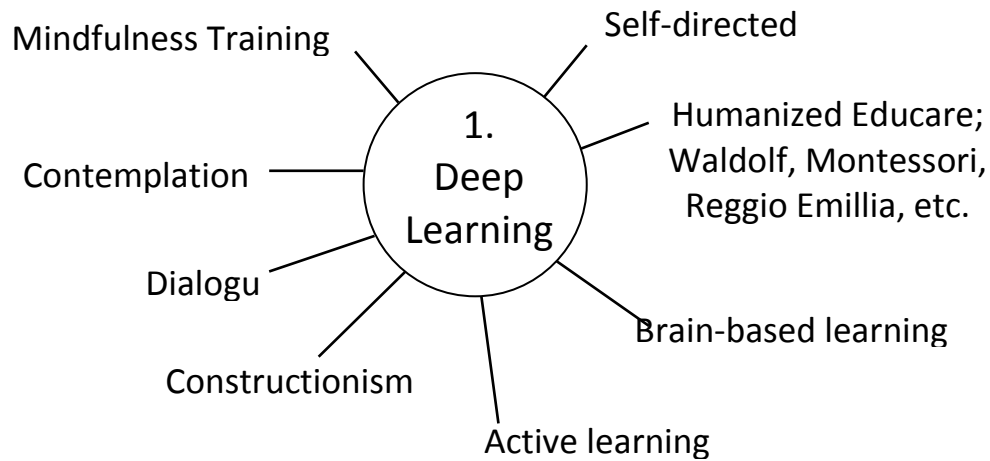
Unfortunately, the ERA practice did not interpret clearly the concept of personal development. Therefore, the ultimate goals of building the learning culture society, wisdom-based society and sustainable society, were never reached.

However, during the last decades, as a result from the Education Reform Act, the emerging of alternative learning programs and curriculums were found launching in some certain schools and institutions. The common goals were the personal enlightenment, insight into self learning, interconnection and relationship between human communities, themselves and ecological communities.

Such holistic education approach has easily led to learning to live sustainably and helped realize that everyone share, as a part of mother earth, the partnership of responsibility.

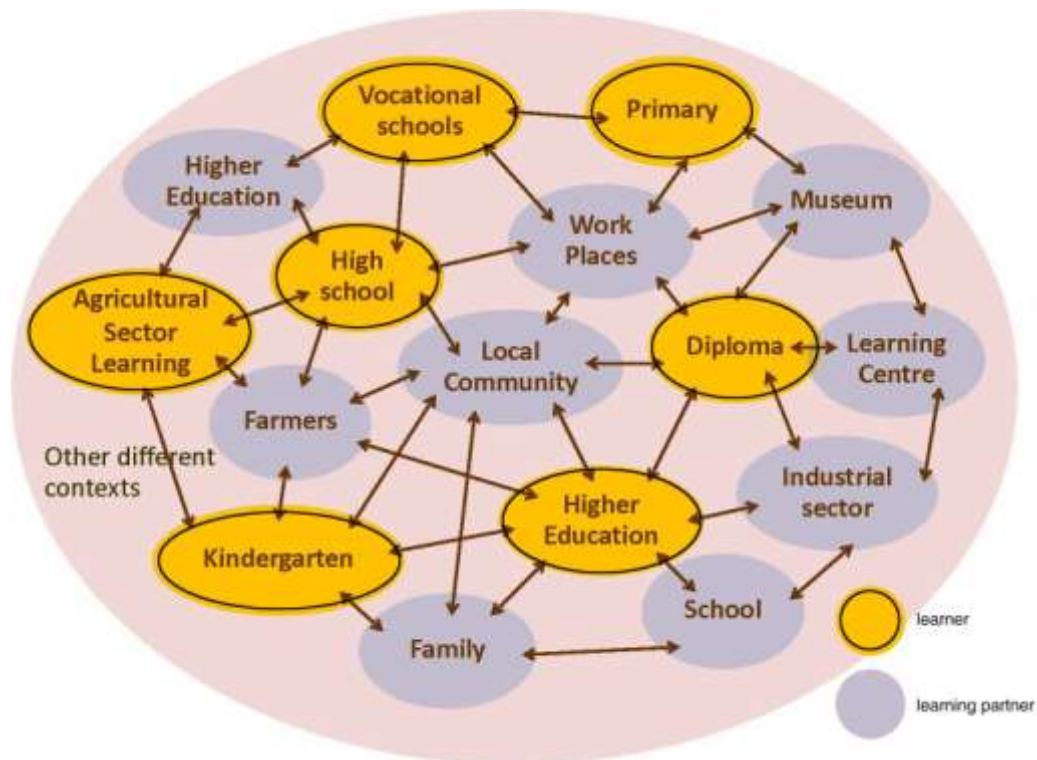
The crucial interventions which are required for promoting the holistic learning, as stated, to reach the ultimate goals, are the 3 components as followed.

1. The deep learning process aims to enlarge one's capability to learn (learning how to learn) in each proper stage of his/her life. Starting from basic self actualization to self-directed learning, one can practice through different ethos such as Humanized Educare (Waldolf, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Buddhist approach schools), brain-based learning, active learning, constructionism, dialogue, system thinking, contemplative education, mindfulness training. These learning processes directly influence the high proficiency learning outcome, providing that the learning partners (parents and teachers) are prompt to initiate those authentic learning atmosphere by themselves. Then the learner will be able to form their value systems and a vision of interrelationship of the whole oneness.



First Components of Holistic Learning Deep Learning Process

2. The Action-Learning in Real Sector aims directly to promote sustainable development parallel with social engagement. The real classrooms are usually waiting elsewhere outside the school. The learner should expose themselves into difference places and communities where the real living and earning activities happen. To deal with different culture and ethnic is also a prosperous experience. Various values, beliefs and visions are exchanged during these experiences. Many schools and institutions have already experimented this kind of special field study.



Second Components of Holistic Learning Action-Learning in Real Sector

The innovations of action learning and participation can be occurred by matching the learner and the learning partners to play their role in the same activities together in the real time and place. In this, they can actually participate and equally share the existing situation, problem solving process and tacit knowledge. Finally they will realize how much effort ones need in doing their jobs. They will learn that success can only be achieved by their own effort, and cannot be easily obtained with money like other commodities they are used to in the present world. Moreover, extra profits of knowledge and pride also come through this 'sweat your guts out' way. They will also find the real value of life through hard working the concept of self-reliance and self-sustain are no longer far from reaching.



Pic.7 Roong Aroon's kindergarten kids cooking.

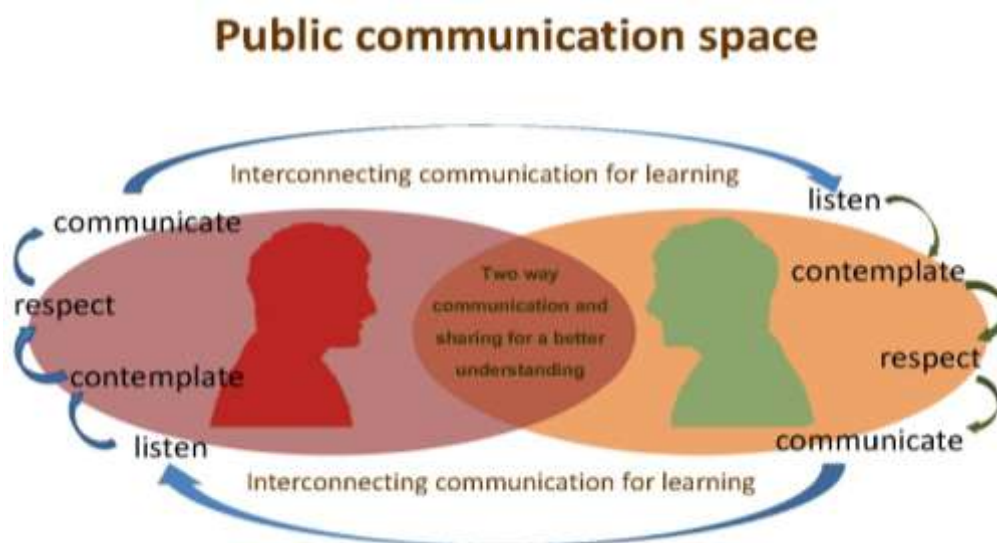
Pic.8 Students, monks and the locals joined the pilgrim walk, to promote Patow river conservation, Chaiyapoom province.



3. The Interconnecting Communication – based learning aims to create the learning culture society. There are two important concepts behind this process ,1) the dialogue in daily life practice and 2)the efficient public communication opened to real time /live presentation.

Why the interconnecting communication is needed to be built in the education process. Actually the present generation of mankind has to organize and deliver outside and the inside knowledge fluently. They are facing the difficulty of “literacy” in the sense of identifying, interpreting, and reflecting properly. Normally the root of constructions knowledge should originate from the inside rather than depending only on the outside instant information. The (2ways) interaction communication can be compared with the simultaneous information circuit of every cell in human body. Even though each cell is autonomous in its own function, but whenever the unexpected situation is detected, the whole body cells automatically deliver and react to each other as soon as possible. If any single cell is solely stand alone, it doesn’t deliver or react to other cells. It may become a free radical cell, which over consume other cells nearby, without knowing that the whole body will be destroyed, including itself.

From this example of cell’s information circuit, one can imagine how to create the interconnecting circuit and how to use communication technology to serve efficiency in delivery and react system thoroughly. Getting to know each other all the time is the ideal learning process of mankind



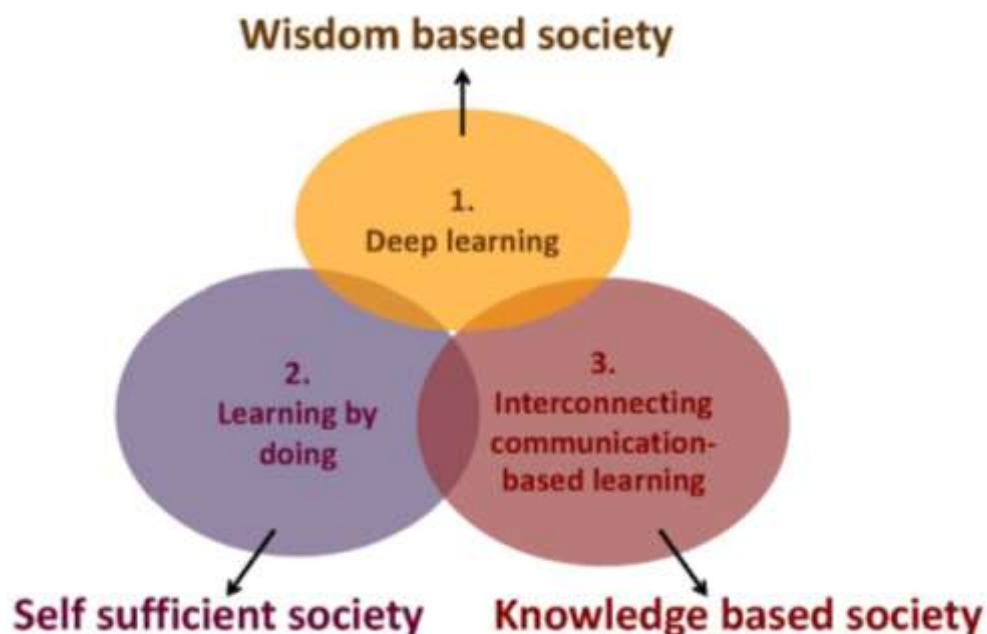
Third Components of Holistic Learning
Interconnecting Communication-Based Learning

In conclusion, the three components necessary for the holistic education has to be interrelated to one another in the same cycle. This input will promote the higher quality of learners and learning-based society.

Firstly, the systems thinking and deeper learning skills will support learners' self reliance and optimize their ability to learn, which encourage the formation of wisdom-based society.

Secondly, the learning by doing skills and experiences participated within the real sectors, will allow learners to truly engage with the complex connection of social issues, such as economic, ecological, social system, localization, globalization, technology and etc. The result will be the development of positive social attitude towards self-sustained economy society.

Thirdly, the interconnecting communication skills are the most efficient tools for being a lifelong learner, fitted with all kinds of context. Apart from self development, learners will be able to share and promote the social awareness issues along with civic participation. These abilities will contribute to the learning-culture society.



The three components of Holistic Education

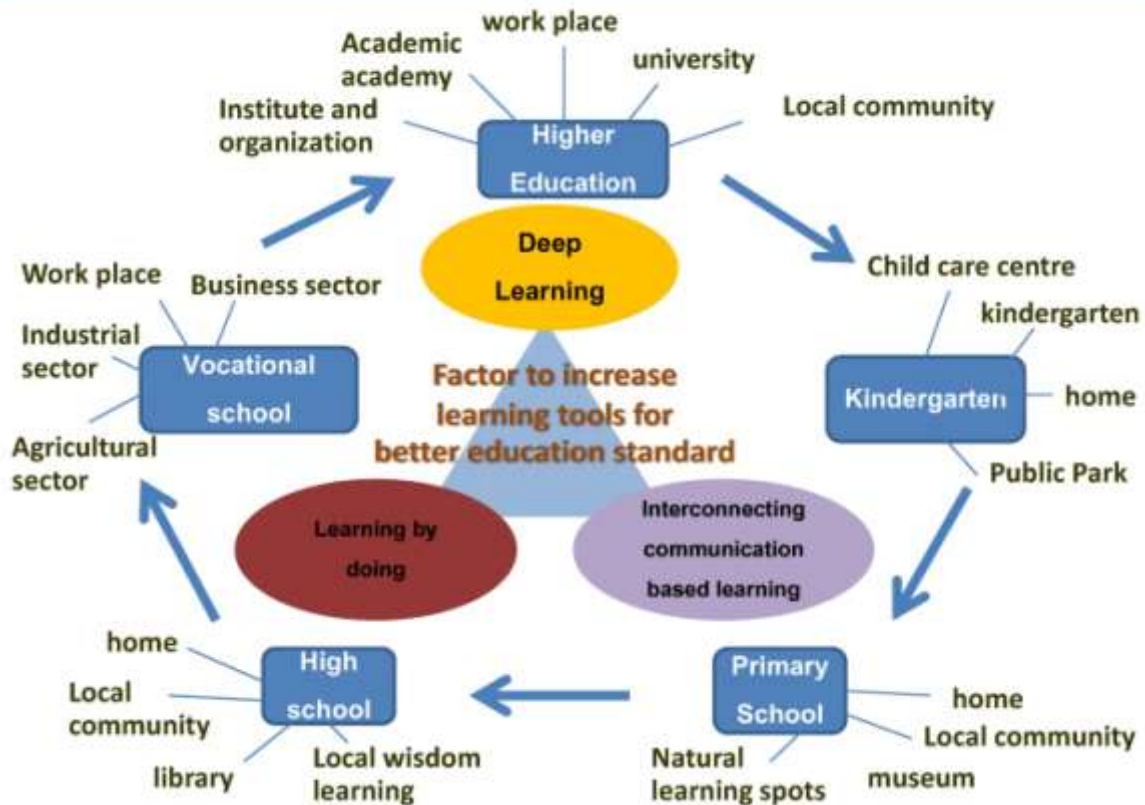
Part III The Implementation of holistic learning approach to promote ESD

What is the important key factor of success in ESD under the concept of holistic learning? In general, the teachers who are trained to be change agents will be firstly expected. It is also possible to design special teacher training programs in order to achieve the well-round character of ESD teachers, as well as the design of whole ESD curriculum. But, carefully considering from the holistic point of view, those key factors are still the input from outside. They are separated from partnership building or the whole school participation, which are the real key factor of success and sustainability.

The implementation should start at the training of change agents through the building of partnerships, such as the model of learning cluster. In this model, whoever is ready to share and learn become change agents or learning partners of ESD.

The whole process of implementing holistic learning into the education system to help promote ESD, certainly required the strategic plan, and the change agents. One strategic plan suggested here has been developed from the sharing experiences of a group of change agents who have been creating the alternative schools and institutions during the last ten years. This group of change agents were networking and sharing their lesson-learned and tried to bring the development of human quality into social movements for the next decade. They proposed the model of Cluster of Learning Practices to represent the holistic learning in practices as shown in the following diagram. The first agent to be changed should be the higher education institutes who will organize the research and development of each cluster. The members of the cluster composed of 2 partner groups, the learners and the learning partners. The main concept and input are the 3 components of holistic learning, as stated in part II. The process is the promotion of learning activities and training programs, designed by both partners together.

Cluster of Learning Practices model



The cluster of learning practice (CLP model) should be functioned as an operating unit in term of research and development for ESD. The higher education institutes who have the experience in partnership building should operate the experiment together with their existing partners. The collaboration of partners can only be achieved when all parties are agreed on the 3 components of holistic learning. Any kind of training programs, curriculum and pedagogy development should be designed in accordance with each pair partnership's requirement spontaneously. The sustainable ESD can only emerge when the CLP model has the right key factors, which are partnership building and the 3 components of holistic learning.

