THAI DISCOURSE ON QUALITY EDUCATION AND THE MAKING OF OTHERNESS

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Introduction

Conceptual Framework

Preliminary Findings

- Definitions/scopes
- How the conventional discourse of quality education applied to “hilltribe students” would unintentionally marginalize students from different cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion
Introduction

- Highland ethnic minority or “hill tribe”: Karen, Hmong, Lahu, Akha, Lisu, Mien, Lua, Htin, Khamu and Mlabri.
- Each group has their own language, culture, customs and traditional dress.
- Access to primary school education for hill tribe students once viewed to be a concern is now greatly progressed.
- Unfortunately, access to quality education still remains a challenge (McNabb, 1993; Pine, 2002; Wallace & Athamesara, 2004; Johnson, 2005; Chuamsakul, 2006; Vogler, 2010; Juelsgaard, 2013; Saenghong, 2015).
Introduction

In Thailand, the term “quality education” first appeared in 2002 when the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) was established, as mandated by the 1997 constitution and then by the 1999 National Education Act.

Since then, the term “quality education” is contained in the basic core curriculum and it is locally, regionally, and nationally implemented.
The key question needed to be raised: “Is quality education appeared in policy documents and implemented in Thai schools sensible for the case of hill tribe students?”

This paper is a part of an ongoing larger study that examines the cultural, social, and educational impacts of the basic core curriculum on highland students (or hill tribes).
Conceptual Framework

**Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

**Documents**

- The National Education Act
- The Basic Core Curriculum
- The National Education Plan
- Ten relevant articles regarding quality education.
Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a concept that was developed from the movement of a critical legal studies (CLS) by a group of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars during the 1970s in the U.S.

CRT, a political and theoretical concept, examines contemporary social structures, ideology, and principles that impact the construction and continuation of social domination and subordination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

It places race or ethnicity at the center of the analysis.
CRT has six key principles (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993):

1. Recognizing that racism is endemic to American life.
2. Challenging dominant claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy.
3. Insisting on a contextual/historical analysis.
4. Demanding recognitions of the experiential knowledge of marginalized people.
5. Emphasizing an interdisciplinary approach.
6. Working towards the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of ending all forms of oppression.
Preliminary Findings # 1

- Definitions/scopes of Quality education

- The National Education Plan (2002-2016)
- Articles (including a few empirical studies)
Definitions/scopes: Quality education

- is likely and automatically referred to measurement, assessment, evaluations, and assurance.
- is strictly and predominantly referred to attaining standard learning, indicators, and determined characteristics stated in the Basic Core Curriculum document(s).

- It’s ‘know what’ (facts) and ‘know-how’.

- Such ways of perceiving limits us to broadly and diversely think and dream about quality education for non-mainstream students, such as disadvantaged or ethnic groups.
Preliminary Findings # 1

- Learning standards:

- Assessment:
  - Classroom assessment, School assessment, Local assessment, National test.

- Indicators:
  - Capacity for Applying Life Skills, Communication Capacity, Thinking Capacity, Capacity for Technological Application, Problem–Solving Capacity

- Desirable Characteristics:
  - Love of nation, religion and king, honesty and integrity, Self-discipline, Avidity for learning, Observance of principles of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in one’s way of life, Dedication and commitment to work, Cherishing Thainess, & Public mindedness

However, there is also less explicit discussion about the relationships and interconnectedness of (a) equal access to education, (b) educational equity, and (c) quality education.
Preliminary Findings # 2

Learning standards

Assessment
- Classroom assessment, School assessment, Local assessment, National test.

Indicators
- Capacity for Applying Life Skills, Communication Capacity, Thinking Capacity, Capacity for Technological Application, Problem-Solving Capacity

Desirable Characteristics
- Love of Nation, Religion and King, Honesty and Integrity, Self-discipline, Avidity for Learning, Observance of Principles for a Sufficient Economy, which is a Philosophy to Live Life, Dedication and Commitment to Work, Cherishing Thainess, & Public Mindedness.
### O-NET score of the 6th grade in 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Size of School</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small (&lt;300)</td>
<td>Medium (300-1000)</td>
<td>Large (1001-2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>47.67</td>
<td>47.86</td>
<td>51.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>46.98</td>
<td>47.70</td>
<td>51.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>35.07</td>
<td>37.60</td>
<td>45.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>40.82</td>
<td>40.77</td>
<td>46.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>40.91</td>
<td>41.15</td>
<td>44.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://www.niets.or.th/th/](http://www.niets.or.th/th/)
Same curriculum, same learning standards, same assessment for all socially, linguistically, and culturally diverse students.

Student growth and progress in learning is largely relied on cognitive capability, individual ability, and the roles of the parents.
The basic curriculum leaves little or no room for schools to design the curriculum that is consistent with students’ diverse ethic cultures and language in their schools.

The nation(s) of quality education is framed from a monocultural or colorblindness approach.

Hill tribe students’ distinctive cultures, languages, worldviews, and learning styles are not or hardly reflected within or taken into account in the basic core curriculum, nation of quality education, school curriculum, educational performance indicators, and assessments.
“Culture counts in teaching and learning. Culture influences how and what children learn both in and out of school as well as how and what teachers teach. Student has ethnic culture and national culture. Students cannot easily separate themselves from their cultures at will’ (Guy, 2015).
Their social and cultural diversity are not seen as resource for teaching, learning, and improving the quality of their education.

Also, recognition of geographical difficulties that students encountered are not explicitly discussed.

This implies that hill tribe students have to sacrifice their home culture and heritage in order to obtain an education.
In this case, the mainstream discourse on quality education and its prescribed allies reproduces otherness and the disenfranchisement of hill tribe students from less advantaged social and ethnic groups, as their forerunners and parents are historically stereotyped, marginalized, and othered by the mainstream Thai society.

Quality education is rather used as the discourse and the apparatus by the government and its agencies to legitimize, moralize, and modernize educational equity.
The implementations of the conventional concepts of quality education on hill tribe students needs to be further questioned and examined.

When we talk about “quality education”, should we first ask “quality education for who/whom?” (i.e. which group of students)
A paradigm for understanding “quality education” for hill tribe students should be reconsidered and approached from a multidisciplinary perspective: SHAM.

Place and cultural responsivity-based quality education should be considered, debated, and developed.
What needs to be done next?

- Conducting the empirical study on the proposed topic:
  - Locating prospective student participants.
  - Concluding interviews with students, parents, community leaders, school representatives, NGO workers, and policy makers.
  - Making home/community visits.
  - Conducting observations.
Thank You!