

**From Policy To Practice Supporting Students With Diverse Needs In Thailand:
Critical Issues And Implications**

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Abstract

A commitment to maximizing learning outcomes for all students is an axiom of most educational systems around the world. However this goal is sometimes compromised by factors that can be complex and difficult to address. Student behavior problems are one of the major issues challenging educators in many countries including Thailand. Recently, laws and policies have been established to strengthen behavior support systems in Thailand. Corporal punishment has been banned in all Thai schools and Positive Behavior Support (PBS) has been introduced as a framework that schools can employ. However, there are still several gaps between the various existent policies and actual educational practices in many Thai schools. This paper discusses current policies related to Thai behavior support systems, the challenges of translating them into practice and introduces a prospective research agenda designed to close this gap and improve the uptake and the effectiveness of positive behavior support in Thai schools.

Keywords: Policy, Positive Behavior Support, Thailand, Behavior problems, Functional behavioral assessment

Introduction

‘Every morning when I wake up, I can’t stop thinking what problems I will face with him today in my classroom’ said Miss Siree, a Thai general classroom teacher. The problems that she mentioned relate to her student, Somchai, a 5 year old boy. He often makes loud noises during class when he fails to get what he wants, he walks around the classroom when he has to do deskwork and he easily gets angry. Miss Siree has tried to be patient and has talked with Somchai when he displayed these behaviors. However, her approach has had no positive effect and so she has chosen to ignore the behavior and allow Somchai to continue his disruptions. Even though her school recently conducted a screening test for disability, Somchai remained unidentified with any special needs. Although Miss Siree has discussed the issue with his parents and suggested they take him to see a doctor for specialist advice, his parents are unwilling to do this.

This teacher’s experience is just one example of the current situation in many Thai classrooms that are attempting to meet the diverse needs of young school students. In this paper, we highlight issues of importance for both Thai teachers and their colleagues in other countries who are seeking to support student engagement and maximize their learning outcomes (Dempsey & Arthur-Kelly, 2007).

In Thailand and in many other countries, if teachers are unable to manage behavior effectively, school behavior problems in some form represent a pressing issue that can lead to chronic difficulties (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Behavior problems negatively affect students’ academic achievement (Mattison, Hooper, & Glassberg, 2002; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004; Westling, 2010), lead to social problems (Babinski, Hartsough, & Lambert, 1999; Barkley, Fischer, Smallish, & Fletcher, 2004), and in some instances may result in the abandonment of formal education (Zima et al., 2000). Therefore, it is important for schools and teachers to assist those individuals with behavior problems who are at risk, in the hope that student involvement in learning and the outcomes achieved by all students in schools will be enhanced.

In the past, aversive approaches (Crone & Horner, 2003; Horner, Carr, Strain, Todd, & Reed, 2002) such as punishment, detention and suspension were widely used to deal with behavior problems in many contexts, including Thailand. Although the use of punishment may discontinue the problem behavior for a while, the behavior tends to reappear and sometimes escalates (Gershoff, 2008; Mayer, 1995). Some kinds of punishment, including many corporal punishments such as caning students, have been eliminated in many developed countries (Gary, 2001; Gershoff, 2008). In its place, a range of alternative approaches to corporal punishment have been developed such as assertive discipline (Canter & Canter, 1992) and cognitive-behavioral modification (Finch, Nelson, & Ott, 1993). However, Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is one of the most promising of these approaches. PBS has been introduced as an alternative approach to prevent and reduce behavior problems in schools (Dunlap et al., 2000). This approach focuses on school-wide preventative strategies that are skill building, achieved by manipulating consequences and redesigning environments (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). The central advantage of PBS is that it focuses on all students. As well, it uses multiple and flexible strategies with each student and schools to ensure a contextual and cultural fit (Sugai et al., 1999). For students who need specific support in behavior, PBS includes a systematic treatment approach called Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) to develop a specific behavior intervention plan (BIP) that focuses on addressing the purpose of the behavior problems and replacing them with more socially and

developmentally appropriate alternatives (Arthur-Kelly, 2006). A number of studies in PBS and FBA have shown promising results in western contexts (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006; McCurdy, Mannella, & Eldridge, 2003; Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009) as well as in Thailand and other Asian countries (Apichatabutra, 2009; Baba & Tanaka-Matsumi, 2011). However, it is noteworthy that implementing FBA in typical school settings can be complex and challenging, requiring a range of dispositional and systemic supports in order to be successful (Gage et al., 2012; Reid & Nelson, 2002).

Recently, Thailand has established a policy of supporting students with behavior problems by assisting schools and teachers in these diverse classrooms and has encouraged teachers to avoid using negative approaches such as punishment. This policy is consistent with the concept of PBS and calls for a proactive approach that supports all students (including regular students, students with at risk behavior and students with high risk behavior). However, implementing the policy in Thailand is challenging because the concepts associated with PBS are relatively new to that country. Meeting this challenge will require involvement of teachers, schools, communities and policymakers.

Even though the challenges of behavior support in Thailand are raised as a major issue for many teachers, very little literature exists on how current policies impact on practices and how to overcome these issues. Thus, this paper will describe the current national policies related to PBS in Thailand and will discuss what is required to translate such policies into practice. The paper will then provide an example of a research agenda that has the potential to improve the understanding and the implementation of positive behavior support approaches in Thailand.

National Policies in Behavior Support in Thailand and Gaps in Implementation

Several recent policy initiatives have influenced school behavior support practices in Thailand from the national to the school level. Figure 1 shows the Thai regulation framework including legislative acts, regulations and policies enacting a positive behavior support approach from the national level (Ministry of Education), to Educational Service Areas (ESA) through to the level of daily practice in schools. At the national level, the 1999 National Education Act provided a key framework related to behavior support in schools. The framework included the goal of development of Thai people generally, the concept of child centredness (Office of the Basic Education Commission [OBEC], 2009a), a requirement of quality assurance as well as the concept of inclusion. On Figure 1, it also shows that all these national concepts in the 1999 National Education Act led to the establishment of further legislation, and to regulations and policies to assist and guide practitioners at the school level. In other words, according to Figure 1, there are four pieces of legislation emanating from the 1999 National Education Act that are relevant to the development of behavior support in schools. First, the Persons with Disabilities Education Act of 2008 was established to focus on the equal rights of people with disabilities to have basic education and to be included in regular classrooms. Second, a Ministerial Regulation of Educational Quality Assurance was established to set educational standards and require every school to be involved in quality assessments. Third, the regulation of school punishment process was released in order to provide a principle for dealing with misbehavior in schools. Fourth, due to the influence of the regulation in quality assurance, a policy of behavior support in schools was introduced to Thai schools in order to function as a framework for behavior support systems. These additional initiatives are now discussed in detail, particularly in regard to their impact on behavior support in Thai schools and identified gaps in actual school practices, as indicated by 1) impact of new approaches to PBS in Thai schools, 2) setting new requirements for schools, 3) improving the recognition of all student needs in classrooms.

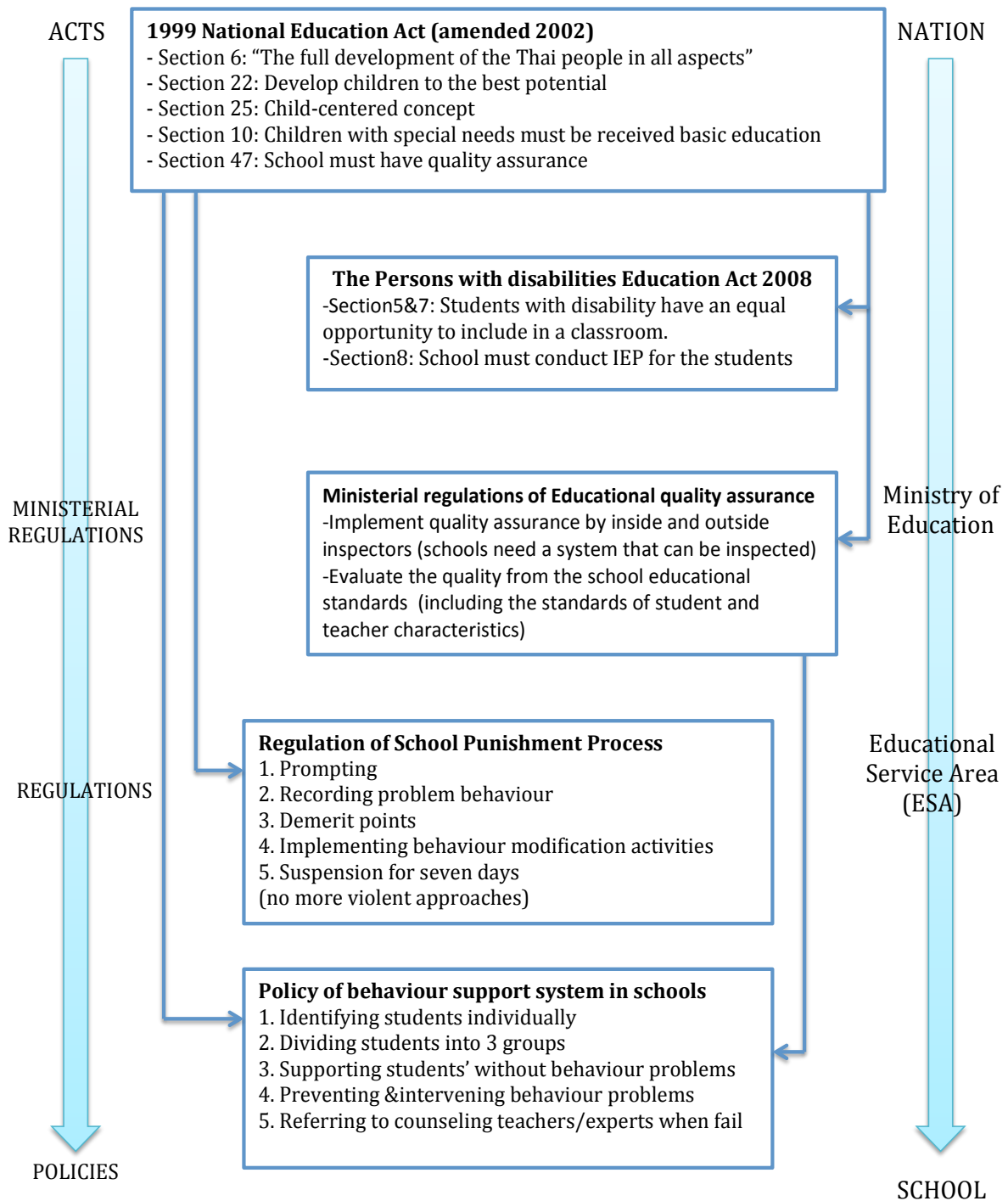


Figure 1. The regulatory framework for use of behavior support systems in Thai schools

Impact of New Approaches to Positive Behavior Support in Thai Schools

The 1999 National Education Act, amended in 2002, sought to provide education in Thailand that focuses on “the full development of the Thai people in all aspects: physical and mental health; intellect; knowledge; morality; integrity; and desirable way of life so as to be able to live in harmony with other people” (Office of the National Education Commission [ONEC], 2002) (Figure 1). This act has impacted on Thai classrooms in many ways. Fundamentally, Thai schools have been encouraged to move from a teacher-centered to a child-centred approach in order to develop Thai children to the best of their potential (National Education Act 1999, S 22 & S 25) (Figure 1). Child-centred approaches emphasise the importance of creating supportive and friendly learning environments in order to enhance students’ motivation and achievement (Kaewdang, 1999). Consequently, the roles of students and teachers in Thailand have changed. Teachers’ roles have changed from didactic instruction to facilitating classroom learning, while students’ roles have changed from passive to active learners (Charupan & Leksuksri, 2001). Thai teachers have been encouraged to be less authoritative while they are expected to create a positive learning environment in order to allow students to express their opinions and to interact in the classroom. Similarly, students are now encouraged to share opinions and to question issues and people they may never have traditionally challenged (Charupan & Leksuksri, 2001). All these changes have had ramifications for student behavior management practices employed by teachers (Thanasetkorn, 2009). For example, corporal punishment has been banned in all schools and so teachers need an alternative to manage student behavior (OBEC, 2009b). A general awareness of violence in schools, potentially caused by school punishment has increased in the society and placed pressure on Thai educators in order to decrease violence in schools. The trend of using positive discipline with children has been promoted among parents as well as teachers.

In efforts to facilitate a smooth transition from more intrusive, punitive approaches to behavior change toward more positive, systematic and child centred school level processes, the following set of constructive approaches has been introduced by the regulation of a school punishment process. These are (1) prompting, (2) recording problem behavior, (3) use of demerit points, (4) implementing behavior modification activities, and (5) suspension for seven days (this last step does not apply to students in grades 1-6). Schools are also asked to avoid strong punishment and to be aware of the age of students and the intensity of behavior when implementing any punishment. This regulation is consistent with the Child Protection Act of 2003 that aims to promote well-being in all Thai children. As a result of this regulation of the ban on corporal punishment imposed in 2000 (revised in 2007), corporal punishment is being gradually eliminated from Thai classrooms. However, there is anecdotal evidence that informal negotiation between some teachers and parents leads to the ongoing use of corporal punishment in many Thai schools. Additionally, for some teachers who avoid using corporal punishment, some research has found that other less punitive punishments were employed as an alternative approach to deal with behavior support (Thanasetkorn & Thanasetkorn, 2009). This phenomenon is discussed further in the next section.

Identifying the gaps between policies for new approaches and actual practices.

There have been challenges with this requirement to phase out corporal punishment. “Spare the rod, spoil your child” has been a traditional Thai social value. Many Thai parents still correct their children by using corporal punishment, such as hitting the child when they misbehave. Thus, moving to child-centred and more positive behavior support approaches has required many long-standing Thai teachers to reflect on their attitudes and beliefs about

dealing with students with behavior problems. For example, while corporal punishment may be banned, there is evidence that many Thai teachers in primary schools still use negative approaches to managing classrooms such as rising their voice, hitting rulers on the table and asking a misbehaving student to knock their own knuckles on the table (Thanasetkorn & Thanasetkorn, 2009). The study has claimed that teachers and students are not ready for changed practices in the form of positive-only approaches to management (ONEC, 2007). There are also reports that Thai teachers have insufficient knowledge on more positive approaches to behavior management (ONEC, 2009). To close this gap by assisting and preparing Thai teachers, introducing these teachers to alternative approaches to behavior management is necessary. One approach is providing professional development in using positive approaches to both in-service and pre-service Thai teachers. First, however, it is necessary to establish new schoolwide processes and practices that support and encourage positive behavior.

Setting New Requirements for Schools

Another implication of the 1999 National Education Act for school behavior support is that the law requires all schools and educational institutes, including the higher education sectors (e.g., universities, colleges and institutions) and technical education, to have a quality assurance mechanism (National Education Act 1999, S 47). The quality assurance process directs the attention of all schools and education institutes to improving their educational quality in order to pass quality assessment criteria. Ministerial regulation of educational quality assurance was released in 2004 and revised in 2011 (Figure 1). Each institute is assessed by both internal and external auditors regarding the national standards and indicators (Nakorntap, 2009). One of the standards and indicators of quality assurance at the basic education level is student characteristics. Teachers are expected to ensure that students have “virtues, morality and desirable values” (p.5), “a working skill, love to work, be able to work with others and have a good attitude toward honest occupation” (p.6) and “healthy habits and good physical and mental health” (p.8) (OBEC, 2006). This requirement has stimulated all schools to reconsider the process of behavior support in schools, with the goal that they should be planned and conducted systematically and then periodically inspected.

In the context of the legislation discussed above (Figure 1), the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Health have developed a system of student supports in schools and studied its effectiveness since 2001. This process has included publishing manuals and providing a training course to school personnel to encourage and support them in implementing this system. Thus, in 2009, at the school level (Figure 1), the OBEC established a policy that requires every public school from elementary to high school to apply ‘*the supporting student system framework*’ in order to prevent and decrease behavior problems in schools (OBEC, 2009a). This process is defined as a behavior support system that focuses on the school and individual students who have additional behavior support needs. Classroom teachers are expected to be key participants in this framework because they are closest to the students and know the students well. However, this framework also encourages collaboration between school personnel and multidisciplinary staff to work as a team in assisting students. The framework provides a five step guide for classroom teachers, namely;

- (1) Identifying students individually
- (2) Analyzing and dividing students into three groups: without behavior problems, at-risk behavior, and high risk behavior

- (3) Supporting students without behavior problems
- (4) Preventing and intervening in behavior problems for those at-risk and with behavior problems
- (5) Referring students to counseling teachers or external experts when behavior support has been unsuccessful. The students who are referred to counseling teachers will receive individual case support, usually over three months. If the behavior problems do not decrease, the students will be referred to expert personnel outside the school.

As mentioned, because of the requirement of quality assurance, this supporting student system framework has been widely implemented in Thai schools (OBEC, 2009a). The direct benefit of this system is that it provides a school guideline for behavior support as well as giving indirect advantages in increasing schools' and teachers' awareness of how to provide a range of positive behavior supports. However, challenges may still be found in current classrooms if teachers have a limited understanding of the approach and lack specific strategies to deal with students who need specific behavior supports, especially where there are diverse student needs. This Thai framework is consistent with the concept of PBS described earlier. Although not specifically stated in the framework, the utility of FBA as a subset of PBS is best considered for students at step 4 above.

Identified gaps between new requirements for schools and actual practices.

Several studies have investigated the PBS system in Thailand. These survey studies have explored current practices and emergent issues when teachers implement this system in schools in different parts of Thailand. Examples of challenges that studies have revealed are a lack of cooperation between teachers and counseling teachers (Wutwitchayanun, Wongkwanmeung, & Sonuntha, 2007), insufficient teacher knowledge and skills in dealing with students who have behavior problems (Ratsemeerat, 2009), lack of skills in implementing screening processes (Dechsupa, 2008; Moontreesri, 2010), lack of teachers' attention to the system due to their heavy workload (Moontreesri, 2010) and the difficulty of some parents in accepting that their child has behavior problems (Wutwitchayanun et al., 2007). Moreover, it was noted that some teachers can see the importance of this support system while others still lack experience and skills in adopting this process (Ratsemeerat, 2009). From the studies, it is noteworthy that the major reported challenge in actual implementation is related to a teacher factor. This may be because the new requirement has set teachers as a key person to implement the process. In this context, the main issue that the studies found was a capacity issue. Many Thai teachers are unprepared in skills and knowledge for a new practice while an administrative issue, such as collaboration with other experts, or issues from other variables, such as parents' attitude, are likely to be reported less than teacher factors. Thus, it can be seen that the efficient and effective use of the new behavior support system remains as a question in practice unless the practitioners' capacity is meaningfully enhanced. Additionally, most of the published studies have taken a quantitative approach to investigating aspects of PBS in Thailand. However, qualitative research is also needed to assist in gaining an in depth understanding of the current issues for the system. This is important given that PBS in Thailand is relatively new and there are needs in many areas, such as increasing teachers' skills and understanding along with promoting strong cooperation between related professional disciplines and families.

Improving Recognition of All Student Needs in Classrooms

The legal imperative to implement inclusive education in Thailand is another issue that has direct implications for behavior support practices in many schools. In 1999, when the concept of inclusion was introduced to the Thai educational jurisdiction, the Thai National Educational Act recommended that children with mild or moderate disability should be educated in inclusive classrooms (ONEC, 2002). This directive from the government to provide education for all students meant that many schools in Bangkok and other provinces were introduced to the concept of inclusive education (Narot, 2010). Later in 2008, inclusion became a more common practice in many schools because of the Persons with Disabilities Education Act of 2008 (see Figure 1). This act stated that students with additional needs have an equal opportunity to be included in a regular classroom. Many diagnosed students with special needs are now enrolling in regular Thai schools. In 2006, 155,938 students with special needs were enrolled in inclusive primary schools and 50,447 students with special needs were enrolled in inclusive secondary schools (ONEC, 2007). In 2011, the number of students with special needs who were enrolled in primary and secondary schools increased to 242,888 (ONEC, 2012). However, even though the policy has resulted in the expansion of inclusive education in numerical terms, the quality of inclusive education is still a critical area that the Thai government and policymakers also need to be attuned to (ONEC, 2009; Vorapanya, 2008).

Identified gaps between increasing recognition of all student needs and actual practices.

The challenges of inclusive classrooms include providing effective teaching strategies to meet the diversity of student needs, providing social scaffolds to create social inclusion and assisting individuals who require specific behavior support (Conway, 2011; Forlin, 2012). Moreover, some research has indicated that students with special needs who display challenging behavior present as a major challenge to educators (Kamps, Wendland, & Culpepper, 2006; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2006). Similarly, some data suggests that behavior problems in classrooms are the main challenge for Thai teachers (Sukbunpant, Arthur-Kelly, & Dempsey, 2013). Narot (2010) claimed that when Thai schools have to accept all students into their classrooms, many classrooms need to significantly adjust in order to accommodate students with diverse needs. According to PBS, these students with behavior problems are normally in a group of students that require a specific behavior support plan to decrease behavior problems and to increase appropriate behavior that serves the same function. As mentioned earlier, FBA is a data-based process within PBS that has the potential to directly assist school practitioners working with identified students who have behavior support needs. However, in Thailand, the PBS policy framework does not introduce the FBA process or systematic processes to develop individualized behavior support plans. Rather, the policy provides a wide range of general strategies for teachers to employ.

Thus, the challenges of dealing with students who exhibit problem behaviors in Thai classrooms are both complex and systemic. Support from professional staff such as special education teachers who are able to work collaboratively may assist those Thai teachers. Similarly, Sukbunpant et al. (2012) found that Thai teachers who perceived that they had insufficient training to teach and manage classrooms with students with diverse needs, believed that special education teachers would be a better option for those students. However, special education teachers are still rare in many Thai schools due to a general shortage of trained personnel in this field (Narot, 2010).

Moreover, there is a misunderstanding about the characteristics of students with mild and moderate disability (Fulk, Swerdlik, & Kosuwan, 2002). Some recent evidence suggests that there are still many undiagnosed students in Thai classrooms and teachers need to be able

to identify and refer such students, including those with mild levels of disability to receive further appropriate assessment and support (Vorapanya, 2008). Misdiagnosed or undiagnosed students may lead to misunderstanding in the provision of student support by teachers. Thai culture encourages students to respect and follow the instructions of teachers (Thanasetkorn, 2009). Therefore, too often when students display some inappropriate conduct such as off-task or disruptive behavior, teachers may believe that this student does not respect them or is being naughty while the real cause is being ignored. Thus, the gaps in expertise, effective systematic processes and knowledge and skills of practitioners remain high in many Thai schools. Effective screening and diagnosis processes for all students in Thai schools is important, as well as the introduction of a systematic FBA process to develop specific behavior support plans.

Thai laws and policies relating to behavior support have impacted on school level processes and classroom practices in many ways. Challenges and gaps in practice can be still found in many Thai schools, especially for teachers who are required to change teaching approaches, implement a new and systematic behavior support approach and deal with students with diverse needs in classrooms. The Thai government and Ministry of Education have a responsibility to develop more effective systemic practices that fulfill the needs of school practitioners who deal with diverse classrooms. While there is an existing policy framework to encourage the implementation of PBS, further research is needed to investigate ways to improve and increase the capacity of school practitioners, multidisciplinary collaborations and the effective use of over-arching support systems among schools.

Closing the Gap by Using the Empirical Evidence Base: A Research Agenda for PBS in Thailand

From policy to practice, there are increasing expectations for Thai classroom teachers to have the skills and knowledge to deal with students with diverse needs and to develop an effective and efficient process that will allow students to reach their learning potential. A careful program of research is required to assist practitioners in bringing policy to life in schools and classrooms. The following research agenda asks:

- How can classroom teachers be supported and assisted to deal with students with behavior support needs in their class?
- Is there a systematic approach for teachers, and if so, can these classroom teachers implement it effectively and efficiently?
- What systemic supports are necessary to ensure class-level changes take place and are maintained over time?

To assist the teachers in positive and effective behavior support practices, the phenomenon needs to be viewed holistically because in a real practice context it involves a range of interactions between individuals, such as teachers and students, parents and students, teachers and teachers, and teachers and schools in a dynamic and fluid context. Moreover, the influences of external variables such as educational policy, family issues, funding and community expectations are also involved. This view is informed by complexity theory that sees individuals functioning within a dynamic system, involving multiple interactions and unpredictable effects (Morrison, 2002). This complex interaction between classroom, school, community, education policies and cultures needs to be considered in its totality, recognizing multiple levels of the phenomenon.

The Conceptual Model

The conceptual model (Figure 2) introduced here provides a picture of the behavior support phenomenon to guide research that can most fully understand the dynamic and complex nature of human social interaction.

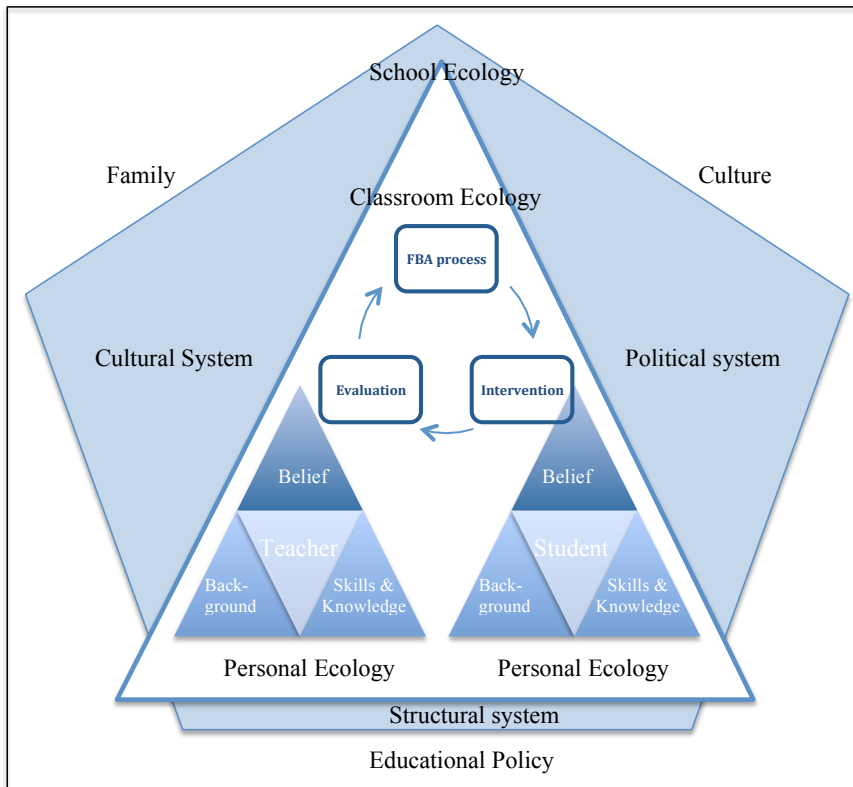


Figure 2. Conceptual model of behavior support phenomenon

Three theories have provided a basis for this conceptual model: ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the ecology of classroom management model (Arthur-Kelly, Lyons, Butterfield, & Gordon, 2007), and the social system (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). This conceptual model uses the elements of Bronfenbrenner's ecology system to build up four layers; socio-cultural ecology, school ecology, classroom ecology and personal ecology. As Bronfenbrenner states, *socio-cultural factors* comprise cultures and social values that influence every layer in the ecological system. This layer will include surrounding environments that influence school and classroom contexts. This consists of culture, social values, the national policy, community and family of students. For example, social values such as 'spare the rod, spoil the child', as well as the Thai educational policies earlier discussed are examples of the components in this layer.

For *school ecology*, this conceptual model employs the social system theory developed by Hoy and Miskel (2008). The model is comprised of three subsystems which are the structural system, the cultural system and the political system. Schools in Thailand have different types (e.g., public schools, private schools and alternative schools) and are of varying size and are in different locations (e.g., urban and rural schools). Each school has differences in its structural, cultural and political systems. Consequently, the capacity to translate policies, including behavior support policies and involving from parents and communities, varies across schools and systems. For example, Thai schools in urban areas are more likely to have opportunities to access resources and seek assistance from professionals

than schools in rural areas. Consequently, translating policies in behavior supports into urban schools may be more achievable than the ones in rural areas.

In *the classroom ecology*, the focus is on using individual behavior support to design an intervention for students with behavior problems. Therefore, a teacher plays a main role in this classroom ecology to enable students with behavior support needs to increase alternative behavior (see Arthur-Kelly et al., 2003). Consistent with the principle of whole schooling, teachers can be the one who create a supportive learning environment focusing on preventative strategies and seeking a positive way to help students with behavior problems meet their needs. Lastly, *personal ecology* has two key players; a teacher and a student with additional needs. As noted by Hoy and Miskel (2008), each person consists of needs, beliefs, goals, interests, background and personality. One recent study found that Thai teachers, who are unprepared for inclusion, tend to increase negative attitudes and resist its practice (Klibthong, 2013). For students, the Hoy and Miskel (2008) underlines a whole school principle that focuses on the parental and familial involvement. Several studies have addressed the importance of collaboration with families as an enabling component in implementing successful behavior interventions (Bambara, Goh, Kern, & Caskie, 2012; Fox, Dunlap, & Powell, 2002). Students who have a supporting family may receive effective behavior supports when compared with those whose family provides insufficient support to schools.

Taken as a whole, this conceptual model can guide research in improving the PBS system in Thailand by demonstrating the relevance of students, teachers, schools, and policymakers in achieving improvements in students' behavior.

Research Priority Areas for PBS in Thailand

In the following section we review three specific priority areas for research attention.

1. Developing teachers' capacity in providing behavior support.

Thai classroom teachers need to develop some specific skills to support students with behavior problems. Thus, the research agenda described here involves professional development for teachers in the use of an evidence-based approach (FBA) to guide their behavior support practices in classrooms. Studies showing the effectiveness of FBA based intervention in decreasing students' problem behaviors in the classroom are increasing. The FBA process has been used for a wide range of needs ranging from severe behavior (Iwata, Dorsey, Slifer, Bauman, & Richman, 1994), to aggressive behaviors (Marcus, Vollmer, Swanson, Roane, & Ringdahl, 2001), and disruptive behavior (Lee, Sugai, & Horner, 1999). Implementing positive behavior support and FBA requires specific skills and knowledge in selecting appropriate strategies for promoting positive classrooms, in managing student behavior as well as designing individual behavior interventions for students with behavior support needs (Dunlap et al., 2000). However, several studies have highlighted the range of complex staff issues that are related to the FBA process in general school settings. These include lack of knowledge by school staff, insufficient training, issues in time management in conducting the FBA process and issues in parent involvement (Bambara, Nonnemaker, & Kern, 2009). Thus, training staff in specific skills in the use of FBA is essential in order to achieve positive student outcomes (MacDonald & McGill, 2013) and the importance of addressing the context of practitioners when introducing the FBA process must be recognised.

In the Thai context, where culture and current educational practice is different from developed countries, research questions centre on how this PBS and FBA process will be conducted and what the outcomes are. Examples of relevant research questions are:

- What are the student, teacher and school-level outcomes of professional development programs in PBS and FBA for schools in Thailand?
- In what ways do PBS and FBA professional development programs need to be customised for Thai teachers?
- What are the difficulties that Thai teachers report in the implementation of PBS and FBA?

2. Improving the behavior system in schools.

One of the given challenges in schools that introduce behavior systems and aim to provide inclusive practices is the screening and identification process for students with special needs. Some teachers lack skills in using the screening tools (Dechsupa, 2008; Moontreesri, 2011) while the accuracy of some screening tools in identifying the special needs is still questionable (Vorapanya, 2008). Consequently, the number of current screening tools is limited which results in misinterpretation and inappropriate referring of students in Thai schools (Vorapanya, 2008). Improvement in screening and diagnosis processes by the experts of special education field is essential. Thus, the research agenda for this area aims to develop and validate the screening and diagnosis process to suit varying age ranges, type of special needs and Thai culture. After completing this phase, a model for transferring the skills and knowledge to school practitioners is needed. The research should aim to investigate the effect of the training program in screening and diagnosis processes for practitioners. The research questions are:

- What are the effects of the developed and validated screening and diagnosis tools in Thai schools? How can this process become more accessible for Thai schools both in urban and rural area?
- What are the outcomes for school practitioners after attending the training program in the developed screening and diagnosis tools?
- What capacity-building processes and structures are needed in schools and systems to support this process of clearer identification of students with special learning needs?

3. Increasing multidisciplinary collaboration in the community.

The issue of cooperation between disciplines may be still found in many Thai schools, although the policy of a behavior support system has encouraged the teachers to work collegially with staff from different fields using school-teams based in the PBS system. Issues reported in the literature include the lack of cooperation between teachers and counseling teachers (Wutwitchayanun et al., 2007), and the inconsistency and lack of agreement between medical and educational experts on supporting students with additional needs (Vorapanya, 2008). Moreover, the shortage of special education staff has exacerbated the problems of staff collaboration in behavior support because regular teachers have insufficient support and report dealing with the students with behavior problem alone (Narot, 2010). Collaboration is one of the key bases upon which positive behavior support can be implemented successfully. Strogilos, Nikolarazi, and Tragoulla (2012) found that when teachers received assistance from other professionals, such as special education teachers and child psychologists, teachers believed that educating students with special needs was possible. The research agenda here focuses on the development of a model of multidisciplinary teaming

that ensures contextual and cultural fit, and asks:

- What is the best practice model for multidisciplinary teams when implementing PBS in Thai schools?
- What do various stakeholders including parents, teachers and principals in the Thai school context report about the development of a collaborative teamwork model?
- What professional development programs are required to enhance the adoption of such a model?

Conclusion

Positive Behavior Support in Thailand is in a developmental phase driven by the requirements of national laws and policies. In this context, new beginnings bring new challenges in effectively implementing PBS in Thailand. A dynamic interaction of socio-cultural factors, communities, schools, classrooms, and individuals influence efforts to introduce and expand effective positive behavior supports for all students. Thus, there is a hope that the various challenges will be addressed through collaboration of educational personnel and other key participants from a national level through to classroom practice levels. To reach that ultimate goal, systematic research is necessary. Translating policies discussed in this paper into positive structures and outcomes represents a central goal of such endeavours. The research agenda presented in this discussion paper will provide evidence in several aspects for a whole system of behavior support. Firstly, it will provide the effectiveness or non-effectiveness of a professional development program in FBA in the Thai educational system. It is hoped that this capacity-building strategy will be promoted among Thai schools and assist teachers to deal with students with behavior problems. Similarly, information about an effective and efficient screening and diagnosis process will assist school practitioners to identify students with special needs effectively and independently. Evidence about a model of multidisciplinary teams that suit the Thai context will support a whole school approach to maximizing learning outcomes for all students in their care. In sum, these research priorities will complement policy level changes that support the effective use of Positive Behavior Support in Thailand.

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