TODAY'S CULTURAL DILEMMA FOR THE THAI TEACHER: MORAL PARENT *AND* CRITICAL THINKER?

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INTRODUCTION

> Teachers do the right thing. They are diligent, persistent, hospitable, idealistic strong and patient. They are disciplined and avoid illicit activities like smoking and drinking. They are also honest, sincere and kind to others. They take the middle way. They are unbiased. They are wise, reasonable and knowledgeable. (His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, 1980:23)

As the King tells us, teachers are pillars of morality. Like their teachers and parents before them, today's Thai teachers should care for children in the most moral ways with whatever is needed: lessons, tutoring and basic needs so that children grow up to be good people. This ideal teacher as responsible moral parent is an integral part of the Thai cultural legacy. We see it clearly in everyday life, Buddhist and academic texts, popular literature, and research data from several surveys about good teachers. All of these sources of evidence will be discussed in the pages to follow.

Positive social relationships, and the personal attributes that enable them, are the most important characteristics of the good Thai teacher as moral parent. All of the views of good Thai teachers that I will present in the following pages include characteristics such as polite and tidy, soft-spoken, fair and encouraging. The message for Thai teachers is that if one is emotionally attuned to students, and if one is a good person and role model, ones students will grow up to be good Thai people and citizens. This is what is most important.

The teacher as moral parent is first and foremost a good person. In Thailand the good person is a good Thai Buddhist. This is a person who doesn't kill, lie, steal, smoke, drink or gamble. It is a person who is kind, giving and helpful to others. It is a person who knows his or her place within the social hierarchies of life – family, school, work, broader community and nation. With social harmony as the ideal, the good Thai person is almost always a follower, and is conservative, patriotic, friendly, hospitable and yielding.

There are other views of the good person in Thailand as well. There are large numbers of Muslims in the Southern part of the country, as well as sizeable Chinese communities in Bangkok and other cities and towns. In the North, there are many highland groups including the Akha, Lahu, Hmong and Tai Yai. All of these people bring their own views of morality to Thailand and assimilate to varying extents, fine-tuning their views as they intermingle them with

Thai ideals. Of these groups, the Chinese are the most numerous and the wealthiest. Though I have no statistics, it is common knowledge that many of the academics, engineers, physicians, CEO's of large companies and other professionals are Chinese-Thais. Most Chinese have assimilated in Thai society through intermarriage and other experiences. Assimilation; however, is never linear, and never 100%. Chinese-Thai views of the good person continue to include a more competitive and individualistic spirit than do Thai views. My point here is not to analyze Chinese-Thai views of the good person, but, rather, to say that the Thai views I am presenting here are the views of the Thai majority.

Since the earliest times, Thai education has been a religious enterprise focused on maintaining Thai culture and Buddhism, the national religion. The Buddhist approach to education is conservative. Its highest-order goal is to conserve and pass on ideas, practices and activities. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the birth of government schools modeled after the British system added secular subjects to the Buddhist curriculum. Still, today, science, technology, the social sciences and other subjects are intermingled with the continued religious/moral focus that permeates the government curriculum used in all Thai public schools. In addition to being moral parents, Thai teachers also have a long history of being providers of information.

The passage of the 1999 Thai Education Act (TEA) proposes to expand the role of the teacher as moral parent and information provider. Added are student-centered learning and teaching to help students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving abilities and a love of learning. While teaching methods that encourage these developments may be the best currently available internationally, it is quite difficult for Thai teachers to use them. First, there has been spotty and uneven availability of workshops where teachers might learn how to use such methods. Second, attending to individual children, a requirement of student-centeredness, is difficult to achieve in classrooms with forty, fifty or sixty students. In addition, teachers are busier all the time with administrative and community work in addition to teaching. Salaries are so low that most teachers are deeply in debt and work at other jobs to supplement their meager teaching incomes. These second and third jobs take even more of their time away from the children. Third, teachers feel blamed. Did their use of inappropriate teaching methods focused on providing information cause their students to learn so little? Fourth, they are not being asked to buy into the new teaching methods, rather are being told to use them. Fifth, and most importantly, teachers are being asked to think critically and teach students how to do this as well. Most teachers, having focused on being providers of pre-packaged information and good Thai people, have learned to be satisfied and cooperative, not inquisitive and critical. While the dilemma is multifaceted, its core is cultural – the moral parent is the Thai ideal and the critical thinker is foreign and contrary.

THAILAND – PLACE AND CULTURE IN BRIEF

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. The population in 2001 was 62.6 million people. (Fry, 2002:18). A Buddhist country and constitutional monarchy, Thailand is headed by a deeply beloved king and governed by a prime minister and parliament. While once named an Asian tiger, with an economy growing at record pace, the financial crisis of 1997 and other problems have caused a slowing of economic growth.

Among the country's greatest problems today are education, corruption, poverty, HIV AIDS, drug use, production and trafficking, prostitution and deforestation.

Thailand is also a country rich in water and arable land, the kind of natural resources that allow for agricultural production that far exceeds the peoples' needs. Like all cultures, the Thais have a particular sense of what is appropriate and desirable. This is very important in our discussion of the Thai teacher as moral parent because these are the ideals that teachers must model and teach. Thai people are generally friendly and hospitable and their most important cultural values include harmony, beauty and fun. Social hierarchies are fairly rigid and based on age and gender, with elders and males almost always having authority over younger folks and females. Language, posture, and the expectation that the older one will care for the younger one in exchange for his respect inform most social interactions (Wallace, 1996). In addition, who one knows is very important because Thais organize themselves around important people in a sort of entourage and circle (Hanks, 1975). This means that the long-used patronage approach is the acceptable way of business, politics and education. A politician will give contracts to people he knows. A school will feel obligated to admit the children of alums. A business owner will hire people he or she knows.

Whether it is possible or not, most Thais also believe that they should honor and care for aging parents. They value the following formula: If one knows ones places in family and social hierarchies and behaves appropriately, one will also be promoting social harmony. This entails going along with the status quo, not making waves and not sharing negative feelings. Disagreeing is a chancy thing to do because if not carried out diplomatically, one would be perceived as disrupting others. This is to be avoided. (Wallace, 1996)

In Thai culture, avoiding confrontation is a part of a larger set of values, all relating to a smooth social flow. It is important to be agreeable and to go with the flow, to take a cavalier, or at least a neutral attitude toward life. A cool heart (*jai yen*) is valued over a hot one (*jai raun*). One commonly hears Thais say O.K., it doesn't matter (*my pen ry*), and whatever (*kaw dai*). In terms of the cognitive side of harmony, Thais believe that one shouldn't think too much (*my kit maak*) or make too much of things. They believe in taking life easy and comfortably (*sabay, sabay*), and often look for the path of least resistance. While many Thai people work very hard in a variety of occupations, there remains a common attitude that the best work situation is the one that is the easiest physically and mentally, takes the least time and yields the most money. In fact, the person who works the least and has the most wealth is considered to be the person with the best *kamma*. This is a Buddhist ideal that says do good, get good; do bad get bad. The effects of this merit and sin accumulate so that ones *kamma*, or life condition, is built of deeds from this life and other, previous lives. We will return to *kamma* in the discussion of Buddhism.

Using this definition of a great job, being a teacher is near the bottom of the list. For those who are conscientious, the hours are long, the work hard and the pay meager. But there are also a good number of Thai teachers who do not go to class, arrive late or don't teach at all. Many of them have second and third jobs to pay increasing debts and make ends meet. Like the experiences of their peers in other countries, the bureaucratic paperwork and other kinds of work have increased, while courseloads have remained steady. In addition, many new teachers are

assigned to the poorest, most remote and challenging schools due to the government system that rewards seniority with the most attractive job assignments.

THAI SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS TODAY

During the 2002-3 school year, from July through March, I observed classrooms and other school settings in and around Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand. I observed the best teachers (model teachers or *kru ton baap*), teachers at demonstration schools and teachers at other government and private schools. I did not include International Schools based entirely on western models of education because my study is of Thai teaching. I do include several private schools whose methods of instruction and teachers are more like Thai schools than International schools. I'll make a few generalizations, provide important statistics and will also describe several classroom lessons.

Thai government schools vary widely in the quality of facilities, numbers and training of staff and readiness of students. While many rural primary schools have no walls, electricity or toilets, there are town and city secondary schools with computer labs, air-conditioning and modern sanitation. Some schools have a teacher in every classroom. Others do not. Teachers in the latter must split their time between two or more classes. Some classrooms have more than 50 students.

The Thai government reports 2001 student teacher ratios of 19:1 in primary schools, 21:1 in lower secondary, 21:1 in general upper secondary and 31:1 in vocational upper secondary (ONEC, 2001a: 58). One must keep in mind that these figures include all administrative personnel in Bangkok, regional and district offices and schools. The average student teacher ratios I have observed in the city of Chiang Mai and also in some nearby suburban and rural schools are closer to 45:1. I have seen a few, very remote village primary schools with these low student teacher ratios, but I am fairly certain that these figures are seriously misleading. Thai classrooms are generally very overcrowded.

In forty nine countries compared in the *2001 World Competitiveness Yearbook*, Thailand ranked second in the percentage of the national budget that was spent on education and thirty third in international competitiveness. (Fry, 2002:20) According to Atagi (from Frye, 2002) there is a great deal of inefficiency in the system. Much of the problem is administrative and organizational redundancy with responsibilities overlapping into various government ministries. In addition, it is well known and well documented that there are a fair number of corrupt government officials in the many education ministries and departments.

At the local level there is corruption as well. The poverty I have seen at some rural primary schools is evidence of fiscal distribution problems. In addition, I have seen teachers not show up for class, or assign work and leave, and I have spent days tracking down principals. Most schools have entrance exams. Students and their parents have many strategies for securing their seats. Many children go to cram school, many cheat on the exams and just as many parents bribe or use their prestige to force school officials to admit their children. See Rojanaphruk, 2002 and The Bangkok Post, May 13, 2003.

The popular Thai novel, *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* (1992/1978) describes a rural school situation familiar to many Thais. An idealistic and well-loved young teacher, Piya works for an alcoholic, gambling and often absent principal. Piya goes with the flow and puts up with his boss, as he must. However, when he learns of broader, more destructive corruption, Piya photographs a local lumber baron with his cronies and mountains of illegally cut teak from the nearby forest. Piya goes to the media and is killed in the end.

It is important to put corruption in context. Payment for incomplete work, bribes for school admission, cheating on tests and embezzlement by government officials at all levels have a particular meaning in Thailand that we must consider. Phongpaichit and Piriyarangsan (1994) describe the current political system as one based on a legacy of King and royalty, nobility and their entourages. In that system, it was always correct for a Thai client to give his patrons gifts in exchange for protection and favors. At the beginning of the 20th century, a mere hundred years ago, King Chulalongkorn began to transform this nobility-based system into one of government departments with civil servants. Due to economic, social and educational advantages, royals and nobles dominated the new system. As Chinese and other successful merchants were able to send their children to school, they, too, entered the government service. As educational opportunities improved so did access to government posts.

Thai government service does not provide a salary which is becoming of officials. The higher the official's position, the more true this is. Most Thais agree that people with power and position should be quite well off. In part, this is also because clients benefit from the money, power and prestige of their patrons. By association, they enjoy increasing social contacts which are quite important in Thai business and society. Most Thais feel that payments to powerful people in exchange for expanding social networks and more particular favors is business as usual.

At the same time everyone has his or her limits. Today many Thais feel that the level of corruption is out of control. Top-level government ministers who are charged with embezzling funds are shuffled from post to post instead of standing trial and facing punishment. While corruption is now reported in the media (see especially the Bangkok Post, any edition) most Thais are disgusted but take no action. They feel powerless to do anything about it. This is one of the messages in *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*. Perhaps it really is best to let things be. This is, after all, the Thai way of handling most disagreeable things.

At the same time, there are many Thai teachers who are a lot like Piya. They sing and play and provide information to their students. They are close to their students because they care about them. They are the ideal Thai teachers who are moral parents. Clearly, though, the moral parent is only one model of the Thai adult. The corrupt politician, the cheat and the thief is a competing model.

Generalizations and summaries are useful to a point, but it is hard to understand cultural issues without any experience of everyday life. For the current paper, the most useful slices of life lie in classrooms. To help the reader to get a sense of Thai classrooms, students and teachers I include summaries of three of the many classes I observed.

Kanika's first grade Thai class – Recite and Rhyme

In February 2003, I observed Kanika teaching Thai to a group of fifty-three first graders. One lesson stands out as typical of lessons I have seen in Thai primary and secondary classrooms. It is typical because the teacher stood at the board and taught a lesson from the textbook. Students then did seat work based on the lesson. What they did not finish in class, they took home. Also quite typical was the level of noise in and outside the classroom. Since almost all Thai classrooms are open air, there is always at least a low din coming from other classrooms and gym classes in nearby fields and courtyards. Also, the children in Kanika's class sit in rows, two to a desk, all desks facing front. With fifty-three children her classroom is crowded. She has just enough room to stand next to about half of the children.

A chalkboard stretches across the front of the room. A clock hangs above the center of the board. Above that hang pictures of the King and Queen of Thailand. A Valentine's Day bulletin board on one side of the chalkboard and the life of the Buddha on the other board fill the front of the room.

The lesson of the day is recite and rhyme. It is a continuation of a previous lesson on rhyming words. The teacher starts by asking the children for words.

A student says, "*nok*", or bird.

Then Kanika calls children to the board to write rhyming words. When they are finished, she asks them what the vowel and then the final consonant sounds are in the word *nok*. The children answer each question in unison.

When Kanika asks her students if any of the words rhyme with *nok*, someone says, "*yang*."

"What is the vowel?" she asks.

"Ah." Students say in unison.

"And what is the final consonant?"

"Ng." Chime the students.

"So have we found a rhyme with *nok* yet?"

"No." The students reply.

The teacher asks for another word from the board that rhymes with *nok*.

Someone calls out, "*tdok*".

The teacher says, "very good," and circles the word. Then she calls for a recitation of the chant, *For the Love of Thailand*.

I have translated the chant and include it below because it is a good example of explicitly teaching children to be good Thai people. The class chanted twice. Once the teacher said half a line and the students responded with the other half. The second time the children said the verse on their own. Kanika walked around the room keeping time by moving her head up and down and rapping a stick on one little desk after another.

Thai verse is read across from left to right. For example: Thais are good. We are brothers and sisters. A golden country. The land of the Thai. And so on. This is a rhythmical chant with patterned rhymes. I am sorry to lose this in the translation. Please try to imagine it.

For the Love of Thailand

Thais are good — We are brothers and sisters
A golden country — The land of the Thai
With energy — Strength and unity
With love of our country — Freedom and harmony.

Our flag — Is tri-colored
These three things — To cherish
The red of the nation — White of religion
And navy the beauty — Of our great Thai King.

Good neighbors — Not aggressors
With danger — We protect
Our beautiful land — Together we care for you.

Thai Towns and cities — Have long histories
Beautiful and authentic customs — Cannot be lost from our country
Aram Temple — Is most splendid of all
Our own Thai language — For us to use and speak.

Thai children today — Must be good and skillful
Be independent — And press ahead
Honest, patient — And disciplined
We love our country — To the end we unite
In strength — With all our hearts.

After the class finishes the recitation, the teacher asks students questions that follow the order of content given in the chant. She asks them. “What do we have to use?”

“The Thai Language,” they answer,

Then, Kanika asks, “Who are the Thai children today?”

“It is us!” Students answer, again in unison.

"What should children be like?" she asks.

"We must be good and skillful."

"What else?" The teacher asks.

"Independent," say the students.

Continuing to follow the text, Kanika asks what it means to press ahead, and some children answer that this means the future. She asks if this is the distant future and some children answer that it is the present. She compliments the children on their understanding. Then she asks them what they will do as students. They say that they will study as high as they can. When she asks what they will do with all of that education, students answer that they will use it to help to develop Thailand.

Then she asks for rhymes from the chant. She begins with the first several lines.

"Khon Thai tii nii Pen pii pen nong."

The classroom gets very noisy with children shouting out answers. Some of them are shouting "*tii, nii, pii"*. Others are shouting other things.

She repeats "*nii* and *pii"*, and then reviews that their vowels are the same. In this case, there are no final consonants. The teacher leads students through four examples and then asks them to work together in groups for the rest of the class period to find the rhymes in the rest of the chant.

The children work some and play some, and the teacher walks around the room monitoring their work. She freely compliments the children who are working and finding the rhymes.

At the end of class, the student leader calls for respect to the teacher. Students say, "Thank you teacher".

Amarin's Third Grade English Class – The Animals

Amarin is a national model teacher (*kru ton baap*). She teaches lower elementary English at a popular and moderately priced private Christian school in Chiang Mai. Her classroom is on the third floor of a large, four-story open classroom building. With fifty-one students, the room is crowded with desks facing front in rows. The narrow center aisle and the narrow corridor around the room's perimeter barely allow Amarin to pass. Students sit facing front and twist in their seats when they work in groups. A chalkboard stretches across the front of the room, above it a picture of the king and the flag, side-by-side, with a cross, hung a few inches higher in-between them. The room is full of posters with pictures and English and Thai words for body parts, months and days, transportation, family, sports and animals. The school motto: "Love, care, share, help, sacrifice", hangs amid other posters. The only message hanging in the room that is not translated into English is on the bulletin board in the front of the room. It is a tribute

to the Queen of Thailand and to all mothers. Thai Mothers' Day is on the Queens birthday. The bottom of that board is filled with student work.

I observed Amarin many times. One of the third grade English classes that took place in September 2003 is typical for her because it includes recitation, phonics, picture and text flash cards, group work and student presentations. She also takes opportunities to highlight learning processes as students are learning, and uses classroom management techniques to effectively settle students down and re-gain their attention.

Class begins with students reciting a chant that helps them with spelling. As they chant, Amarin organizes materials. When they finish she thanks them and asks students who need help with their animal headbands to come up to the front of the room. Half of them pour into a longish, wiggling group in front of the classroom. A student in the back asks about his animal, a bird. Amarin asks him how to spell it. When there is no answer, she asks the entire class, and about half respond in unison, " b… i… r … d."

Phonics takes center stage for about fifteen minutes of this sixty-minute class. Amarin uses poster board charts that contain a sound in the middle such as "ot", with letters all around, such as h, p, sl. As Amarin points at each one, students recite in unison: "h…o…t… hot, sl…o…t… slot". She asks for this one again, saying it herself and pointing out that sl is one sound, not two.

Then she holds up a student's paper and tells the class that only two students did as well as Noi on this assignment. "Why, you ask, is Noi's paper so good? It is neat and the coloring and detail of the picture is excellent. The little story that she wrote is also very good." She calls Noi to the front of the room, puts her arm around her and asks her to read her story. A very timid Noi reads her little story about summer and hurries back to her seat. Amarin tells students that they will do this kind of assignment again and that they will all have another chance to do as well as Noi.

The next student Amarin calls to the front is Boom. He bounces right up, smiling all the way. Amarin puts her arms around him and holds his paper in front of his chest so all can see it. She describes his work saying that it is a really nice little story that he produced on a computer with his mother's help.

He reads the story in a tiny voice and she repeats each line so all can hear. "The sky is blue, the leaves all fall". Amarin asks the class, "What season is this (*nii pen radoo array, kha*)?"

They say, "*bai mai louang*."

"Good."

Then she and Boom finish reading the story. "It's time to say goodbye", she reads, raising her arms and swaying. She smiles, opens her eyes wide and repeats with emphasis, "this is a beautiful little story."

Amarin writes the word "ANIMALS" on the board, underling the "s" for Thai students whose language indicates the plural quite differently.

As always, students repeat, “animals.”

She uses flash cards with the written names of animals, turtle, bear, monkey, kangaroo, dolphin, elephant, tiger, giraffe and more. Students read the cards in unison. Dissatisfied with students’ efforts, Amarin tells them that she will be grading the next round, with everyone who puts forth effort getting the full ten points.

They go again, about 25% louder this time. Amarin stops to emphasize the final “k” in duck and the “sh” in fish, the latter a particular problem for Thai speakers. In the end she grades the students in groups with a chart on the board familiar to students. Most groups got the full ten points. Two got nine points.

Amarin calls Mai up to the front of the class so that students can hear a native English speaker say the animal words. Mai uses the same cards, and into the microphone she says, “dolphin.”

Students respond “dolphin” in unison.
Mai goes through all the cards twice. In the end a boy in the front asks, why is Mai bowing as she reads each card?”

Amarin says, “Mai is not a teacher or a professional speaker, she is a teacher’s friend. But she is really brave to be up here in front of the class, isn’t she? This is a great chance for Mai to practice talking in front of the class. Today, she is bending and moving as she talks. Tomorrow, maybe she will do this less. With practice, she will be more and more confident and will fidget less and less. Let’s have a round of applause for Mai.”

Everyone claps.

An Animal song, *Old MacDonald*, comes next. Amarin smiles and sways to the music as she leads students in singing several verses of the song. The third time, she asks them all to stand on their chairs, which she does as well, and they scream the words, “Old MacDonald has a farm, Ee Ay Ee Ay Oh, And on his farm he has some sheep, Ee Ay Ee Ay Oh. With a bah bah here and a bah bah there, here a bah, there a bah, everywhere a bah bah.” As they sing, Amarin also leads them in body movements that emphasize the words here, there and everywhere. She also cracks a joke about all the bah bah, which, in Thai, means crazy. They all giggle.

After this song the students are completely revved up, and all Amarin has to do is to ask them to please sit down. And then, after waiting 5 seconds, she says, “OK, then.” They quiet down.

Next, Amarin leads a recitation using another series of flash cards, this time with pictures and no text. The first one is a monkey. The teacher asks in a joking way, “Are you a monkey?” She laughs and answers her own question, “Yes, you are a monkey”. She continues to lead the class in reciting the names of the animals pictured on the cards.

Then Amarin writes on the board: “What animal do you like?” She asks Mai, the native English-speaking student.

Mai responds, “I like a tiger”.

The teacher repeats this and writes “I like a …” on the board. Amarin looks around, sees a girl in front standing, and says, “We will start with you.” Amarin asks her, “What animal do you like?” There is no answer. “Do you have it with you?”

The girl shyly shows her dog headband and says “dog.”

Leaning toward the little girl Amarin says softly, “I like a dog.”

The girl replies very softly, “I like a dog.”

The class is getting louder as Amarin focuses her attention on one student, so she says, “You all need to listen to your friends and your grades will reflect this. Then, she turns back to the girl and asks her, “What animal do you like”?

“I like a dog,” the girl replies.

Amarin then says, “She likes a dog.” She writes it on the board.

Next Amarin calls groups of students to the front of the room and asks them to put their headbands on and respond, one by one, to the question “What animal do you like”. Some students give one-word answers, such as “shark” or “dolphin”, and Amarin always says, “I like a shark,” or “I like a dolphin”. Students repeat as best they can. When all students have told about their animals, Amarin asks them to hide their headbands. Then she asks the class what animal each child likes. Unlike the usual choral response, students raise their hands and Amarin calls on them. The first students give one-word answers like “tiger”, or “cat”. Amarin says that they can also say, “She likes a cat.” She explains the pronoun usage in Thai and gives translations to be sure they understand.

With fifty-one students, this activity, even at Amarin’s zippy pace, takes some time. Student attention wanes. The teacher returns to her chart and gives participation grades for each group. She calls for a volunteer to take her role in asking students about the animals. She chooses a boy standing near the front of the room. He takes her role and asks the first student, “What animal do you like”. The student answers and he moves on to the next. As had his teacher, he also asks the class what animals these students like.

Amarin takes over again, asking children in another group, “What animal do you like?” As before, she then asks the class what animals the children like. She notices Sue’s hand shoot up and then quickly down to cover her mouth. So she asks Sue, “What animal does Gina like?” Sue stalls and Amarin asks her if she hasn’t been listening.

A friend whispers in her ear, and Sue says, “A rabbit”.

“No.”

Amarin calls on another student, who says, “a dog.”

“Right”, says Amarin, as she walks over to the grading square on the board and adds points to the group who got the answer and subtracts points from the group who did not.

At the end of class, Amarin describes the homework by giving an example. She calls all the students who like cats to the front of the room. She tells them that they will need to meet before the next class and make up a song about cats to sing in front of the class. Each group will need to do the same for their animals.

Class ends when the teacher tells students they will be having a break and may play or use the bathroom.

Chai’s Ninth Grade Math Class – Geometric Design

Chai is also a national model teacher (*kru ton baap*). He teaches math at the secondary level at another moderately priced private Christian school in Chiang Mai. Chai sees math as a vehicle to help students learn how to think and use their creativity. The class I will describe is different than the other two classes described thus far, and also different from many of Chai’s classes because the students spend almost the entire class period working on their own. I observed this class in September 2003.

Chai begins the class by explaining the assignment. He says that students will use three and four sided shapes as well as circles to create geometric designs. Early on in his explanation, he shows student examples from another class. He says they are ordinary, and that he expects far more creative designs from this class. He asks for something strange and beautiful, and tells students that they will have this Friday class period as well as the weekend to create their designs. He asks them to begin by thinking and conceptualizing the design. A student asks him about tools, and he says they can use everything: pencils, erasers, compasses and rulers. He stresses that this project is really all about creativity.

Chai leans some larger examples against the chalkboard and invites students to have a look at them. Students spend the rest of the hour working on their designs. Chai walks around and talks to students who initiate conversation. The classroom is quiet, except for noise coming from other rooms.

A few minutes before the end of class, Chai asks if anyone was finished.

In unison, students say, “No.”

“Exactly,” Chai responds. “That’s because coming up with a creative design is really hard. How long do you think it takes to design logos and advertisements?”

“A long time,” students answer in unison.

"We are really doing the same thing. Summarizing a lot of knowledge and skill into one image, one design. You could have copied a design in an hour, but this is just copying, not creating. It is far easier because you don't think, you just copy." Chai reminded students that they would have the weekend to work on their designs.

Called by the leader, students end class when they slowly chant, "Thank you, teacher."

The Good Thai Teacher in these Few Observations

These observations are of three teachers teaching different subjects at different grade-levels in different schools. I chose these classes because despite all of these differences, there are a few important similarities. Most striking is the class size. All of these classes had over 50 students and one teacher. Like most Thai classrooms, all three are open-air and quite noisy, with sounds from students in the class, from other classes and from outdoors. Thai classrooms are often quite noisy. When they are available, most teachers use microphones.

The two language classes were taught in the traditional way -- from the book at the board. In both classes, the teacher led the class in recitations where the students answered in unison. This is quite common in Thai schools. It is an expression of class size and of the importance of conformity and harmony. Teachers expect students to learn together and to respond together. In fact, teachers often ask questions that may be answered with one or more certain words.

Sometimes these questions directly follow a text, such as Kanika asking, "What must children be like?"

The children answer in unison, "they must be good and skillful".

Even Chai used this method in his math class, which was different that the other two classes because the students spent much of the period working individually. Chai asked his students if they liked strange advertisements. In unison, they answered, "Yes". He asked them several other questions like this as well.

Sometimes choral response is for rote memorization. Kanika had students chant "*For the Love of Thailand*". Amarin used the choral response method with flash cards to help students memorize English sounds and words. These methods are used in all kinds of subjects, not just in language classes. For example, I observed a high school Biology teacher who routinely asked students to tell her what was given here or there or what was high or low on a graph in their texts.

Amarin departed from this whole-group method with choral response directly from the text when she called students in small groups to the front of the room. She asked students individually what animals they liked. She built in a way to involve the other fifty students by asking them to remember what their classmates said.

These teachers encouraged three kinds of thinking – memorization, analysis and creativity. Amarin encouraged memorization with flash cards, singing and choral and individual response.

She encouraged creativity with her homework assignment that would have students writing and singing songs about animals. Kanika encouraged memorization through chanting and analysis through students searching through the chant for rhyming words. Chai encouraged creativity through asking students to create geometric designs.

These three teachers also taught within the moral parent framework. All three were tidy and polite. All three were positive and avoided being critical about the material and the students. Amarin was the best example as she used only positive methods to quiet students. She also turned students' criticisms of their classmates into learning opportunities and only highlighted the best student work.

A SURVEY - THAI STORIES ABOUT GOOD TEACHERS

Methodology

In order to learn more about what it means to be a good teacher in Thailand, I conducted a survey. I worked with five Thai college students, who, as research assistants collected stories of good teachers from 100 respondents which included 20 teachers, 20 high school and 20 college students, and 40 others. Research assistants asked respondents to tell them about two of their best teachers. I coached the research assistants, using role-play and group analysis, to follow responses that were given, rather than introducing new categories in their questions. I encouraged them to ask for examples. I am fairly certain that each came close to mastering this approach to questioning which yields categories of thinking that are important to respondents. Even if assistants did not follow these procedures all of the time, their perspectives as college students are also valuable.

The assistants took notes about the stories as they interviewed respondents, later typing them in Thai. We met weekly for about six weeks as assistants collected the data. Once the data was complete, we organized and analyzed it. Each assistant reviewed her data, reading over it several times and then made a list of common characteristics mentioned in her teacher stories. We shared our lists, reviewed the data again and developed another list of common characteristics. Using our combined list, assistants reviewed their data and counted each time a particular characteristic was mentioned in a story. There were a few new categories that emerged, and a few others that were dropped because they were not very widely shared. We adjusted the list of shared characteristics accordingly. Research assistants reviewed the stories and counted the characteristics one more time. We produced a table and discussed the results. Assistants checked the data one more time for accuracy of the count. Then we fine-tuned our list by combining like categories. Our most salient category, tidy, polite and clean in dress and habits was born in this last pass through the data.

Findings – The good Thai teacher as primarily a moral parent

> I liked this one teacher because we were close. I got to know him because he was my homeroom teacher. He helped me with all kinds of reports and would give advice about where to get electrical supplies. He was the head of the electrical

> division at tech school and also head of the drug project. When students skipped class a lot, he would look after them. He also invited the older students to help test the younger ones for drugs. (From a 23 year old local man)

The good Thai teacher is predominantly a moral parent who also is sometimes a provider of information and far less frequently a learning coach. Twelve of the seventeen (or 70%) of the most common characteristics found in the teacher stories have to do with teaching morals for life. Only thirty percent of the characteristics of good teachers have to do with teaching information or skills. Of these, only one feature, teaches students to think, suggests that the good teacher is also sometimes viewed as a learning coach.

The most important characteristics – the moral parent I

> I have a teacher who is a nice woman with a good disposition. She doesn't take advantage of students. She looks like a nice older person. Her appearance is polite and tidy. When she teaches, she is easy to understand. She teaches in her own style. (From a 15 year old student)

The top four, or the most frequently expressed characteristics of good teachers are tidy, polite and clean in dress and habits; nice giving and kind; pay attention to and love kids and easy to understand. When we look at the frequency of response, only one of the top four characteristics has to do with information, that is the last one, "easy to understand".

The next group of characteristics – the moral parent II

> One of my best teachers was a female professor in college. She was polite and tidy. All of her students loved her. She had a good disposition and was always a good example for students. She was nice and was herself with students. In terms of her style – she was tidy, like a female teacher should be. She also always followed students. Even though I graduated long ago, I still keep in touch with her. She planted a treasure and helped me realize what it means to be a teacher. She gives her students knowledge, confidence and support. (From a teacher)

The next group of characteristics were all mentioned between 43 and 48 times in the stories. None of these characteristics directly address teaching information or skills. All are about being a moral parent -- forging good relationships with and guiding students by being a good example for them. These characteristics are as follows:

> Able to discuss problems and give advice to students;
> Speaks politely and doesn't scold, yell or criticize;
> Is natural with students;
> Is fair and reasonable;
> Is fun and not boring;
> Is a good role model for students

It is interesting to note that only five teachers mentioned that the ability to discuss problems and give advice is a characteristic of a good teacher. Almost half of the respondents who listed being a good role model for students were teachers. This is a large proportion when we consider that teachers comprise only twenty percent of total respondents. Perhaps the need to be role model is clear to teachers from professional training and experience.

The least important group of characteristics - teaching

It is in the least frequently mentioned group of characteristics that we find the most attention to teaching information and skills as being important in good teaching. Four of the six characteristics in this group have to do with teaching information and skills:

Teaches students to think
Gives examples;
Teaches from the book at the board;
Gives group and individual work.

The other two features in this group, patient and calm and motivates students with words, candy, etc., again are more reflective of the focus on teacher-student relationships in the moral parent model.

The four teaching techniques in this last group, along with being easy to understand, from the most frequently mentioned characteristics, are far less important to respondents' memories of their best teachers than are the twelve other moral parent characteristics. At the same time, the fact that they make a coherent category also reveals that they do have a place in Thai ideas about good teachers.

Table 1, to follow, summarizes the survey results.

Table 1 Characteristics of Good Teachers in Thailand

Traits, characteristics	Secondary Students *N=20 (40)	College Students N=20 (40)	Teachers N=20 (40)	Folks N=40 (80)	Totals N=100 (200)
1. dress and habits – tidy, polite, clean	26	30	18	29	**103**
2. nice, giving, kind	27	12	15	27	**81**
3. pay attention to and love kids	16	14	19	32	**81**
4. easy to understand	*21*	*11*	*9*	*30*	***71***
5. able to discuss all problems, also gives advice	8	14	5	22	**49**
6. speaks politely, doesn't scold, yell or criticize	17	10	6	15	**48**
7. is natural or is him/herself with students	3	16	8	21	**48**
8. fair and reasonable	4	16	14	10	**44**
9. fun, not boring	11	10	7	14	**43**
10. teaches students to think	**7**	**8**	**6**	**11**	**32**
11. Is a role model	3	5	19	5	**32**
12. gives examples	*3*	*8*	*5*	*10*	***26***
13. teaches from the book, at the board	*14*	*1*	*0*	*6*	***21***
14. patient and calm	2	4	8	2	**16**
15. gives group and individual work	*9*	*0*	*1*	*3*	***13***
16. motivates (encourages) students with words, candy, etc.	0	1	3	8	**12**
17. is professional (teacherly)	0	1	9	0	**10**

*N=20 (40) Means that there were 20 informants, each giving two stories.
Italics are used in the list of characteristics to differentiate teaching techniques from moral parent characteristics. **Bold type is used to show the category I am calling teacher as learning coach.**

We cannot be sure from these findings alone that the Thai teacher is more often a moral parent than a messenger of information or a thinking coach. What we can be sure of is that this is what Thai people expect teachers to be like. We can also be sure that these traits and ways of being are what Thais value in their teachers. However, when taken with the observations of classrooms, the picture comes into sharper focus and we see that expectations mirror the activities of everyday life.

ANOTHER STUDY OF GOOD TEACHERS IN THAILAND

Mantana Biamada (1968 as reported in Peumpasuk and Kamweset, 2001) surveyed 1406 respondents (415 male 991 and female) in Central Thailand. When she asked them about good teachers, they listed the following characteristics which are separated to indicate three levels of importance. Good teachers:

1. Teach well;
2. Use democratic reasoning;

3. Are kind and giving to students;
4. Are fair and honest;
5. Give advice and consult with students;
6. Have a good personality and characteristics;
7. Have good relationships with students;

8. Support and promote students;
9. Take care of and give things to students.

This study, conducted 35 years ago, presents an even stronger view of the good Thai teacher as moral parent. In Bimanda's findings, only the first characteristic, teach well, is related to teaching and not moral parenting. All the other characteristics, for example, support and promote students, have a good personality and characteristics, be kind and giving and take care of students all speak to the importance of the teacher-student relationship and its similarity to the parent-child relationship.

Democratic reasoning is also given as a very important characteristic of good teachers. In fact, it is second on this list. In Thailand, this is shorthand for being fair and listening to all students, not just those from rich and powerful families, the most gifted, or the best looking.

THAI BUDDHISM: MAIN SOURCE OF VIEWS OF THE GOOD THAI TEACHER

Thai Buddhist beliefs provide the foundations for Thai ideals about the good person and teacher. One of the most widespread and popular Thai Buddhist ideas is *kamma*. Most Thai people believe in the notion of *kamma*, or, do good and get good; do bad and get bad. They refer to the process of doing good as making merit, and seldom discuss its opposite – sin. The Thai notion of *kamma* includes all of the future, both in this life and the next. (Klausner 2000/1981) *Kamma* is very important in both worldview and activities and is something that most Thais want their children to understand. Teachers are ideally additional moral parent models who help children to stay on the meritorious side of this dichotomy.

Klausner (2000/1981) summarizes a hierarchy of merit-making. He says that the best way for a Thai person to make merit is to support the Buddhist temple and monks with food and other donations. The more one gives, the more merit one accumulates. The giver can expect some of that goodness to come back to him or her. A man or boy may also enter the monastery for a period of time. Spending a month or more living in a temple as a monk, a man or boy makes merit for himself and his parents, especially his mother, who cannot achieve this kind of merit without a son. While not as meritorious as temple-based merit-making or entering the

monastery, a Thai person can make merit and avoid sin if he or she is a good person and does not lie, cheat, steal, kill, smoke, drink or gamble. One also makes merit if one behaves in ways that promote harmony and avoid confrontation and anger.

A respected scholar of Buddhism and education, Pra Ajharn Payutto (2537 BE - 1994) says that education is the set of practices that lead to a correct life. Payutto's view is a moral one because he is saying that the correct life is the correct goal. In this case, if education is used for good purposes, its set of practices will serve a person well on the journey toward a correct life. In this sense, education is a tool to be used for correct moral development. Correct moral development leads one to be meritorious.

Thai Buddhism is far more complex than this and entails many perspectives and canonical texts. The most directly relevant message about critical thinking is found in the Kalama Sutta in which Buddha says, "one should not believe what people say even if they are teachers or leaders. Nor should one rely upon tradition to understand a phenomenon or idea, rather one should observe and analyze and then, finding a reasonable and beneficial solution, should accept and live up to it. (web.signet.com, 2002)." This is not, however, what Thai children are taught about Buddhism. Some say that Thais are too conservative and yielding for this kind of approach.

According to Mulder (1997), Buddhism is presented in grade school textbooks as "an endorsement of hierarchical society with its gratefulness, obligation, obedience, rote learning, desire for disciplined subjects and stability" (pages 40-1). While Mulder does not find discussions of merit and *kamma*, in the school texts, through everyday experience these views also come to be inter-mingled with these Thai cultural attributes of the good person. Mulder also notes that the texts leave out all reference to Thai beliefs in ghosts and spirits. Many Thais also believe that the world outside the home and family is a very dangerous place. Not only are there human strangers, of whom one should be wary, there are also all manner of ghosts and spirits of places, ancestors, bad death and unfinished business. Altars and little "spirit houses" protect almost every home, business, Buddhist temple and important site. Thais propitiate spirits at these places with candles, incense, flowers and other objects. They are showing their respect to the spirits in the hopes of receiving blessing and avoiding harm.

The most important beliefs that comprise Thai Buddhist notions of the good teacher are that one ought to be a good, meritorious person who avoids lying, cheating, killing, and other sins and who also avoids confrontation and is grateful and obedient.

A college textbook for pre-service teachers (Peumpasuk and Kamweset, 2001) includes a detailed list of characteristics suggested by these Buddhist principles. The list is quite similar to the findings in both my study and Biamada's (in Peumpasuk and Kamweset, 2001). In the Buddhist view, the teacher is a role model for students by being a moral parent who is patient, cares for and protects students from the unknown, wants students to be happy and grow, dresses and speaks politely, knows and recommends the right way of living and prevents students from being lazy and fooling around. The teacher should also accept all students regardless of what they learn, and should see the good, ignore the bad and keep only good things in their consciousness.

In addition to these characteristics, Buddhist principles for good instruction are also given. Teachers should be knowledgeable and disciplined, teach so that students understand clearly, use what students know to learn new things and move from the concrete to the abstract. Teachers are also reminded to pique students' curiosities so they will follow, support students to become self-confident and brave to think, speak and act, to make learning fun and to develop strategies for keeping students' attention.

This list is much more detailed in terms of teaching methods than either survey. The Buddhist notion of good teaching also includes the directive: support students to become self confident and brave to think, speak and act. This shows up in my survey as number ten, teach students to think. I have found that teaching students to think in the Thai classroom context is difficult at best. The teacher is supposed to be appropriately polite and soft-spoken and avoid confrontation. He or she is also supposed to only teach what is good and right. This is problematic because without access to what the teacher considers to be bad and wrong, students cannot learn to think critically. In addition, students are supposed to treat the teacher with respect, and in a Thai classroom this usually means to avoid speaking unless the teacher asks a question. What this means is that teachers have to be very careful about what they encourage students to think about and students must also be careful that they think correctly. All of this hedging clouds thinking.

THE EARLY DISCOURSE OF THE CURRENT THAI EDUCATIONAL REFORM: FINE-TUNING THE VIEW OF THE GOOD TEACHER

It has been a few more than a hundred years since King Chulalongkorn, Thailand's reformist leader into the twentieth century, opened the first government schools in the kingdom. Before that time there was instruction for boys (and some girls) of royal and noble birth conducted at the palace. In 1900, King Chulalongkorn opened two government schools (King's College and the Civil Service School) that offered English, Thai, mathematics, science and other subjects in Bangkok, the capitol city. (Wyatt, 1994:237)

Long before the twentieth century Thailand's Buddhist temples and monks served as educators, teaching local boys to read and write the Thai language and study the classical Buddhist texts in the Pali language. Thai Buddhist temples with their emphasis on basic literacy, morality and religious scholarship and government schools, with their emphasis on literacy, morality and secular subjects together form the roots of the current Thai educational system. The depth and complexities of these educational root systems strongly inform education in Thailand today. The ways in which they are intertwined with other institutions and ideologies of Thai society promote continuity of guiding values, ideals and practices amid changing contexts.

According to Fry (2002) the current education reform in Thailand is the fourth such movement. He mentions first King Chulalongkorn's introduction of secular education in the early 1900's, second a period of democratic reforms in response to the student movement of the mid-1970's, third an attempt to reform education to help Thailand adapt to the needs of globalization. The fourth and current reform began with the passage of the 1999 Thailand Education Act (TEA).

The goal of the 1999 TEA is to help students to become thinkers – problem solvers and life-long learners and to turn Thailand into a knowledge society. These changes are deemed necessary to

enable Thailand to effectively compete in the global marketplace. For the past four years, the Thai government, especially The Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC) has worked toward these goals by commissioning a large number of research reviews of all aspects of education, hosting international conferences on educational reform, problem-based learning, site-based management and other topics. They have undertaken an information campaign in the media, on websites and in printed reports about educational reform measures and outcomes. They have funded a host of teacher education and professional development pilot projects aimed at showing teachers how to use methods that encourage students to think and enjoy learning. They have also worked on restructuring governance and administration of education and schools across the kingdom. As I write in May 2003, ONEC is also lobbying parliament to raise teachers' entry-level pay from 6,000 to 8,000 Baht per month (from roughly 143 $US to 190 $US per month).

Like many educational reform movements around the world, the Thai government targets teachers as key to both the problems and solutions. ONEC also points to administrative problems such as centralization and mismanagement, but in the end, the teachers are really the ones who must change their methods to make Thailand a knowledge society with students who can think and enjoy learning enough to become life-long learners.

Model Teacher Evaluation

The clearest expression of the government's reform vision for teachers lies in the Model Teacher and National Teacher Programs because the winners are teachers judged to be the best in the nation. According to ONEC (personal interview, 2002) there are 586 model teachers (*kru ton baap*) and 26 best in the nation teachers (*kru hang chat*). The program ran from 2000 – 2002 and was promoted to encourage teachers to think about the new government standards for good teachers, to reward those who met or exceeded the standards, and to encourage these teachers to train others. To become eligible, teachers needed to develop a set of materials detailing their teaching philosophies and methods as well as research that illustrated the efficacy of their methods in terms of student learning. Their portfolios were reviewed by their principals and teams of college faculty members. All of the standards in this section are English translations from the Thai (ONEC, 2001c).

The standards are expressed in seven categories:

1. Use of child-centered teaching practices;
2. Management of learning processes;
3. Specific areas of knowledge and skills;
4. Evaluation of learning using child-centered learning and multiple methods so teacher has indicators about the learner;
5. Does research and develops model of learner that fits learner's abilities;
6. Personal characteristics;
7. Community Work.

Some of the standards focus on Thai notions of the teacher as moral parent, just like those found in the two research studies and in Buddhist perspectives. These are standards that have to do with being tidy and polite, yielding, positive, conservative and moral.

Personal Characteristics of the teacher

1. A good model in personality and family;
2. Exhibit moral and right action (*mii kunatam, chireatam*);
3. Has good relationships with others;
4. Follows customs, is law-abiding, maintains customs, conserves art, nature and national culture;
5. Professional in teaching;
6. Has his or her soul in teaching (*chitwinya*);
7. Accepts bosses, colleagues, students and community.

Community Work

1. Receives acceptance and respect from community, also, great personality;
2. Academic leader of community;
3. A member and promoter in professional teaching organizations;
4. Knows the school's community well.

Here ONEC adds academic leadership and membership in professional organizations. These activities have the potential to promote growth and change, not the conservatism which is characteristic of the other attributes in these sections.

The attributes in sections one through four provide many more instances of this kind of blending of "the old with the new". Here are a few examples, "teachers should help learners to do real work so they are able to think, use their thinking and practice right thought (*kitchop* – a Buddhist idea). Teachers also should blend content of subjects and infuse morality into every subject (*kunnatam* – a Buddhist idea). Teachers should be knowledgeable about religion, art, culture, sports and Thai wisdom (*pumipanya* which includes dancing, folklore and sayings).

The importance of right thought, morality and Thai folklore and traditional ideas are clear in these standards. Since the standards intend for teachers to use these ideals as they teach students to think in real, interdisciplinary settings, they are also asking for change.

The rest of the characteristics listed in these standards are new to Thai teaching and include a teacher's abilities to promote encouraging atmospheres that encourage students to construct robust knowledge, to use research as part of learning process and to ensure that learning is aligned with tools and location. In addition a teacher should make sure that students receive practice in discovering information and creating knowledge on their own, that students choose to do activities, follow their abilities, their skills and interests so that they will be happy, that students practice discipline and responsibility in work and that students practice self evaluation, improve themselves and accept others to the point where they are interested in life long learning.

Taken together, these new characteristics almost reflect international standards and best practices in teaching. What is missing is critical and analytical thinking. This is because when all of the characteristics are considered, they privilege certain kinds of thinking as good and demonize other kinds of thinking as bad. The Thai teacher must also be a moral parent who, in addition to nurturing relationships and being a role model, must also promote Buddhism and right thinking. With these new standards, he or she must also promote active and discovery forms of learning that help students to create robust knowledge and a love of learning.

CRITICAL THINKING IS UNTHAI

The National Scheme on Education, published by ONEC in 2002, was just released as a strategic plan for the next fourteen years (2002 – 2016). The scheme includes three objectives: "balanced human development, building a society of morality, wisdom and learning and developing the social environment" There are a series of targets related to these objectives. Two of them, when taken together, sum up the problem for encouraging critical thinking in Thailand.

First, consider the objective: "All Thais will have knowledge, critical thinking ability and a thirst for knowledge in science and technology as well as social and human sciences." (ONEC,2002:18)

Then consider this one: "The majority of the Thai people will adopt desirable values and behavior in accordance with the traditional way of life. (ONEC, 2002:17)

While other government documents, Buddhist materials and research surveys mention teaching children to think, this is the first mention of *critical* thinking in all of the educational materials I have reviewed. Critical thinking is problematic when it is envisioned as accompanying traditional Thai culture which discourages critical thinking and disagreement by encouraging conformity, conservativeness, going with the flow and not making waves.

Imagine a student who thinks she has to sit still at her desk and repeat what the teacher has told her in unison with her fifty-four classmates. Her expectation is that she stay with her classmates. The teachers' expectation is that students stay together and repeat. Will this student stop the classroom flow and ask a question that calls the information into question? It is hard to know for sure, but my experience tells me that like the students in Amarin and Kanika's classes, the students will follow the flow. Even students in Chai's class, where creativity is encouraged in their geometric design project, would not be likely to question the parameters set by the teacher.

At one elementary school I visited a teacher told me that the school was teaching children to speak up more and ask questions. She said that the teachers thought it was a good thing, to teach the students to speak up. Several parents complained that their children were ill mannered after attending the school. Mai, the teacher, said that some parents were just really conservative. Still, she maintained that "with the way the world is now" it is important for kids to be braver and more independent. At this school, where Kanika also teaches, I observed many classes and never saw an instance where a teacher modeled critical thinking by questioning a text. Nor did I see any instance of a student either questioning the teacher's presentation of information or the parameters of an assignment. I did see students making presentations of their work which was

based on texts and teacher lectures. The only original work the students did was creative work, usually painting, drawing or three-dimensional art to accompany their presentations. This must be what Mai was talking about when she said that they were teaching students to speak up and ask questions.

In my observations of many schools and classrooms, I did not find the encouragement of critical thinking to be practiced. What I did find is that the predominant instructional process in Thai classrooms from first through twelfth grades continues to be direct instruction via lecture and/or recitation followed by seat work and then often by homework. Some teachers have added activities that encourage creativity and thinking. Such as geometric design, science projects, song-writing, and observation, research and bicycle tours in social studies. In these kinds of activities, students spend far more time talking with each other, answering and asking questions and presenting their work in front of the class. These kinds of activities that represent the new "student centered" teaching methods, however, are few and far between in most classrooms. In addition, most of the thinking students do is creative, adding artistic representations to information straight from texts.

In one class, I saw a science teacher encouraging students to think about how certain reactions might happen and to predict other reactions based on their hypotheses. This work was facilitated by the teacher who coached a few students at the board. She asked students to think through the graphs and helped them with leading questions when they had problems. Several small groups of students went to the board and each time the students were rather timid and tentative, relying on the teacher's guidance.

These observations make sense when considered alongside survey data and Buddhist notions of good teaching. The stress is overwhelmingly on what I have called the moral parent model of the good teacher, which is followed by teacher as information provider and then learning coach. Remember that 70% of the responses in my survey comprised the moral teacher view with only 30% having anything to do with teaching. In Biamada's (2001/1968) survey only one category of response "teach well" had anything to do with teaching information. Though it was the first category of nine, it was striking in its singular mention.

The Buddhist notions about the good teacher include many more features that speak to methods of teaching information. These include piquing students' curiosity, moving from the concrete to the abstract and encouraging students to be brave in their thinking, speech and action. However, when taken in the context of the "moral parent" characteristics, this last teaching method takes a back seat. If a teacher aims for these "moral parent" characteristics, such as being polite, caring for students, protecting them from the unknown and keeping only good things in their consciousness, then they, themselves, are prevented from being brave in their thinking, speech and actions. If teachers don't know what critical thinking is and have no experience doing it themselves, how can they model or explicitly teach these things to their students?

THE DILEMMA – MORAL PARENT *AND* CRITICAL THINKER?

There are many issues related to teaching and learning that exist within and beyond the walls of the schoolhouse. We have seen that in the Thai case there is a major contradiction between Thai

cultural values and experience and the agenda of educational reform. Thai teachers are supposed to be models of the Thai cultural ideal of the moral parent. This means that they are supposed to be conservative, tidy and polite, compliant, hospitable and caring. At the same time, the current educational reform expects them to teach critical thinking. Is it possible for teachers to be both moral parent and critical thinker? It seems to me that this is only possible if two things happen -- a cultural change in the Thai sense of the ideal person and moral parent *and* a change in the real world such that corruption and the easy way out no longer pay off.

Children learn about life in and outside of school. They learn from the content of their lessons and from the unspoken messages that come from activities in school. In Thai classrooms, students learn to operate as one, as a compliant unit, all uncritically following teacher and text. In order for students to be able to think critically, they need to be encouraged to analyze information, not just accept what the teacher says and what is in the text. For their part, teachers also need to become critical thinkers. To make these goals possible, I believe that there are three sets of interconnected cultural issues that deserve further consideration: teacher buy-in to change teaching and learning, confronting corruption in Thai schools and the broader society, and finally, broadening the sense of the purposes of education.

There has been much research that shows that educational reform efforts are often top-down mandates from academics and policy-makers to schools and teachers. The teachers perceive policy-makers as having neither knowledge nor experience of the realities and subtleties of real classrooms. In addition, changes and reforms that come from above often leave teachers feeling blamed for their students' real and perceived failures, further alienating the teachers from the goals and methods of reforms (Evans, 1996). This lack of teacher buy-in is often one of the main reasons that reforms are unsuccessful in effecting major educational change (Evans,1996; Pope, 2003 and others). This is a problematic issue in Thailand for several reasons. First, Thai teachers have little experience voicing their opinions about ways to improve learning. Second, the reform effort is well underway, with goals, objectives, strategic planning documents and the like, all with broad media coverage. The one area in which the government's educational reform asks for teachers' input, enhancing a much-reduced national curriculum, requires a great deal of work from already overworked teachers. Although these obstacles exist, the extent to which ONEC and other government education ministries can seek teachers' input to improve their students' learning, will help to determine the success of the reforms. ONEC must be ready to hear about class sizes, physical plant, resources, administrative overloads and other problems and to do something about them. If they do not, teachers are not likely to take reforms seriously. Even if teachers do try to implement mandated reforms, they are not likely to have the necessary skills, tools, information and situations that are conducive to their realization. Teachers must practice what they are to teach. The classroom and broader social contexts must be conducive to that practice.

The second phenomenon that has a great impact on the teachers' dilemma of being both good person and critical thinker is the high degree of corruption in Thai society. Teachers and parents are not the only role models Thai children look to for examples of what it means to be Thai adults. Powerful people such as school and government officials also play their part as children gain experience in school and the wider society. While the media is often blamed for introducing corrupting western values into Thai society, it is not credited enough for exposing

corrupt Thai officials. On 27 May 2003, I searched the Bangkok Post website (http://www.bangkokpost.com) and found 300 citations to articles exposing government corruption. While less systematic, I also clipped corruption-related articles from *The Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* from December 2002 through May 2003.

While I found many articles related directly to education, two of them, when taken together, paint a graphic picture. One reported that parents had to pay fees up to 70,000 Baht (1,166 $US) to buy seats for their children in public schools (Bangkok Post, 2003). The other, from *The Nation*, reported that "Cheating goes far Beyond Exams". Pravit Rojanaphruk reported on a study conducted by a Chulalongkorn professor and his students who found that cheating on exams and changing grades were big business, costing from 5,000 to 20,000 Baht (119 to 476 $US) per course grade (Rojanaphruk, 2002:4A). Rojanaphruk goes on to quote Professor Amornwich, "Ours is a society of corruption. People who do not cheat are branded as foolish… University education has been reduced to getting a piece of paper." (ibid)

Children learn early how to cheat in school. They learn about cheating on tests, buying seats in certain schools, cheating on entrance exams, buying admission and buying course grades. They learn that the adults who run their government are corrupt as well. In all of the articles in the Bangkok Post from the period December 2002 through May 2003, not one government official was tried or convicted of corruption, though many were suspected. Here are a few examples. The former health minister who, when caught with 22 million Baht said that it had been his wife's money, and that another 18.4 million Baht was gambling winnings which he put in his maid's account because it was more convenient. (Susanpoolthong, 2003) There was a probe into corrupt contracts on a 17 billion Baht road in Southern Thailand in which 18 high-ranking government officials were cited (Mahitthirook, 2002). The extent of the Salween log scandal was found to be difficult to assess because " some of the logs had been stripped of their bark and sawn into planks by unscrupulous forest officials. The bark and planks were then sold illegally." (Nanuam, 2003)

It was never reported that any of these or countless other officials suspected of corruption were ever formally charged or brought to trial. It is more likely that they either just waited for the next scandal to obliterate their "flash in the pan", or that they were transferred to other high-level posts like the two high-ranking officials of the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry who were transferred due to their involvement in corrupt contracts of the Klong Dan wastewater treatment project. (Kongrut, 2003)

These kinds of illegal activities that go unpunished because of the social positions of the offenders are not only costly to the country, slowing development and perpetuating poverty, they also undermine any attempts at urging children to learn to think, especially critically.

As Prof. Amornwich warns, if people do not cheat they are seen as foolish. If cheating is seen as the route to power and prestige, why think at all? Critical thinking is hard work. Why do it if no one else does? Why do it if there is an easier way? After all, the Thai ideal that competes with that of the moral parent is the wealthy and powerful individual. This is the person who has the most money and works as little as possible to get it. The wealthy and powerful, whether corrupt or not, are as much a cultural model of the Thai person as is the teacher as moral parent.

Prof. Amornwich also raises the final issue I will address when he says that a university education is just a piece of paper. Unfortunately, he is right if students will lie, cheat or steal to get that piece of paper to secure a higher-paying job. If learning were important, grades and degrees would take a back seat, or at least a passenger seat, to self-improvement.

We need to ask ourselves, what is education for? Is it only a path to a job or profession, or is it more than that? Like that of many other governments, the Thai rhetoric of educational reform, cites education as the key to economic competitiveness in the global marketplace. With this kind of goal, education becomes more corporate in its approaches, and less like the family-based enterprise that rearing our young once was. It is less about providing the moral parent model for living a good life than it is about producing able workers who help to make a country a business-friendly environment. While I understand formal education needs to address economic issues, are we not also obliged to provide an environment that is conducive to teaching children to be the kind of adults we can be proud of?

Thailand has much work to do to achieve all of these goals. Cultural change in the Thai meaning of the moral parent, the critical thinker and the successful adult are all necessary for children to become life long learners, critical thinkers and good citizens. Because they are relatively powerless, teachers cannot accomplish these goals without help. If it is to be resolved, the teachers' dilemma of how to be the moral parent and critical thinker must become the national dilemma.

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