

Developing Student Teachers to be Professional Teachers

Suttipong Boonphadung

Abstract—Practicum placements are an critical factor for student teachers on Education Programs. How can student teachers become professionals? This study was to investigate problems, weakness and obstacles of practicum placements and develop guidelines for partnership in the practicum placements. In response to this issue, a partnership concept was implemented for developing student teachers into professionals. Data were collected through questionnaires on attitude toward problems, weaknesses, and obstacles of practicum placements of student teachers in Rajabhat universities and included focus group interviews. The research revealed that learning management, classroom management, curriculum, assessment and evaluation, classroom action research, and teacher demeanor are the important factors affecting the professional development of Education Program student teachers. Learning management plan and classroom management concerning instructional design, teaching technique, instructional media, and student behavior management are another important aspects influencing the professional development for student teachers.

Keywords—Developing student teacher, Partnership concepts, Professional teachers.

I. INTRODUCTION

TEACHERS are regarded as the most important factor influencing the successful educational transformation. [1]. They play a key role in providing quality education for the students, who are the most important resource of the nation and a strong basis societal and national development [2], [3], [4]. Because of this reason, professional development for teachers should be taken into consideration by many countries. Having educational reform system, Thai education places an emphasis on the quality of teachers. High quality teachers or professional teachers need to be expert in learning management and possess practicum knowledge. Professional development for teachers should be examined and revised for establishing a professional development guideline for reorienting the student teacher programs for success [5].

Student teachers in the 21st century are expected to have appropriate teacher demeanor, possess intelligence and emotional quotient, and be able to create a good relationship with students. Furthermore, professional teachers must be skillful in learning management and instructional methodology [6], [7], [8]. Richard and Kruker [9] stated that the teaching professional practicum provides an opportunity for the student teacher to gain knowledge and actual experiences as a professional teacher. The Faculty of Education makes a great effort to produce professional teachers who meet these expectations of the society and

nation's educational standard. The Faculty of Education aims to provide effective teachers with a professional process [10], [11]. However, it is found that the process still lacks, and there are extended meetings to find the most effective ways to achieve professional development for student teachers. Although the result of the evaluation of student teachers' performance was in a good level, there is a weakness in the teacher professional process, such as being short of creative thinking, with insufficient English language skills, weak performing classroom action research and inadequate evaluating and measurement skills [12], [13]. Furthermore, studies investigating weakness of the student teachers during performing a practicum placement reported that there are weaknesses in communicative skills, distress, powerlessness, discouragement, and the lack of confidence and inadequate knowledge in teaching substance [9], [14]. This reflects that the quality of the student teachers does not meet the expectation of the society as well as nation's.

According to literatures, the researcher found that the Vygotsky' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and partnership concepts are able to support student teachers' effective professional development. Therefore, the researcher decided to employ partnership concepts between the Faculty of Education of Rajabhat Universities and the partner schools as scaffold for ZPD [8], [15], [16]. The researcher additionally discovered that the partnerships among student teachers, mentors teachers, university superintendants, program heads and teacher practicum program heads are able to cooperatively create strategies and initiate guideline for improving the quality of student teachers [17], [18], [19]. Obviously, the Faculty of Education of Rajabhat Universities makes a great effort to emphasize teaching substances, teaching strategies, and enhancing experience for the student teachers to apply in their authentic teaching performance.

In regard to this matter, the researcher aims to study the use of partnership concepts and initiate professional development guideline for student teachers of Faculty of Education in Rajabhat University.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Zone of Proximal Development

Zone of Proximal Development theory was first articulated by Vygotsky [20]. This theory relates to the interrelationship between learning and developmental level. Vygotsky indicated that the most important things that should be seriously taken into consideration of learning management are actual development and potential development. The distance between actual development and potential development is called zone of proximal development or ZPD.

Suttipong Boonphadung is with the Faculty of Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, BKK, Thailand (corresponding author to provide phone: +6687700-1348; fax: +662160-1057; e-mail: suttipong2511@hotmail.com).

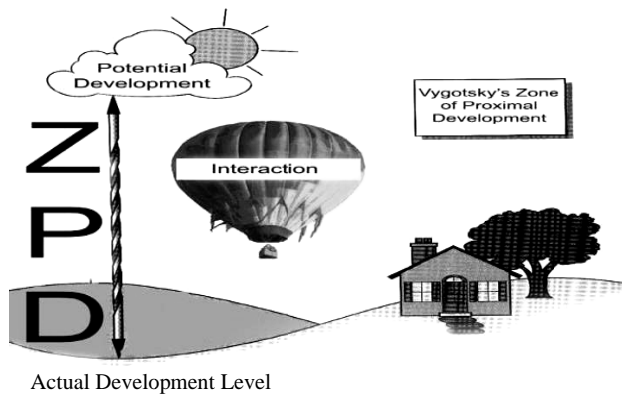


Fig. 1 Displays the Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. [21]

B. Partnership

The concept of partnership refers to the arrangement where parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests. Moreover, within the context of partnership, trust and information exchange are inherent. The goal of partnership focuses more on process than product. Generally speaking, partnership concerns the way of creative and cooperative working [22].

Haber and Williams introduced working strategy by using partnership process that including of [23]:

1. Establishing powerful goals
2. Setting up aligned objectives
3. Organizing realistic activities
4. Constructing trust and respect
5. Engaging invested partners
6. Being endorsed by leadership
7. Creating real accountability

Kilon stated that effective partnership related to desirable start. Kilon additionally asserted that partnership possibly brings about opportunities and risks. Hence, parties need to carefully consider the 4 fundamental of partnership that composed of [24]:

1. Vision of partnership
2. Objective of becoming partnership
3. The expectations of engaging partnership
4. Mutual interests

Horrowisz introduced 3 processes to successful partnership as follow: [25]

1. Partnership acceptance
2. Effective communication between parties
3. A clear role and responsibility of parties

To summarize, partnership refers to the differences of partners' abilities and skills and experiences exchange. The following is partnership process for establish professional development guideline for student teachers of Rajabhat University.

1. Communicating and consulting with partners to find and distinguish problems
2. Setting up powerful objectives
3. Discussing and interviewing each party to find the way to solve problems.
4. cooperating to establish the professional development

guideline for student teachers of Rajabhat Universities

5. cooperative studying on related documents and research papers

6. presenting and publishing

According to the study on theoretical framework, the researcher finally decided to use both the Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and partnership as research theories. Fig. 2 shows the integration between Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and partnership to set up the professional development guideline for student teachers of Rajabhat Universities.

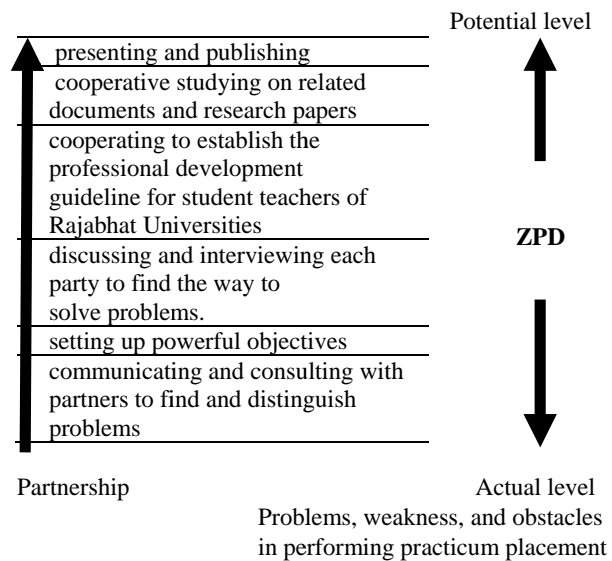


Fig. 2 Theoretical framework

According to Fig. 2, can be described as follows:

1. In the part of actual level, it is needed to identify problems, weakness, and obstacles in performing practicum placement of the student teachers.

2. Applying partnership to find guidelines and ways of solving problems, improving weakness, and eliminating obstacles in performing practicum placement of the student teachers. Then, it is the process of pushing forward the quality of the student teachers to the actual level. At the same time, each party needs to communicate and consult with one another to find and distinguish problems, set up powerful objectives, discuss with and interview each party to find the way to solve problems, cooperate to establish the professional development guideline for student teachers of Rajabhat Universities, cooperatively study on related documents and research papers, and present and publish. Finally, 5 experts evaluate the professional development guideline for student teachers.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The details of research methods and justification for its use are presented as follows:

1. The participants in this study are purposive sampling comprising of the three faculties of education in the three Rajabhat Universities: Bansomdej Rajabhat University,

Thonburi Rajabhat University and Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. They are well known as teacher-training institutes and selection was based on their prestige history in professional teacher development and differences of their student teachers. Table I showed the faculties, the number of year-5 student teachers and superintendants, program heads and practicum program heads participating in the study.

TABLE I
THE NUMBER OF POPULATION

| The Faculty of Education | Year-5 student teachers | The number of | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| | | Super-intendants | Program Heads | Practicum program heads |
| Bansomdej | | | | |
| Chaopraya | 161 | 34 | 7 | 1 |
| Thonburi | 36 | 25 | 3 | 1 |
| Suan Sunandha | 159 | 38 | 5 | 1 |
| Total | 356 | 97 | 15 | 3 |

Theory of central tendency was utilized as guide to determine the number of participants. It suggested that the number of sampling be at least 30 people and proportion per hundred of the population be used for statistic calculation [26]. With the number, the diversity of statistics of sampling would be comparatively same as the one of normal distribution. In the other words, the number of sampling group should be 25 percent of the total population for a hundred of people [27]; the number of informants, comprising of superintendants, program heads and practicum program heads, be at least 29 people. For sampling size, the researcher consulted Krejciec and Morgan's Table and set acceptable validity rate at 5percent. The sampling size was therefore at least 186 people [28]. The number of the informants was as follows:

1.1 The total of superintendants, program heads and practicum program heads was 30 people.

1.2 The number of year-5 student teachers was 200 peoples.

2. The number of mentors in schools participating in Rajabhat universities teacher development program in academic year 2010 and 2011 was not identified. Because of that, the researcher equated area of normal curve Z to area of t distribution. In the other words, the value of Z and that of t was statistically equal on the condition that the number of sampling was over 100 people [26]. The number of mentors was then decided by the researcher to be 100 people.

In sum, the informants included year-5 students, superintendants, program heads and practicum program heads as well as mentors in schools participating in Rajabhat universities teacher development programs. The number of each was shown in Table II.

TABLE II
THE NUMBER OF INFORMANTS

| Informants | Total |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Year-5 student teachers | 200 |
| Superintendants | 25 |
| Program Heads | 4 |
| Practicum program heads | 1 |
| Mentors | 100 |

3. The construction of data collection instrument to be used for the improvement guidance of the Rajabhat universities teacher development programs was based on the partnership concepts and followed the steps described below:

3.1 Reviewing details/information relevant to teacher training of the participating Rajabhat Universities. Documents and texts relevant to criterion and competence of teacher professional practices as well as the partnership concept were also reviewed.

3.2 Developing open-ended questionnaires based on the data gained from focus-group discussion. The questionnaires contained four open-ended questions divided into two parts.

Part 1 The informants were asked to write and choose responses concerning to their general demographic information.

Part 2 The informants were asked to response to an open-ended question about their problems, concerns and pros and cons of their practicum. The questions were designed to elicit information in the areas of teaching and learning activities, curriculum, assessment and evaluation, classroom management, classroom action research and teacher practices.

4. The mentors, the superintendants, program heads, practicum program heads and Year-5 students in their practicum at schools in academic year 2010 and 2011 were asked to cooperate in the study. Study aims and objectives were clarified so they understood that their opinions and ideas were appreciated and used as part of developing problem-solving guidance for the improvement of teacher development program.

5. Research instruments included open-ended questionnaire, interviews and focus group interviews. The open-ended questionnaire contained a collection of four self-reported questions which was created and proofed by 5 experts. Its Content Validity Index was 1.00 (CVI = 1.00). Interviews were then conducted for in-depth details in addition to those gained from the questionnaires. The responses were studied via content analysis and revealed aspects of help and hindrance. Information gained was categorized and further discussed in focus group interviews for developing teacher training development guidance. Related documents and texts were intensively studied for further information.

IV. RESULTS

Based on the partnership concept and the review of documents and texts, the study reported problems and hindrances of the 3 Rajabhat Universities teaching practicum program as well as suggestions for the program improvements.

TABLE III
THE DETAILS OF THE PROBLEMS AND HINDRANCES

| Cons, problems and hindrances reported by Student teachers | Conceptual categories | Guidance for teacher training programs based on The Partnership Concepts | Guidance for teacher training programs based on the literature review |
|--|--|---|--|
| Teaching and learning activities | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expertise in the taught area 2. Teaching methods and techniques 3. Writing teaching plans 4. Selection of teaching techniques appropriate to content to be taught | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To include modern/contemporary teaching courses (e.g., problem-based instruction, cooperative learning, activity-based instruction) 2. To emphasize on student participation in learning process in the ways that get them involved in classroom activities (e.g., lesson-plan writing, material preparation, small group works). Activities are scaffolded for individual knowledge construction, rather than for mass knowledge transmission. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To have Student teachers initiate Personal Plan Development for academic and personal growth and to file evidences in portfolio as records of successes/progress [29] 2. To train Student teachers to give their peer constructive criticism in written form as part of reflections on details of teaching practices performed by their peers [30] 3. To include microteaching, in which Student teachers reviews recorded session of teaching to enhance/acquire (new) teaching skills [31] 4. A mentor to be selected should be a good communicator, possess interpersonal skills, approachable in order to offer constructive feedback/advices when expected, as well as have at least 3-year teaching experience with profound understanding on mentoring process [32] |
| Curriculum | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To be profound in Core Curriculum B.S. 1998 2. To be equipped with knowledge and skills in interpreting/analyzing learning standards, learning indicators and preferable characteristics prescribed in a subject group | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To intensively study the Basic Curriculum 2. To be able to interpret/analyze learning standards and learning indicators prescribed in learning group 3. To understand core competence characteristics and infuse them into classroom activities | To educate Student teachers school curriculum of the institutes where their practicum takes place [33] |
| Evaluation and assessment | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To be knowledgeable in classroom evaluation and assessment 2. To be profound in variety of classroom evaluation and assessment techniques (e.g., for cognition, affection, psychomotor) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There should be placement test given at the beginning of lesson so that lessons/activities would be designed to fit the class's academic background 2. Formal and informal class assessment should be characterized by authentic assessment -- demonstration of skills/competencies to be performed in real world. | — |
| Teacher practices | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To be a good role model to primary/secondary students in regards to code dress, speaking manners, morals and ethics 2. To foster Student teachers' emotional quotient - emotionally and socially competent behavior | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To educate mentors to offer counsel/information in a variety of formal and less formal contexts to mentees (e.g., verbal and written advices) 2. To execute learning activities to help all students learn and develop preferable characteristics 3. To be able to understand and regulate emotion 4. To serve as role models of good practices in code dress and preferable behaviors | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To clarify roles of mentors as college helpers for the growth of the mentees [34] 2. To accommodate Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development into dynamics of mentoring relationships of teacher mentors, superintendants and Student teachers so as to come up with agreements for practices by all [35] |

TABLE III (CONT.)
THE DETAILS OF THE PROBLEMS AND HINDRANCES

| Cons, problems and hindrances reported by Student teachers | Conceptual categories | Guidance for teacher training programs based on The Partnership Concepts | Guidance for teacher training programs based on the literature review |
|--|--|---|---|
| Classroom management | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student teachers lack of knowledge in motivation and classroom management techniques. 2. Student teachers are incapable of handling with misbehaviors of students during classroom activities. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To study research/review articles in the relevant fields 2. To include classroom management as part of courses in curriculum 3. To initiate systematic mentoring – mentors to provide Student teachers solution/advices in regards to classroom management | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To create learning environment where students are the center of classroom activities, motivated to fully participate in learning process and responsible for self-directed learning [36] 2. Suggested teaching styles to be used in class: [37] Teacher-centered style, in which rewards and punishments are used as motives for behavior change, Student-centered style acknowledges that all learners are potential for development and require students to be active, responsible participants to optimize learning environment according to The Partnership Concept, and Cooperative learning, in which small teams of students take part in decision-making to direct classroom activities and have teachers as their facilitator for advices /guidance 3. To include educational leadership (e.g., knowledge, skills and emotional regulation) across the courses in teacher curriculum [38] |

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Professional teacher development is essential in national education improvement. The improvement concerns the quality development of teachers and their teaching so that teaching and learning at classroom level meet the standard determined by core curriculum and national education criterion as well as expectation of the society. Profound understanding on variables effecting failure/success of national education improvement affects professional teacher development, and was therefore necessary to make known to educators and concerned people. Such understanding will be a guide to plan teacher education and assist the effective design of teacher professional development programs. Still the image of teachers and their practices has not met the public expectation. Student teachers will possibly face many more difficulties (e.g., short of specific skills/competencies required by employees, conflicts deriving from working with mentors/other student teachers, misbehaviors of student-teacher practices, self-adjusting and learning to get along with colleges and school practices, emotional regulation, classroom management as well as sorts of classroom problems – students' withdrawal from activities, learning disability in certain aspects, low self-confidence) than they might expect and yet need to be prepared for dealing with them. To response to society demands on professional teachers, the Faculty of Education may consider utilizing the combination of the Partnership concepts and Zone of Proximal Development concept. The combination of the dual concepts feasibly fosters the improvement of professional teacher development programs. The current study reveals problems, hindrances and supports for effective teacher training as well as gives suggestions based on the Partnership concepts. The actual development level of such current situations could be raised and attained the potential development level via the utilization of the Partnership concept. Student teachers,

mentors, superintendants, program heads and practicum program heads play the key roles in directing and planning to take proactive actions to solve and prevent possible problems. The collaboration between the faculties of education and schools for the betterment of professional teacher development gives Student teachers great opportunities to expose to real classrooms and actual practices of teaching approaches and methods learned in institutes. The exposure to real teaching and learning situations gives the Student teachers vivid understanding of school routines, classroom activities, expectations publics have towards them, school policies and curriculum. It grows their confidence, desirable characteristics of life-long learners and comprehension of good teacher practices. In line with Higgens [39], as being a partnership, higher education institutes and schools should cooperate in increasing understanding and knowledge. Ehrich et al. [40] further advocated that all stakeholders in the practicum program must collaborate to minimize these problematic areas, because "...mentoring has enormous potential to bring about learning, personal growth, and development for professionals".

The study found that, to develop professional teachers, teacher-training institutes have to place an emphasis on knowledge management, classroom management for instance activity design, teaching techniques, instruction materials design, classroom management techniques, classroom/student disciplinary. The findings emphasize the professional development concept of Darling-Hammond that concerns the important of content knowledge and pedagogy such as teaching strategies or teaching techniques [41]. Moreover, the finding is also in accordance with Cochran-Smith that focuses knowledge and specific content knowledge as an crucial element of professional development [42].

It would be beneficial that further studies on teacher training would make use of the findings reported in this study.

This would expand the theoretical and empirical views on teacher improvement as part of educational reform. Teacher improvement could be characterized by life-long learning that takes place throughout one's life in either formal (e.g., a class) or informal ways (e.g., a range of situations/workplaces). Learning can no longer be divided into a place and time to learn knowledge (instructed in classes) and a place and time to apply the knowledge (acquired in workplaces). The view should be shared by all concern people – school administrators, faculties, mentors and student teachers. Its context of teacher development program is experiential in nature, centered on the application of learning in the workplace, and provide the practical application of knowledge and skills through dynamics. Such learning is expected to cultivate good teaching practices and should be shared by all concern people –school administrators, faculties, mentors and student teachers. Last but not least, the faculties of education as well as teacher institutions need to be aware of the impacts of the ASEAN Community, in which Thailand will soon be part of their societies, possibly have on teacher development. Knowledge of the Community and specific skills and knowledge essential to take part in the coalition are value added, if have, for student teachers in the 21st Century.

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Suttipong Boonphadung was born in Bangkok, Thailand on July 3rd, 1968. In 1990, he obtained his first degree of Bachelor of Education (Honors) from Suan Sunandha Teacher College, Bangkok, Thailand. Then in 1997, he furthered his studies in Educational Measurement (M.Ed) at Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok, Thailand. In 2006, he graduated Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction from Kasetsart University.

Today, he is a lecturer in Curriculum Design and Instructional Theory, Applied Mathematics, Mathematical Modelling, and Research for Learning Development at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand. Since 2008, he is also the Head of the Department of Master of Education Program in Curriculum and Instruction at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Main research topics concern the principle of educational measurement and evaluation, the development of learning management, teaching for thinking skill enhancement, the development classroom action research for pre-service and in-service teachers. Recent studies include Sustainable Development of the Life Quality for the Elderly by Applying Sufficiency Economy-Based Schooling (South Korea, Jeju Island: Education and Management Technology, 2012), Life Long Education: Professional Development Guideline for Partnership in Practicum Placement of English Teacher Candidates in Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (South Korea, Jeju Island: Education and Management Technology, 2012), and The Effects of Cooperative Groups as Communicative Language Teaching Techniques for Teaching Grammar to English Teacher Candidates in a Rajabhat University (South Korea, Jeju Island: Education and Management Technology, 2012).