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Thailand:
Building Productive
School-Community Partnerships

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Executive Summary

School Community partnerships are not new in Thailand. In the early days of Thai society, palaces, Buddhist temples and homes assumed responsibility for education. Though informal alliances between schools and communities have always existed, those relationships changed when the government assumed major responsibility for education. Nevertheless, the need for good school-community partnerships has been demonstrated.

Researchers such as Snanchit (1987), Pragob (1987), Prapaporn and Ranu (1986), Teera (1987), Berger (1981) and Otterbourg (1986) reported compatible findings regarding particular dimensions of school community partnerships. The general consensus was that benefits will accrue to the community and school when stable alliances exist.

Information garnered from the interviews and research identified three characteristics which seem essential for building viable school-community partnerships. They are: (1) A clear perception among school and community people of their respective roles as partners, (2) A sense of ownership of the school among community members, and (3) A shared perception of the school as a center for community development.

The benefits of productive school-community partnerships are numerous and varied. Partnerships can create new educational opportunities for all involved--school people, students, their parents and other community persons. Partnerships can also be an important source of additional funds for school improvement.

Laying a solid foundation is the first step in creating strategies for productive partnerships. The Ministry of Education has established a formal structure for school-community partnerships through the School Education Committee. Interviews and research indicate that there are efforts underway to improve school quality by nurturing and extending school-community partnerships.

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The Historical Context

School-community partnerships are not new in Thailand. In the early days of Thai society, three institutions assumed responsibility for education. These were the palaces, Buddhist temples and the homes (ONPEC, 1986). Formal instruction, in reading, writing and arithmetic, was offered by monks to boys who attended local temples or who became novices in the temples. For the most part, girls' educational opportunities were limited to the basics for housekeeping or for the roles of ladies in palaces. Skills in agriculture and the crafts were taught mainly through apprenticeships.

King Rama V (1868-1910), in 1874 made a commitment to provide education for the common people, thus expanding educational opportunities in the kingdom. Recognizing the traditional role of the temple in Thai society, one of the King's strategies was the use of local temples to provide expanded school access. The traditional relationships among temple, school and home are captured in this motto from Ban Dongbung Pattana School:

Good and firm school is because of temple.

Beautiful village is because of school and temple.

All these depending on one another result in progress. If they don't help one another, they will suffer a loss (Prapaporn and Ranu, 1986, p. 1).

Informal though stable alliances between schools and communi-

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ties have always existed in Thailand. However, when the government assumed major responsibility for education, the nature of relationships between school and community changed (Snanchit, 1987).

In 1921, when the first Compensatory Education Law was enacted, there were provisions in the law for a School Advisory Committee (Pragob, 1987). The 1921 Law identified "sukasa plea"-- school financial support as the main role of the Committee. However, the downturn in the economy of Thailand during the late 1920s and early 1930s interrupted the flow of community financial support to schools. That trend continued over the years until now.

In more recent years, the Ministry of Education Regulation of 1975 established a formal structure for school-community partnerships through the School Education Committee. Then in 1982, the Office of the National Primary Education Commission's (ONPEC) regulation reactivated the School Advisory Committee as a formal alliance to support primary school improvement. Primary school improvement is a major focus of the Sixth National Education Plan (1987-1991).

This paper will present information regarding school-community partnerships as a contributing variable in primary school improvement. Information was collected from (1) interviews with leading Thai citizens in selected schools, universities and communities, (2) Thai documents in English, and (3) journals. The following broad areas frame the discussion of findings. (a) The

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goals of school-community partnerships; (b) Characteristics of viable partnerships, (c) Models of selected school-community partnerships in Thailand; (d) Strategies for 'improving' school-community partnerships, and (e) Benefits of productive partnerships.

The Goals of School Community Partnerships

Partnership has a variety of meanings. Brimblecombe defined it this way:

In its best sense, it implies sharing--but sharing for a purpose which is creative. In this sense partnership is formed because the participants believe that the product... will be enhanced through partnership to an extent which none of the participants would have achieved in isolation (1985, p. 35).

The term partnership implies parity. School community partnerships are not typically characterized by parity. However, that is a goal worthy to pursue in the developing relationship.

Improving the quality of primary schools is a major education goal in Thailand's Sixth National Development Plan. The cost and complexity of this commitment requires broad citizen support and participation. It requires innovative funding schemes if it is to be achieved.

In many developing nations, the educational expenditure per student is far lower than in technologically developed nations. Even so, the governments of developing countries allocate between

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25 and 30 percent of recurrent expenditures for education (Wood et. al, 1986). These percentages are proportionately higher than in developed nations, and they markedly reduce funds available for other important public services.

It is validated that most Thai citizens will not have schooling opportunities beyond primary school. This reality creates a mandate to provide the highest quality of education for this population. As adult citizens, they will be contributing to the ongoing stability and economic advancement of the country.

The Sixth National Development Plan (1987-1991), delineates specific objectives to enhance and broaden community involvement in schools. These objectives deal with the school's opportunity to meet academic and other advancement needs of the local community. They are identified here:

1. To encourage institutions to expand their services in various forms to the community.
2. To encourage academic institutions' role in community development and their role as a center for academic, occupational, cultural, recreational, and information services
(ONPEC, 1987, pp. 4-5).

So increased community involvement will be enhanced both through the school's contribution to the community and through the use of formal structures which invite community participation.

The 1982 ONPEC regulations establish the School Committee as a formal structure for community participation in schools. Pragob

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(1987) reported four basic functions of the School Committee:

They are to:

1. Provide suggestions and guidelines to school people which enhance their response to community. These guidelines will provide a basis for determining the appropriateness of teaching/learning activities.

2. Seek assistance in any form from the people in the community--private or government agents for school development.

3. Suggest specific ways the school can help the community and the reverse. And coordinate the school activities so that school and community will benefit.

4. Appoint ad hoc committees to accomplish specific tasks.

The current regulations which invite community involvement are intended to spark renewed interest and commitment in ways which contribute to improved school quality.

Characteristics of Viable Partnerships

Information garnered from the interviews and research identified three characteristics which seem essential for building viable school-community partnerships. These are: (1) A clear perception among school and community people of their respective roles as partners, (2) A sense of ownership of the school among community members, and (3) A shared perception of the school as a

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center for community development.

Clarity of Role: Pragob (1987) reported from ONPEC research underway that community persons participated at a higher level as partners when the specific functions and tasks for their roles were defined. Defining the roles and creating a structure for achieving success were equally important in expanding meaningful community involvement.

Research on school community partnerships in the U. S. was consistent with Pragob's findings. Otterbourg said, "a lack of understanding of alternative partnership arrangements by all partners, can hinder the development of an alliance" (1986, p. 5).

Snanchit (1987) said community persons devalue the input which they can make to school people in interpreting community problems and needs. Frequently, they assume that what they know will not be valued among school people, who are often more highly educated. Training of community people through the school cluster is one avenue for clarifying the ways in which they can work to foster school improvement.

It is important for parents and teachers to understand each other's roles, responsibilities, problems and concerns in order to work together to maximize learning experiences of children. Unfortunately, parents sometimes feel intimidated by teachers and teachers feel threatened by parents. These feelings usually result from a lack of under-

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standing and communication rather than because of lack of concern about the child's education (Welch and Tisdale, 1986, p. vii).

Teera (1987) demonstrated that principals also needed training to establish appropriate relationships with the community. His research determined that principals are often unclear regarding their roles. Thus, they spent proportionately too much time in community activities.

ONPEC-sponsored training identified principals' functions and tasks associated with the community. It developed procedures which principals could use to attain success in community related tasks. It also provides principals the opportunity to learn what proportion of their time should be invested in community activities. There is an ongoing effort to improve the quality of the principal's preparation and job efficiency.

Community relations is one of six areas of administrative training, designed to improve principals' efficiency. Other areas of training include academics, personnel, student affairs, business and budget, and buildings and surroundings. These six areas of administrative training are direct outgrowths of ONPEC objectives (APEID, 1985). The ONPEC objectives were designed to improve primary school quality through a decentralized management scheme, using school clusters.

Sense of Ownership: When community people see the school as an extension of their homes, they respond to it differently. According to Snanchit (1987), many Thai people see the teacher as

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in loco parentis.

In striking contrast, Supang (1983) reported that sometimes community people feel detached from the school. Supang tested the community's sense of school ownership by asking, how they would respond if they saw someone pulling down the school fence. Though responses of community people were not entirely indifferent, there was evidence of a low sense of school ownership.

Pragob (1987) said that one of ONPEC'S intents through the School Committee, is to redefine the community's role as a school partner. Increasingly, community people must see the school as an agent of their community, and not as agent of the government. They must accept extended responsibilities to support the development of their children, their nieces, nephews--their family.

It is clear that not all of the funding for school improvement can be met through traditional funding schemes. The government cannot meet all funding requirements for school improvement. Therefore, the community must assume shared responsibility for this costly undertaking. And community resources must be mobilized in efforts to improve school quality.

The School as a Center for Community Development: When the school functions as a center for community development, it attracts widespread support from community residents. Kachorn (1987) identified specific ways in which the school functioned as a center for development. The identified functions are: (1) disseminating information through closed circuit radio and leaflets. (2) Promoting occupation and vocational development.

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(3) Providing leadership on issues of basic health and sanitation. and (4) Serving as a coordinating unit for cultural conservation.

Rung (1985) suggested a way to promote the involvement of community. He cited the school cluster--a network of schools, whose purpose is mutual assistance and sharing of educational resources. Involvement of the community is a feature of the school cluster. It mobilizes the community's human and other resources for its support. This, in turn, promotes community welfare by arranging non-formal education opportunities. (APEID, 1985). The partnership offers mutual support to school and community.

Snanchit (1987) maintained that the school should be a model in giving. It should always give first. When this willingness to give is established, community persons are more responsive when the school has requests for support. She offered as an example, the government practice of giving students 50% of their textbooks free during the first year and 25% during their last year of primary school. Snanchit believes that if the school managed well, these free texts could be accumulated so that during some years, students could receive all texts free. As another example, she suggested that the free cloth given to schools, by factories, could be used to make clothing for poor children in those schools. Such practices could establish the schools as generous and responsive to community residents.

Models of Selected School Community Partnerships in Thailand

Ban Dongbung Village: The model developed, in 1958, for Ban

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Dongbung Village is supported by three cooperating institutions--the temple, the village and the school, according to Prapaporn and Ranu (1987). Just as a braided rope is stronger than a single strand, so the development of an entire community is enhanced as each of these basic institutions work together.

A number of factors seem to contribute to the partnership described here. Each of the cooperating institutions sees a role in working to develop and advance the well-being of the entire community. The sense of economic interdependence functions as another basis for the cooperation. The perception among community people that the school belongs to them, and that the school is enhanced by their support also influences them to contribute to its improvement.

There is some evidence that the school contributes to community development. The school compound is used by the villagers for a number of activities and celebrations. One of several is the Songkran Festival. "...Villagers see the school as the community's property" (Prapaporn and Ranu, 1986, p. 19).

In Ban Dongbung Village, community responses to the school are made in the form of (a) direct cash donations, (b) building roads, (c) donations of agricultural or other supplies, (d) providing labor of various types, and (e) cooperating with the school in ridding the community of morally decadent activity.

Sang Saeng Village: In this village, there is a well-established history of community support for the school, according to the Chief of the Village Cluster (Sri, 1987). A variety of

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activities demonstrated that the community had a clear role in supporting the school: (1) the purchase of an image of Buddha for the school--a requirement of the Ministry of Education; (2) the practice of making house calls to parents of truants to encourage them to monitor their children's school attendance; (3) setting up the radio broad-casting system, (4) funding the costs of road development to the school, and (5) funding particular school events.

When asked about the reason for their support of the school, the Chief said that the school provides education for their children. The community wants to support those efforts. In fact, he said they were willing to do even more but would not want to infringe on the school's authority. There was a clear indication that the community identified positively with the school.

The school utilizes the broadcasting system to provide news service and other information to local citizens. Information is provided on health and sanitation, consumer pricing information and other local concerns. This is recognized as a medium for promoting community health and contributing to general community development.

The fact that 99% of the children in the village attend school is a clear indication of the community's confidence in the local school. Community people participate formally through the School Committee and informally in a variety of other ways.

Strategies for Improving Partnerships

Communication is central in the development of any stable

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relationship--whether among individuals or groups. Berger (1981) says the opportunity for open communication is an essential ingredient in meaningful home-school relations. Burger suggested that two-way communication will invite responses and participation from parents.

Snanchit (1987) reported that when teachers communicate positive information about students to their parents, it initiates positive responses from parents. She cautions that school people must set out to invite parents to hear good news rather than negative reports about their children. Negative reports tend to alienate parents from school people. This is borne out in research conducted in the U. S. by Berger (1981) who identified patterns of parent interaction with schools. The five parent types are:

1. Parents who avoid schools at all times,
2. Parents who need encouragement to come to school,
3. Parents who readily respond when invited,
4. Parents who are comfortable about coming to school and enjoy involvement in the educational process, and
5. Parents who are overactive and enjoy their power and influence within the school.

The responses of school people to parents must be varied depending on the needs of the parents. The first group, for instance, needs to be encouraged to build a relationship with school people. An

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inviting school atmosphere will attract the second, third and fourth parent types. Few parents will fall into the last group, however, even these can be persuaded to work jointly with school staff to achieve shared goals for educational improvement.

For the most reluctant parents, Miller and Wilmshurst (1975) suggested ways to attract parents to the school. Selected activities were: (1) classroom visits, (2) special activities--a play, hobby week, tea party, and birthdays.

There is a continuing need for school and community people to nurture the growth of a relationship which will bring benefits to both parties. Otterbourg (1986) reported that the following basic considerations are essential in creating the foundation for a viable partnership: Two critical questions should be asked?

1. Are the following program components in place?

- o an organizational structure
- o leadership structure
- o a program budget
- o tools for recordkeeping as related to program administration and development

2. Are the following program components in their development phase?

- o a process for communication, including networks, procedures and vehicles
- o selected program activities based on priority needs and available resources

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o procedures and recordkeeping forms for

program monitoring and evaluation (p. 271).

If the response to the basic questions is yes, partnership leaders can turn their attention to development and implementation of the guidelines and structure for each of the elements of the system. For instance, the communications dimension deals with writing skills, editing skills, verbal and interpersonal skills--with groups and individuals. There needs to be a sense of protocol and sensitivity to people in different age groups, role groups and ethnic and cultural groups. To the extent that staff/committee members need additional training to be effective, the organization must account for that support through staff development.

Snanchit (1987) said that the school should function as a change agent. School staff could contribute to an improved quality of life among community people by studying the community to determine its characteristics, its problems and the obstacles to success and working toward resolution. Some ^a _h areas of concern include (1) health care, (2) teenage pregnancy, (3) moral education, and (4) malnutrition among young children. Additionally, school people should look at students and community in terms of current and future needs. Pupils should be taught on the assumption that they might live in either rural or urban settings in the future. In the absence of this consideration, students who moved to urban areas, from farming communities, might be ill-equipped to function in the world of work in urban areas. Worker characteristics for success vary in the two settings.

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Often success of programs is measured quantitatively. It is Snanchit's (1987) view that when success of school-community partnerships is measured only by money contributed, lower income families are sometimes driven away. Money contributed represent only one measure of program success. She contends that the school's contribution to community development is an important measure of the success of the partnership.

Miller and Wilmschurt (1975) hold that volunteering tends to be a hobby among middle and upper income people. And the expectation that lower income parents will find the time to volunteer in similar measure might be unrealistic. Despite differences in financial and other resources among parents, there are basic commitments to children which all parents must make. Jackson's statement makes the point:

Parents must make room in their hearts and then in their house and then in their schedule for their children. No poor parent is too poor to do that, and no middle-class parent is too busy (1979, p. viii).

Establishing the school as a center for community development is an important ONPEC strategy for strengthening the bond between school and community. As schools meet broad-based community needs, schools gain increased community support. Schools must offer educational services which are relevant to the lives of both school age children and adults.

Kachorn (1986) talked about the school's role as a

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demonstration agency for the Green Northeastern Project. The government-sponsored project fosters agricultural development for the province. This is an undertaking of significant magnitude in an agricultural community. The school's involvement demonstrates its commitment to an improved quality of life for community residents. Another project of interest was the school cooperatives (where the community is part owner). This project had important economic incentives for the community participation.

Kachorn (1987) believes that when the school, home and temple function as one unit, the basis for a sound partnership is established. This view is supported in other research by Prapaporn and Ranu (1987).

Laying a solid foundation is the first step in creating strategies for solid partnerships. The success of everything else depends on it. Other information in this section has covered the school's role as a change agent and a center for community development. And last, it discussed the value of cooperating institutions working together to achieve shared goals.

Benefits of Productive Partnerships:

The benefits of productive school-community partnerships are numerous and varied. The partnerships can create new educational opportunities for all involved, school people, students, their parents and other community persons. As individuals benefit, their communities benefit. As the level and quality of education is improved for the general citizenry, the entire community is advanced. Business needs capable workers and schools provide

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relevant training in the preparation of the nation's work force.

Partnerships can also be an important source of additional school funding for the enhancement of education opportunities of students, school staff and community. It is apparent that some of the funding for school improvement must come from sources other than the government. Parents and other community people are major stakeholders in education. It is important that they participate in ways which contribute directly to improved school quality. School-community partnerships provide that opportunity.

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