The Thai Community Curriculum as a Model for Multicultural Education

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The notion of a community curriculum in Thailand comes from widespread recognition that Thai society has been greatly influenced by the west in its development and modernization. According to many Thais, community curricula are needed to encourage young people to preserve Thai culture and revive local ways of thinking about 'development' through gaining respect for local culture and history. This paper discusses an active research project through which Northern Thai teachers conducted research about the local histories of three Tai Yai minority communities. Unlike many multicultural education programs, this one was firmly based on activities that required teachers, members of the majority group, to conduct research about the histories of minority group community members, which included their own students. The active participation of both majority and minority group members encouraged cultural learning. This paper describes the research process, summarizes the teacher-researchers' findings, analyzes participants' learning and shares lessons learned.

Thailand, multicultural education, community, curriculum, action research

INTRODUCTION

Before, the school told us what to do. Now they are asking us about our history and we are teaching at the school, too. A woman from Lai village.

Getting to this point is not easy, but it is possible. This paper will tell the story of how it happened. It is the story of teachers, students and residents in three Tai Yai communities in the northernmost provinces of Thailand who began this elementary school curriculum project by collecting data about local histories. Two and a half years later, they produced far more than three local history books. They engaged in a process of cultural and multicultural learning. The Tai Yai minority individuals, young and older, learned about their own culture and history and the teachers, majority Northern Thais, learned about themselves and their Tai Yai students, their relatives and their neighbours.

We suggest that this community curriculum project is a model for cultural and multicultural learning because it both encouraged positive identity development for members of the Tai Yai minority group and reduced their stereotyping by members of the Northern Thai majority group. This happened because members of both groups were participants who learned through doing and interacting. They didn't study or read about each other. Instead they brought the information and feelings forth themselves. Including the students, teachers and community members in researching and writing local histories highlighted and provided instances of points of view in history, beliefs and feelings. This learning required multi-generational and multi-ethnic participation. It also required that the activity mirror the desired outcome. So the teachers became people who didn't

know and needed to ask questions of villagers, people who did know. This role reversal encouraged learning to occur because participants were asked to do what was intended for them to learn.

What occurred was not only formative, but also transformative and participatory in Wenger's (1998) sense of the terms. It was the activity and interaction of research that helped to transform the thinking and feelings of teachers, students and villagers. While it is possible to develop multicultural education programs by adding modules about various ethnic and minority groups to existing curricula, or even finding texts that include multiple points of view, we have found that having communities and schools write their own texts and pull together their own curricula create processes of participation that have far more potential to engage and help develop the cultural and emotional imaginations of teachers, students and community members.

In the following pages we will describe the activities of the project and the learning processes of participants. We will also discuss those features and outcomes of this project – role reversal for teachers and villagers, multigenerational participation, multiple points of view, identity development and stereotype reduction – which we believe contain useful information that can inform cultural and multicultural learning in other settings. First, we need to contextualize the project by providing important background information.

Thailand is a small, tropical country in Southeast Asia that shares borders with Laos, Cambodia, Burma and Malaysia. It has a monsoon climate, with hot, wet and cold seasons. A Buddhist country and constitutional monarchy, Thailand is headed by a deeply beloved king and governed by a prime minister and parliament. While once counted as an Asian tiger, with an economy growing at record pace, the financial crisis of the 1990's, and other problems have caused a slowing of economic growth. Among the country's greatest problems today are poverty, HIV AIDS, drug use, production and trafficking, prostitution and deforestation. The Tai Yai people who participated in this project are quite poor and suffer, to varying degrees, with all of these problems.

This project was funded by the Thai Research Fund (a Thai government agency) as one of four pilots designed to encourage community members to rely more on themselves and each other, and less on the government. These projects fit into a larger, long-term government and non-governmental (NGO) agenda that encourages rural residents to work together and build community-based businesses. The government sees this as necessary because there are poverty, drug and prostitution problems in Tai Yai and other rural communities nationwide. As did her colleagues, the researcher conceptualized the project as action research. However, this was the only project of the four in which teachers, students and community residents would work together. In this case, they would study local village history, focusing on migration and Tai Yai identity. The rationale was that by encouraging people to focus on how life has changed for their ancestors and themselves, villagers young and old would develop a sense of their own histories and identities as they also built their lives as minority group members in Thai society. The hope was that Tai Yai villagers, young and old, would become multicultural, much like the Punjabis whom Gibson (1987) described as "dressing to please the people and eating to please themselves". In other words, the villagers would become able to navigate Thai society and still hold on to their Tai Yai identities. It was also hoped that through conducting research teachers would develop a greater appreciation for their roles in Tai Yai oppression.

THE THREE TAI YAI VILLAGES – LAI, HUAY AND PONG

Three, small, Tai Yai villages were chosen as project sites. Lai, Huay and Pong, [1] are inhabited by predominantly Tai Yai individuals, many of whom immigrated to Thailand from nearby Burma (Myanmar). There have been continuous waves of migration from Burma in all three villages. Some of the Tai Yai migrants arrived in Thailand as long as 120 years ago, with others arriving as recently as last year. The Tai Yai recognize the difference by calling people Tai Yai *cow* (old-timer Tai Yai) and Tai Yai *mai* (newcomer Tai Yai). Their migration to Thailand has resulted from and fuelled many centuries of strained relationships between Thailand and Burma. The Tai Yai people have been at the centre of many of the conflicts and continue to fight for their independence. They are a people who once ruled a large kingdom that reached from Yunnan, China, through eastern Burma and into Chiang Mai, Thailand. Like many peoples who have experienced a golden age in their history, the Tai Yai want to recapture the prestige and power they once had. They feel they have a right to self-determination and to their own nation state.

Two of the project villages, Lai and Pong have long been haven to and supported by the Tai Yai military. In Pong, Tai Yai military control and support have been especially strong. This village is near the Ta Tawn Bridge over the Mae Kok River, which forms part of the border between Burma and Thailand. This bridge is a rallying point for Tai Yai independence from Burma, and because of this there are many Tai Yai villages in this area. About 50 years ago, when Burma won its independence from Britain, many intellectuals, soldiers and other Tai Yai people migrated across the Mae Kok River and settled Pong. Over the years, the intellectuals left and soldiers took over leadership of the village. Ten years ago, Pong's major patron, a high-ranking soldier, died, and with him died the outside support for the village. Since the area is very dry, it is hard for the villagers to grow enough food to support themselves, and many have turned to drugs and prostitution to make a living. The annual Pong *wai kru* (respect for teachers) festival of gift-giving, dancing, music and feasting, supported by the military and also used as a cover for strategic military meetings, ended with this patron's death.

The school in Pong is quite separate from the community. Part of the reason is that the village is deep in the forest, part way up a mountain and thus barely accessible by a dirt or mud road in the rainy season of June through September – roughly half of the school year. Because of this, all of the teachers and administrators live in a nearby town. In addition, the principal was assigned to Pong School as a punishment. The teachers all went to work there straight from university. They had little choice in their assignments in a Thai teacher placement system based on seniority.

Lai village has also been supported and inhabited by Tai Yai soldiers. However, even more important to understanding this village is to know its geography and role as an opium, gambling and prostitution rest stop for Silk Road caravans of British, Burmese, Thais and others. A long, narrow town strung along a road very close to the Burma border, Lai is still on an active drug route. Like Pong, Lai is very poor, except for soldiers' families who have enough left over from subsistence to buy the uniforms and supplies needed for their children to attend school. Like Pong, the teachers at the Lai School do not live in the village, rather in the nearby *amphoe*, or district capital town. Both the old and new principals are businessmen, with more interest in city politics and business than in administering and improving the school. Like the teachers in Pong, Lai School teachers were also assigned to this remote school soon after graduation.

Huay is different from the other two villages because it was originally settled by Tai Yai villagers escaping their burning village in Burma. Villagers walked together in a caravan a hundred or more strong through highland mountain jungle and founded this village very deep in the forest. They

[1] The names of the towns are pseudonyms.

chose the area because they heard of its fertility. Unlike the other two villages, Huay lacks a road or trail to Burma. Huay villagers talk of how difficult life was when they arrived. They started out planting vegetables and dry rice, at the same time preparing fields to plant paddy (wet) rice. These paddies took three years to produce an adequate yield and some, unable to wait for the rice, went back to Burma during these first few years. Also unlike the other villages, the principal of Huay School is devoted to the school's development. Though the school is quite poor, the principal encourages teachers' creativity and supports them in their efforts. One teacher has many wealthy friends in Bangkok who have made regular donations to the school. Another important difference in this village is that the Tai Yai and Northern Thai both have neighbourhoods in the village, albeit on separate lanes. Consequently, the teachers and principal live in the village in fairly close proximity to their students and the Tai Yai community.

An important issue in all three villages is that of the old timers and newcomers. The old timers have established themselves; they speak Northern Thai (the local Thai dialect) and Central (Bangkok) Thai. They have adapted to life in Tai Yai villages in Thailand. The newcomers are less acclimated and therefore, more in need of participating in the project. Many of those who arrived ten years or more ago are citizens, while newer-comers are not. Thai citizenship becomes important for freedom of travel and sometimes employment. Literacy in Thai and the languages of many neighbouring, minority highland groups, such as Lisu, Lahu and Karen are also important for Tai Yai residents to make a living in the multicultural and multilingual marketplace of Northern Thailand. While these minority languages need to be learned through interpersonal experience, Tai Yai parents have long seen the Thai schools as critical for teaching Thai language literacy to their children. At the same time, they have also been wary of the schools because they have had little direct involvement. What involvement they have had has confirmed their fears that they are thought to be culturally inferior and in need of the school to inform their children about Thai culture.

TAI YAI ON THE INSIDE, THAI ON THE OUTSIDE

The culture and standards to which the Tai Yai begrudgingly aspire are those of the majority population in Northern Thailand, the *khon muang*, or the town's people. These people have also been referred to as the Tai noi (the little Tai) as compared with the Tai Yai (big Tai) who are the residents of the project towns. The relationship among these two groups is a rather complicated one. While the Northern Thais are noi (small children) in terms of ancestry, they are the majority population who have long been associated with the Thais in Bangkok as citizens of the nation state of Thailand. While the Tai Yai are older in terms of cultural ancestry, they are relative newcomers to Thailand. In addition to lacking citizenship and language skills, they also bring with them a form of the Tai culture that is older and more traditional than the Tai culture of the majority population, the Thais.[2]

This comparison is significant to the people involved because being modern is highly valued by the Thai people from Bangkok in the centre to Chiang Mai in the North, from Korat in the Northeast to Songkhla in the South. The focus on being modern or up-to-date, *than samay*, is reflected in everyday discourse. This Thai way of talking about being modern in dress, household goods, food, technology and values is applied as much in everyday speech as in the Thai and international media. Mills' (1997) study of the lives and dreams of young, migrant factory workers in which a *than samay* lifestyle of nice clothes, TV sets and refrigerators provides a sharp

[2] Thai is a nationality; i.e., the people of Thailand. Tai is a larger, Southeast Asian group of peoples who share wet rice cultivation practices, Buddhism and spirit worship, ancestry and self-designation as Tai. The Tai Yai are Tai as are the Thais. See O'Connor (1999) for an exploration of the meaning of the Tai.

picture of how this value competes with a more long-standing Thai value of caring for one's parents.

This tension and values competition is reflected in a nation-wide movement back to Thai roots. Many Thais have been feeling that the West and more developed Asian countries, especially Japan, have been exerting so much influence toward globalisation that it is time to begin saving Thai culture from extinction. There are Thai Studies Programs and Centres at most major universities with the explicit purpose of *anurak,* or preserving, Thai culture. There are other institutionalised programs to preserve Thai culture as well. The most notable are the widespread practice of 'wearing local clothes to work on Friday' and a number of highly valued festival parades, which include historical local dress, food, music, dancing and drama. It is unclear how much effect these cultural preservation activities have on more essential expressions of Thainess such as values, beliefs and behaviour. However, deep the preservation goes, it has turned out to have some important meaning for the Tai Yai people. Even though they are looked down on as being less modern and less civilized, they are still the cultural ancestors of the Northern Thais, so that their culture also warrants preservation. In order to understand the balance of these Thai views as experienced by the Tai Yai, though, it is necessary only to look to their economic position, which in most cases, is far worse than that of the majority group.

A project that aims to bring teachers, students and community members together to write a local history of the people of a town is one that squarely addresses this current Thai movement toward cultural preservation. This push for local cultural preservation alongside globalisation emanates from Bangkok, and also includes the provinces of the north, northeast and south. Secondly, villages and towns are much changed by this globalisation which entails vast labour migrations back and forth from Bangkok and other Thai cities from the many small villages and towns that dot the countryside. It is not uncommon to hear people talking about their hometowns as having only old folks and children for much of the year when the young adults are working in the cities. The Tai Yai are no exception to this. In fact, they say that all of the young adults have gone to the city.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THAILAND – A POTENTIAL CATALYST FOR CULTURAL AND MULTICULTURAL LEARNING

Also important to understanding this project is the Thai government's ambitious educational reform effort which is propelled by the Thai Educational Reform Act of 1999. The goal of the reforms, which reach from nursery to graduate school, is to produce learners capable of solving problems. The reform strategies include decentralizing administration and curricula and shifting the focus in classrooms from one of teaching content to one of producing life-long learners. A ministry of the Thai Government, the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC), is funding a variety of research and development projects for teachers, administrators, university faculty and others to improve administration, curricula and teaching methods. There are model teacher programs (*kru ton baap* and *kru hang chat*), school-based teacher training programs, and the development of both longer teacher training programs (increasing from four to five years) and a national licensing for teachers. ONEC is also pushing the parliament for an increase in beginning teachers' salaries from about 6,000 Baht or 143 US$ per month, to 8,000 Baht or 190 US$ per month. [3]

The part of the government's educational reform that has the most direct bearing on this project is the mandate that each school should develop its own local curriculum to supplement the national

[3] These US dollar equivalencies are based on the April, 2003 exchange rate of 42 Baht to 1 US dollar.

curriculum. This local curriculum is defined as including content about the local area, people and environment, making sure that local people are involved with the school and that students and teachers also work in the local community. It is hoped that through the development and use of these local curricula, schools will become community centres that make use of the talents of the community members, and meet the educational needs of adults and children. It seems that policy-makers are dreaming of the neighbourhood Buddhist temple school of old that served all of these functions.

Some teachers in city schools are bewildered by this notion of a local curriculum because their students' homes are not near the schools. But for the teachers in project schools in Lai, Huay and Pong, the need to get to know and become known by the Tai Yai townsfolk surrounding their schools makes a lot of sense. These teachers, like many others in Thailand, work in schools quite far from their hometowns. Like the situation at many rural Thai schools, especially in the North, the teachers do not share the same ethnic background as the students and community members. In this project, the teachers are majority Northern Thai and the community members and students are predominantly minority Tai Yai.

This project is an educational one on several levels. First, it is intended to produce content and materials for local curricula. Second it encourages teachers, administrators, students and community members to learn about culture and history through researching history and working together.

THE PROJECT: PROCESSES AND SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The project was carried out by a senior researcher, a research assistant, teachers from schools in the three towns, their students and people who live in the communities where the schools are situated. In the end, each of the three schools and communities produced a book about local, Tai Yai history. The hope is that in the future, teachers in these three village schools will use the local history books to build local curricula.

This was an action research project that used research as a learning tool for participants. In addition to collecting data, as all researchers do, the teacher, student and community researchers also learned about their own and others' cultures and histories. What follows is a description of the project's work followed by what was learned by participants. Some of the findings about local history are included, but because our goal here is to discuss the learning processes of participants, we focus far more on process.

The project had four phases. During the first six months the researcher and assistant contacted village leaders, residents, administrators, teachers and NGO workers to develop support for the project by recruiting teachers and key community members. Phase Two, the data collection phase of the project, lasted for about 12 months. During the next six months, Phase Three had teachers working with NGO workers to learn about and then encourage and empower villagers. During Phase Four, the last six months, teachers and the researcher wrote local history books.

Phase One – First Six Months – Contacts, Permissions, Initial Meetings

The senior researcher began work in February 2001. She chose sites based on relationships formed during past research projects in Tai Yai communities. She hired a research assistant. She visited community leaders and gained permissions. These leaders also shared census information and maps with her. One of the leaders was far easier to convince than the other two because he was the leader of a village where the researcher had worked in the past. This was the only village where she was able to convene an initial meeting with leaders, residents and teachers. In the other

two villages, she got permissions but held no meetings. She also contacted NGO workers and shared information with them.

The researcher went to a school in each community and discussed the project with teachers and administrators. All of them were worried about research and afraid of the researcher, a professor from the city. She knew that the teachers were so used to being told what to do that she needed to use particular tactics in recruiting them for the project. So, she reminded them that they would have to develop a local curriculum and that this project would help them to do that. In the end she got volunteer teachers from all three schools – three from Lai, eight from Huay and four from Pong.

Teachers, students, community members, the researcher and assistant met to discuss the research project. The researcher introduced the two research topics of migration and ethnic identity and encouraged teachers to begin by asking each of their students to interview two adults by asking them where they were from and the meaning of Tai Yai. It was hoped that the elementary school students would act as a bridge between the teachers and communities.

The researcher, assistant and some of the teachers who had volunteered met for a three day meeting to follow up the meeting with all participants. Experience had the researcher predict that this would be both training in research methods and cultural conscious-raising. She began the workshop asking for the teachers' views on doing research and about the Tai Yai community members. Teachers made comments such as, "We can't do research." The Tai Yai are not like us, they are dirty, have free sex and do drugs, just like other tribal people." They are Burmese – our enemy-- so why should we help them?" With her predictions confirmed, the researcher began to demystify the research process and the Tai Yai people. She decided not to provide initially too much information about either the people or research processes because she wanted the teachers to learn through experience and discovery. She knew that she would meet the teacher many times, and would have chances to coach them little by little.

The researcher also knew that she had to give the teachers enough information for them to get started conducting research. She gave them a primer on questioning techniques that included examples and role-play. All of the teachers asked questions in role-play sessions. However, all of them were far more focused on their questions than on informants' answers. She also showed *The God's Must Be Crazy,* a film about contact between two societies to encourage discussion about the difference between a researcher and native's point of view. What the teachers saw was that people who live in the forest live a more natural life than those in the city. While this was not the most sophisticated analysis of the film, it was better than saying that the villagers in the film were uncivilized. The researcher knew that the teachers had much to learn.

Phase Two – Next Twelve Months – Data Collection

The researcher knew that the teachers would need feedback as they collected data, so she built frequent workshops into the project design. Over the first 12 months of the project, she met with the teachers 15 times. Since they sent data through diskettes and email, she had even more frequent contact with them. The researcher also decided early on that she would assist teachers with research methods as needs arose. As she remembers the data collection phase of this project, she recounts four areas in the teachers' learning process.

Data collection

At first, teachers had little idea about how to collect data. They asked simple questions about where people were from and who the Tai Yai were. When the teachers asked these kinds of questions, they got short, simple answers, like, "Tai Yai are brave". "I was born in Thailand".

Since they didn't know how to continue the dialogue, their data was quite thin. This problem was raised in many meetings and continued throughout the year of the most intense data collection. Bit by bit the teachers gained questioning skills, and by the end of the project, the four teachers who remained were able to conduct interviews. Their skill levels, however, were not equal. Also of interest is that the teachers located key informants. These key informants were those community members who were able to remember and reconstruct their history and give meaningful details.

Integrating data and questions with larger, research questions

At first, teachers did not think about the larger research questions as they interviewed informants. Even though their questions were about where informants were from and who they were, the teachers did not link this with the larger research questions about migration patterns and ethnic identity. This problem, like the first one, was most intense at the beginning and lessened as time went on. This issue was also discussed in the many meetings during the data collection year. In the end it was no longer a large problem. The teachers were increasingly able to integrate and organize their data around the project's themes.

Additional interviews

The teachers realized that the data they collected initially was superficial as the researcher began to ask questions about Tai Yai history. For example, the researcher asked about the British in Burma and what kind of effect colonization had on the villages. The teachers realized that this was missing from their data so they asked about it. Teachers continued to need this kind of direction throughout the project.

Note-taking

At first, the teachers didn't take any notes, they just told about what they heard as they talked with informants. When the researcher asked them to write detailed notes they tried, but the notes were incomplete and sometimes contained analysis. For example, in writing about a change in leadership in one village, the teacher wrote, "The headman was replaced by an elder. This, however, was not a formal and official designation." Teachers needed to be reminded that this kind of analysis—'formal', 'official', should be left out of notes. It was difficult for most of the teachers to keep their own views out of their notes. For one teacher, this problem persisted until the end of the project. Others became more able to understand that informants often have different points of view from researchers.

In Pong, the teachers never collected any data because during the course of the project, relationships among Tai Yai village leaders and Thai officials broke down and there was a revocation of citizenship for 200 residents. This caused distrust and made communication between the community and the school, another arm of the state, quite tense.

Phase Three – Next Six Months – Checking Data and Empowering Community Residents

During the next six months, the teachers worked with a locally active Non-governmental organization (NGO) whose focus was on helping community members to make enough money to improve their health and standard of living and avoid prostitution, drug production, use and trafficking. Two of the villages have a long history of drug involvement. Pong is on an active drug-trading route and Lai has a history of being an opium, gambling and prostitution pit-stop on a caravan route once used by Chinese, British and other Silk Road travellers and traders. The teachers observed NGO workers and also assisted them in encouraging the villagers' economic

endeavours. They held meetings to encourage local pride and also provided funds and other assistance for small businesses.

After observing the ways in which the NGO workers encouraged the villagers, the teachers also held meetings to encourage the villagers to discuss their history and current situations. The Lai villagers said that they should hold one of the meetings just before a festival because they would already be gathering. But when the time came, only the children and a few old folks could attend because the villagers were all busy with work to prepare the festival. This turned out to be a great experience for the kids who had the opportunity to talk to the old folks and ask questions that were important to them.

During these six months the teachers organized several more meetings at local temples in Lai and Huay. Their goal was to encourage villagers to develop more confidence. History was their tool for encouraging villagers to be proud of their past and develop strategies to deal with current problems. The last meeting they held was most effective because the villagers, who had been reticent in the beginning, really aired their opinions. They disagreed with teachers' characterisations of their history and also shared ideas about the schools. This disagreement was significant for people who had previously been quiet both to show respect and avoid upsetting teachers on whom they depended for their children's education.

During the course of the project, relationships among Tai Yai village leaders in Pong and Thai officials broke down to the point where school-run (Thai-run) meetings to encourage villagers to develop ethnic pride and businesses became impossible.

Phase Four – Last Six Months – Writing Reports

During the last six months of the project the teachers wrote monograph-length reports about the local histories of Lai and Huay. The young, Tai Yai men who had conducted the research in Pong also wrote a report about Pong's history.

CULTURAL AND MULTICULTURAL LEARNING

The Teachers

The teachers had a great deal of difficulty conducting this research. Even though some of them had been teaching in the schools for years, they did not know the villagers. They had trouble understanding their language, which is close to Northern Thai, but not the same. This cultural and linguistic unfamiliarity, coupled with Tai Yai reservations about sharing information about their journeys through China and Burma, made it very hard for the teachers to collect complete data. At one of the many meetings, they asked the researcher for a questionnaire that contained all of the questions. They were sure this would help them to get the job done. The researcher attributed this request to Thai teachers' experiences of always being told what to do. They had trouble understanding how to ask a question, listen to the answer and then follow up with another, related question. In retrospect, the researcher argued that some of these problems might have been avoided with additional training in research methods, especially questioning techniques.

Teachers knew that they were collecting historical data in order to build a local curriculum. They were confused about how this could possibly be the case since they knew local, cultural curricula to include language, food, dance, festivals, music and other artifacts. This notion of culture as folklore devoid of history was much like that of the Tai Yai.

Thai teachers were overworked and underpaid like most of their colleagues around the globe. In government schools, all of the employees, including teachers, were government employees who

were paid 6,000 Baht or 143 US$ per month at the entry level. While teachers with seniority or advanced degrees earned more than that, it was not nearly enough to live the middle-class lifestyle to which most aspired. Almost all teachers had gone deeply into debt. Many had second jobs or small businesses to earn extra money. Professors and teachers all got paid to do research, one of the least lucrative, second jobs. However, since new standards that came with the educational reforms had teachers being evaluated not only in terms of their teaching effectiveness, but also their community involvement and research, this research project provided added benefits. Their experience in the communities, the research work and the books they had written also help them to develop the local curricula, which they were required to do. Had this project not been such a good provider of ways to do these newly required job tasks, it was not likely that teachers would have participated.

We had more data about the teachers' learning processes than the other groups because they had the most contact with the researcher. Because of this we were able to sketch the differences in cultural learning among the four teachers who worked with the project all the way through. These four teachers had different experiences and learned different things.

There were two teachers from Huay who completed the project. One teacher, Noi, tried to understand her Tai Yai students before the project ever began. As she learned about the Tai Yai, she wanted her students to develop a strong ethnic identity as Tai Yai only. She thought that they should not have to 'pretend' to be Thai. As the project progressed, she realized that for the students to make a living in Thailand, they would have to assimilate and become Thai, at least in part. She also became overwhelmed by the numbers of Tai Yai and the amount of assistance that she came to realize was needed. At the same time, she saw that many Northern Thais were also poor and in need of assistance. She developed mixed feelings about who the Thai government ought to help.

The other teacher from Huay, Lek, taught her Tai Yai students that they had a debt to Thailand because Thailand took them in when they had nowhere else to go. She taught them that they had to show some reciprocity and give something back to Thailand. She came to realize that this made some of the kids angry because it caused them to deny their Tai Yai identities. She softened a bit as she learned how hard the kids' lives were.

There were also two teachers who completed the project in Lai. One of them was so quiet that the researcher never really learned what she thought. The other one was just the opposite. A singer and dancer who also had a business selling various things, Jeep said that she really cared for her students but the researcher said that it was hard to find evidence of this. Jeep was always busy with other things. In addition, she really dressed up all the time to teach in this poor, remote village. In the end, Jeep said that she understood much more about the Tai Yai, but her behaviour did not change. Their book about Lai's history was disconnected and very poorly written. Perhaps the fact that both teachers lived outside the village and that Jeep was so busy with other things caused them not to have time to collect enough data and appropriately analyze and write it up.

We have discussed the political problems in Pong. There were no teachers who completed the project there. The history book was written by community members.

Community members

Tai Yai people knew quite well that the Northern Thais discriminated against them. So at first, when older folks were interviewed, they told children and teachers that they were born in Thailand. They tried to guess what the teachers wanted to hear and then told them that. They lied to please teachers whom they saw as essential to helping their children. As the research progressed and the teachers started showing more understanding of their culture, the Tai Yai grew to trust

them more and more. They opened up and started talking about journeys through China and Burma. As trust grew, some villagers told all. They told stories of hardships in Burma and China and more personal things as well, like their teeth falling out during a certain part of the journey, and crossing various rivers. They used these personal events to arrange other events in chronological order. They also told of coming to Thailand and needing to invest three years in preparing paddies, planting and harvesting the first crop of rice. Many of these older folks remembered using horses and wagons for transport up until WWII when the Japanese built roads which were followed by an increasing availability of trucks and motorbikes. Some old folks told of their troubles adjusting to life in Thailand. One gave the example of having to change her oil from sesame oil to pork lard. She said it was a long time before food tasted good to her. These older residents also told of more recent history, of their adult sons and daughters leaving the villages for nearby cities. Now, they said, they waited for checks from the city.

The old folks were happy to teach the children. If left to their own devices, they tend to focus on the Tai Yai 12 months of festivals, what they considered to be important in Tai Yai culture. They said that they needed to teach the children and their parents as well because the parents were all working and had no idea of Tai Yai customs. One problem, here, was that while the old folks had always been willing to teach, not many people of any age had been willing to listen. This was a significant problem for Tai Yai, Northern Thai and other cultural groups. The kids just hated to listen because the old folks told them what to do and lectured them about things they did not find important. If the kids asked too many questions, the old folks were bothered and either did not respond to the kids or scolded them for talking out of turn. There was a broad generation gap. Over the course of the project, this gap lessened for some older and younger villagers. Community meetings were key in this development. The villagers had the chance to discuss their difficulties and successes in life and came to the realization that while they used to had land and planted rice and vegetables, they now had little land and have to work for others. Even though this was their everyday experience, it was quite a revelation for them to talk about it.

Another problem for the villagers was that at first they did not believe that they had a history. What they had was a culture, with language, festivals, foods, dance and other artifacts. They were sure that history was the province of kings, princes and other royals. Little by little, as they began to piece together their own migration experiences, they came to understand that they did have a history. In the end, they realized it was quite rich, too, as it filled a whole book. One headman who had been sceptical at the beginning of the project said at the end, “Your book is fine, but I think I will write my own since I have so much information.”

Students

As we have said, the elementary school students were instrumental early on in conducting interviews with adults in their villages. This was an awkward task for them because like their parents, they wanted to appear to be Thai so they could fit into Thai society. They were also very young, so that as the lowest members of the hierarchy, they had little power to probe or refute anything. They asked questions and accepted all answers, short, untrue or otherwise.

The Tai Yai children just listened to their Thai teachers because they wanted to fit in and be Thai. They tried to forget that they were Tai Yai because they were ashamed of being a member of a minority group that was poor and looked down on. During the course of the project, these students came to appreciate their Tai Yai history and the struggles of their ancestors. They developed increased ethnic pride. This was exactly what the project and the elders intended – that the Tai Yai kids not be ashamed of who they were. The researcher and elders shared the idea that this kind of shame would be debilitating for the youth.

One of the benefits to the students was their growing appreciation of the old folks in their villages. Some of them developed close relationships with these elders and came to understand why the elders were so proud of being Tai Yai, even thought they were currently poor and looked down on by their Thai neighbours. They learned that the Tai Yai had been the *pii yai*, or the ultimate elders of all Tai peoples, including the Thais. They learned of tiger kings and brave soldiers who conquered a vast kingdom that included parts of China, Thailand and Burma. They learned that Tai Yai Buddhism differs from Thai Buddhism because their beliefs and practices are more important to them. They also learned of the Tai Yai reputation as good salespeople. All of these things helped them to gain a bit more pride in being Tai Yai. Some students said that they had to appear to be Thai in speech and dress, but also had to remain Tai Yai inside because that was whom they really were. Several students went even further, saying that the Tai Yai were actually better than the Thais because the Thais were dirty and lazy.

CONCLUSIONS – LESSONS LEARNED

In the beginning of this paper we said that this project was a model for others to follow because it encouraged multicultural learning in transformative ways by engaging students, teachers and community members in researching and writing local histories. The process encouraged teachers to consider multiple points of view, and villagers young and older to develop increasing ethnic pride. The key to the project's success was in its design which required multi-generational and multi-ethnic participation. As is always the case, everything did not go as planned and this project encountered many problems. These problems and successes contributed to the lessons we learned. In the hopes that these lessons might be useful to others developing multicultural education programs, we summarize them below.

Necessity is important

This may seem like an obvious thing to say, but we think that necessity may be the most important contextual feature for success in multicultural education programs. It would have been much easier for villagers, children and teachers to maintain the *status quo* and hold onto their views, however counterproductive we found them to be, than to engage in cultural learning. For the villagers, participation was necessary to please teachers whom they saw as key to their children's success. The children found it necessary to please both their teachers and their parents. Teachers knew that no matter how busy they were that they would have to develop a local curriculum within the next few years. They saw this project as helping them to do something that was required. This project demanded a great deal of time and energy from participants. While we do not mean to argue that self interest is wholly to credit for all of this work, it is clear to us that were there neither need nor benefit, participation would have been hard to come by.

A supportive process is important

The researcher knew that this project would lead to realizations that would not be easy for teachers, children and villagers. She built in meetings for everyone, especially focusing on the teachers who had both role models in the NGO workers and support for conducting research. No one told the teachers how to conduct research and how to ask questions. At the same time, the researcher met with them and provided guidance and coaching as problems arose in data collection, note taking and interviewing. For the children and villagers, the community meetings where they shared information about local history were very important to building inter-generational relationships and ethnic pride. These community and teacher meetings were key to encouraging participation. Without them, we imagine that the teachers would have collected data, taken notes and then written manuscripts. As it was, the meetings provided forums for support and the sharing of points of view.

Individual differences are important

All people do not become multiculturally literate at the same pace. This is not a new idea, but it is worth restating and instantiating. See Hollan (2002) for example. We wish we had more data about the children and villagers, but the data we do have and have summarized here about the teachers is evidence enough that individuals come to multicultural education projects with different ideas. Each individual also draws different information from these projects. Success cannot be measured by the development of a desired amount of pride on the part of minority individuals or a precise reduction of stereotypes held by majority individuals. Participation, though imprecise, is probably the best measure of success. Once participation becomes a common occurrence the door is open for continued ethnic identity development for majority and minority individuals. The importance of pride and the development of a positive ethnic identity for minority individuals is included as the cornerstone of most multicultural education programs. See, for example, Banks and Banks (1997) and Lee, (2002). However, we found that it was also important for majority individuals also to develop their own identities in relation to what they learned about minority group members. The teachers who seemed to learn the most became increasingly able to listen to the Tai Yai point of view without feeling that their own identity and point of view were being overlooked.

Local points of view are important

In summarizing effective multicultural education programs Lee (2002) says that all curriculum materials must be free of bias and stereotypes. We agree that stereotypes are never useful, but also disagree that bias should be removed. In this project, local bias was, in fact, the goal for the local histories. It was essential, really, that each community should develop a monograph about its own history from its own point of view. It is important that multicultural education materials come from many points of view. In fact, point of view is one of the issues we hoped participants would encounter and grapple with.

We also realize that developing local histories might have the effect of putting local ethnicities in boxes. In our case, writing Tai Yai histories and not incorporating these into the broader histories of Thailand and Southeast Asia could have such an effect. While using a local history alongside a more inclusive national or regional history might compartmentalize and trivialize local cultures, we think that this can be avoided through critical reflection and is well worth the risk. In addition, the process of collecting and writing the history is in many ways more educational than the finished product, so we encourage the writing and re-writing of local history as a method of multicultural education.

Teachers going to parents is important

According to Lee (2002) and many others, successful multicultural programs must include teachers and administrators encouraging parents from ethnic minorities to participate in school events. This is so that the school can include everyone, not only majority students and parents. Lee does not talk about teachers going into communities to serve or to learn about them. This is probably what is necessary to encourage parents who already have negative feelings toward the schools, for example, disenfranchisement, limited experience with education and oppositional identity to education as discussed by Ogbu (1997) and others.

In addition, if we are to aim for inter-generational participation in our cultural education programs, then we need to get beyond the school-centred notion of multicultural education. Wenger (1998) makes the strongest case for this, saying that education should transform us, thereby encouraging us to develop our own identities and listen to the points of view of others.

This local curriculum project moved in this direction by including older and younger Tai Yai villagers and majority group member teachers who all worked together to research and write about local histories. The researcher used both schools and Buddhist Temples for meeting sites and the teachers went into the villages and interviewed community members. Thinking beyond the school and curriculum is essential if we are to encourage inter-generational participation and identity-building processes in multicultural education.

When teachers and students conduct local research, they learn about culture

At the risk of being repetitive, we would like to say a few more words about the potential of teachers and students as researchers conducting local research. The most obvious benefits are that the teacher learns about the local community and the local community members, including the students, are seen as knowing something of value to the teacher. What we would like to stress, though, is that the process was just as important as what was learned. This process of doing research, brought the teachers into frequent, prolonged and meaningful contact with villagers. Research is what created participation. Not only did the teachers learn about the village and villagers' history, they got to know people and their personal stories. They also became known to the villagers. In addition, the teachers developed research and writing skills, both essential to their helping their students learn to think analytically.

Actions speak louder than words

> The secret, of course, is that mind is an extension of the hands and tools that you use and of the jobs to which you apply them. (Bruner, 1996, p. 151)

This project packed a powerful punch of activity, participation and multicultural learning. Unpacking Bruner's little gem of a sentence explains why. We learn from doing. Our project was focused on learning by doing research. Both the tools and the tasks shaped that learning. The researcher presented the teachers, villagers and children with a task – to learn about local history, a topic which had everyone looking at how people have come to where they are today. The tools were human resources in the form of asking and answering questions, telling and recording stories and the developing trust that made the questions and stories increasingly personal and meaningful to participants. The activities and roles for teachers, students and villagers were different, so the tasks were also different. Teachers and students asked questions and listened. Villagers answered questions and told stories. Since teachers were members of the majority group, the Northern Thais, this turned normal activity on its head. Instead of telling villagers and children what to do, they were asking about the Tai Yai minority experience and point of view. Everyday affairs were also turned upside down for the Tai Yai minority group members who usually listened to the teachers rather than telling them about their own views and experiences. These activities, tasks and tools describe a learning process that mirrors the desired outcome. In other words, participants were asked to do what they were intended to learn. That's why the project was so effective.

The Lai villager whom we quoted at the beginning of the paper said it most clearly:

> *Before, the school told us what to do. Now they are asking us about our history and we are teaching at the school, too*

Wenger (1998) would likely describe the effectiveness a bit differently. He would say that it was the participatory character of the research that encouraged participants to develop their identities, and it was this personally meaningful knowledge and feeling that motivated learning and transformation.

For whichever reason, this project was more effective in reducing the stereotyping that comes from the fear of the unknown than just exposure to individuals from unfamiliar cultures alone

would have been. While we do not mean to belittle the effect that reading a book can have on a person, we have found that writing one is far more powerful. This is because writing is far more active and requires more effort and much more investment of oneself than reading does. Research is also an active approach to building knowledge and experience.

Through our experience, we have come to feel strongly that multicultural education programs will be far more effective if they include activities that mirror intended outcomes. We found research, as this project arranged it, to be one such activity.

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