

*The Development of Local History Curriculum based on Place-Based Education  
Approach for Primary School Students*

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**Abstract**

The main objective of this paper is to describe the process of developing the local history curriculum based on place-based education approach for primary school students in the area of upper Chao Phraya river community, Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand. The sub-objectives aimed to 1) study the local history contents and locally-related contexts for defining the local history curriculum framework and 2) develop the local history curriculum based on place-based education approach for grades 4 to 6 primary students. The development of curriculum followed the research and development (R & D) model. The research phase was conducted by using qualitative methods. In-depth interview was employed to collect local history contents, locally-related contexts and local history teaching and learning strategies from local historians, knowledgeable people and experienced social studies or history teachers. The additional information for designing the curriculum was obtained from the thorough analysis of locally-related historical documents. The development phase was characterized by defining curriculum framework including scope and sequence of the local history curriculum and developing the prototype of curriculum. The prototype of curriculum was assessed by 7 specialists including local history educators, curriculum and instructional academics and experienced social studies or history teachers. The revised version of the curriculum was implemented in 3 primary schools in Nakhon Sawan province. The result shows that the prototype of curriculum was given a good score by the teachers. It can increase the students' knowledge of local history, develop local historical research skills and improve sense of community and belonging.

**Keywords:** curriculum development, local history curriculum, place-based education approach, context-based learning

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## **Introduction**

The debates about the potential threat of globalization to the local identity, society and culture have prompted a growth of local studies in history in Thailand. These challenges have led the parsons and the enthusiastic amateurs to study about local and regional histories from a variety of perspectives. In the education context, the study of local history was promoted by the Ministry of Education as one of the student-centered learning approaches since the educational reform era in B.E. 2542. Therefore, the study of local history has grown over the years due to the contribution of local history educators, educational researchers, secondary and primary school teachers and students participating in the projects funded by Thailand office Research Fund (TRF). The “local youth historical research for students based learning reform” projects were funded by TRF in all regional parts of Thailand and have had major influences upon many teachers and students. The research showed that these projects benefited the participant students directly especially their conscience and pride in their community. It was believed that the research results satisfied the government educational policy of basic education core curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008) that our society needed good and responsible citizens; the citizens that were happy, loved their community and its members (Rittidet, 2011).

The study of local history projects have corresponded with the visions and goals of basic education core curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008) as well as learners’ key competencies and desirable characteristics (Ministry of Education, 2008). In addition, the school-based curriculum development is under the decision-making of school administrators, educational committees, stakeholders, teachers and students of each school. Therefore, the school-based curriculum provides the opportunity for teachers to construct curriculum that relates to socio-cultural, historical and community contexts (Wattanatorn & Thongthew, 2007). The advantages of the curriculum based on local contexts include the connection between families and society’s needs and interests with the goals of the country’s education at national level (Collins, 2001). It can also give the students an opportunity to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant to local community contexts and thus increase their ability to contribute to the development of their districts or provinces (Kraipeerapun & Thongthew, 2007).

It is also interesting to note that from the educational point of view, the inclusion and integration of local history and community contexts such as local stories, places, cultures and ways of people’s lives into the school-based curriculum can also be expected to make the learning experiences more interesting, authentic and contextualized for primary school students (Sobel, 2005; Theobald, 2006). Although local history content oriented learning did not provide an outstanding learning achievements comparing with the traditional teaching methods, this kind of learning can increase the students’ knowledge of local history, process of local historical research and sense of community and belonging (Aktekin, 2010).

In this study, the local history curriculum for use in the rural central region of Thailand, is used as a case example of one approach to incorporating local history and community contexts such as local stories, places, cultures and ways of people’s lives into the curriculum development process. The study was carried out in the upper Chao Phraya river community in Nakhon Sawan Province which is situated in the fertile delta of Chao Phraya river in the central region of Thailand. The local history

curriculum was developed after conducting qualitative research to understand and analyze local history and community contexts provided in this region and what counts as historical and local knowledge and skills which are required to prepare their students to live well in the community. The local history curriculum was designed by adopting the place-based education approach (PBE) into developing curriculum. The ultimate aims of this approach are to help students develop local-related knowledge, build stronger ties to their community, enhance their appreciation for the natural world, and create a commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens (Gruenewald, 2003; Sobel, 2005). The place-based education approach proposes curriculum and instructional framework for educators to design the thematic and integrated curriculum, authentic learning unit and contextualized teaching and learning (Smith & Sobel, 2010). In this paper, I incorporated the local history and community contexts information with the intent on developing a local history curriculum for grades 4 to 6 primary students in the primary schools around Chao Phraya river community, Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand. I believe that this case example would be responsive to Thai local history, wisdom and community knowledge which are strongly emphasized in the current curriculum (Thongthew, 2011). In addition, the curriculum may be of use to others who are interested in creating curriculum that take advantage of the place students inhabit, it will be contextual scaffold for students' authentic learning in the community.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study was to describe the process of developing the local history curriculum based on place-based education approach for primary school students in the area of upper Chao Phraya river community, Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand. The specific objectives of this study were as follows:

- 1) To study the local history contents and locally-related contexts for defining the local history curriculum framework.
- 2) To develop the local history curriculum based on place-based education approach for grades 4 to 6 primary students.

### **Study site**

The community chosen as the study site was purposely selected based on accessibility, convenience, size, and voluntary school staff. The voluntary school staff was considered as an important aspect. Therefore, the study site is Ban Krok Phra which is historically established in the area of the upper Chao Phraya river community. It is located in Nakhon Sawan province in the central part of Thailand. This community is about 250 kilometers from Bangkok. In addition, the rationales for selecting this community as the study site were from the unique community contexts (Collins, 2001). Firstly, Ban Krok Phra is situated along the Chao Phraya bank and is considered as a community which contributed to the economic growth of Nakhon Sawan province since the beginning of Rattanakosin period. This geographical location contributed greatly to the establishment of watering community and peoples' ways of being in this place. Secondly, the people in this community aspired to preserve the local contexts such as tradition, occupation, wisdom, and etc. In addition, they wanted the young generation of the community to study learning contents connected from the day-to-day lives of the community.

## **Research methodology**

The development of the curriculum followed the research and development (R & D) model, i.e. Research (R<sub>1</sub>), Develop (D<sub>1</sub>), Research (R<sub>2</sub>) and Develop (D<sub>2</sub>). However, this paper would only represent the first and second phases that have been conducted.

1) The research phase was conducted by using qualitative methods. In-depth interview was employed to collect local history contents, locally-related contexts and local history teaching and learning strategies from local historians, knowledgeable people and experienced social studies or history teachers. The additional information for designing the curriculum was obtained from the thorough analysis of locally-related historical documents.

2) The development phase was characterized by defining curriculum framework including scope and sequence of the local history curriculum and developing the prototype of curriculum which consisted of 6 components: vision, goals, contents and learning experiences structure, learning management guidelines, learning materials and resources, and evaluation and assessment guidelines. The prototype of curriculum was assessed by 7 specialists including local history educators, curriculum and instructional academics and experienced social studies or history teachers. The revised version of the curriculum was implemented in 3 primary schools in Nakhon Sawan province.

## **Research instruments**

Research instruments in this study were classified according to the first and second phases that have been conducted.

1) Research instruments for collecting data in the research phase included: 1.1) semi-structured interview form for collecting local history contents, locally-related contexts and local history teaching and learning strategies from local historians, knowledgeable people and experienced social studies or history teachers 1.2) locally-related historical documents collecting form for collecting local additional information for designing the curriculum.

2) Research instruments for collecting data in the development phase included: 2.1) the evaluation form for assessing the prototype of curriculum 2.2) the learning achievement test for assessing students' knowledge of local history 2.3) the observation form for evaluating students' local historical research skills and 2.4) the learning diary for assessing students' sense of community and belonging and personal writing

In addition, the curriculum is considered as one of research instruments. I therefore categorized the local history curriculum framework including scope and sequence of the local history contents and local history curriculum based on place-based education approach for grades 4 to 6 primary students into the curriculum development phase.

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative approach. Mostly, the focus was put to qualitative techniques such as semi-structured interview and field-based observation. I had one research assistant. She was a female teacher in the nearby school community. She conducted the research with me in the field since she was considered as a local staff member. More importantly, she had educational

background in Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction. She helped me in transcribing the tapes to text files.

### **Research procedures**

1) The study of the local history contents and locally-related contexts in the area of upper Chao Phraya river community, Nakhon Sawan Province for defining the local history curriculum framework: this main step was designed based on the role of researcher. First, taking the researcher stance, I had conducted in-depth interview to obtain local history contents, locally-related contexts and local history teaching and learning strategies from local historians, knowledgeable people and experienced social studies or history teachers respectively. At this step, the field study method was applied to collect the data. The study revealed a broad variety of the local history contents and locally-related contexts of upper Chao Phraya river community and appropriated local history teaching and learning strategies for the teachers' application of these contents into the classroom teaching contexts. Second, the additional information for designing the curriculum was obtained from the thorough analysis of locally-related historical documents.

2) The development of local history curriculum based on place-based education approach for grades 4 to 6 primary students: there were 6 steps in the process of the curriculum development as follows.

2.1) Defining the curriculum framework by setting scope of the local history contents and sequence the local history contents in the local history curriculum, I as a researcher and two experienced social studies or history teachers got together to plan the curriculum framework. We decided together what ground to cover and what style of teaching to adopt and design the curriculum framework by using content mapping grids which represent the scope and sequence of the local history contents and learning experiences from grades 1 to 6 primary level. The scope and sequence of the local history curriculum demonstrates the development of student 'learn about' and 'learn to' content across a stage in relation to the identified scope and sequence. By mapping all essential contents across the stage, schools would ensure that teaching-learning programs address all essential knowledge and understanding content in the stage and present a comprehensive and balanced development of the skills and prescribed focus area content.

The curriculum framework including scope and sequence of the local history curriculum was assessed by 7 specialists including local history educators, curriculum and instructional academics and experienced social studies or history teachers. The criteria were set up based on the principles of vertical and horizontal organization and the criteria as follows: students' maturity, prior experiences and capabilities as well as the difficulty, up-to-date and balance between the breadth and the depth of the local history contents (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2008).

2.2) Development of the prototype of local history curriculum: Based on the previous process, the curriculum framework including scope and sequence of the local history curriculum was assessed by 7 specialists. Then I and two experienced social studies or history teachers each was responsible for particular grades from 4 to 6 local history courses, making decision and writing up statements of general aims, list of topics to

be covered. The prototype of curriculum was expected to use for grades 4 to 6 primary students and thus it would be implemented in grade 6 primary students.

2.3) In accordance with the scope and sequence of the local history contents and learning experiences from grades 4 to 6 primary level, I and two experienced social studies or history teachers collaboratively designed the local history curriculum based on place-based education approach. The integrated, holistic and authentic learning is a core learning philosophy of this approach. Therefore, we designed the theme-based learning units and drafted the details of the integrated learning contents under the identified theme which were composed of 6 theme-based learning units and required study period in one semester.

2.4) Due to previous steps of local history curriculum development based on place-based education approach for primary school students, I had got the prototype of local history curriculum that could portray the overall curriculum contents and learning experiences. In this step, I set the meeting. The meeting was set for specialists including local history educators, curriculum and instructional academics and experienced social studies or history teachers and the knowledgeable community people who also served as the school board committee. I would gather their opinions and suggestions to the prototype of curriculum. These opinions and suggestions enabled the integration of the local community contexts with the contents from the basic education core curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008). The integration was done using the identified themes in each theme-based learning unit from the previous step.

2.5) Evaluating the prototype of curriculum: All curriculum related materials and the overall curriculum structure were reviewed by 7 specialists including local history educators, curriculum and instructional academics and experienced social studies or history teachers and the knowledgeable community people who also served as the school board committee. The specialists evaluated the antecedent situations in the curriculum by comparing knowledge, skills and dispositions available in the curriculum with that was supported to be covered as previously agreed upon. The specialists reviewed the curriculum to assure the educational attainment and possibility of its transaction. The results were that the curriculum had components which were appropriate and related to local history and community contexts and it had a high level of quality. In addition, it was suitable for implementation. The specialists considered that it could be used as a tool in teaching the values and identities of community contexts including knowledge, wisdom, local resources and cultural traditions.

2.6) The revised version of the curriculum was implemented in 3 primary schools in Nakhon Sawan province. In this implementation step, I emphasized students' engagement by being co-researcher in the learning process. Students would play significant role as local history junior researcher (Thongthew, 2001). Their main responsibilities concerned using research skills such as seeking fundamental data, making decision, selecting appropriate data, interviewing and note-taking in order to obtain local history contents and locally-related contexts from the community. In this step, it was done by having 50 students in grade 6 of Wat Huadong Nuea school, Wat Na klang school and Wat Tha Sud school collect the local history contents and locally-related contexts in the area of upper Chao Phraya river community. All these activities covered people's ways of life, living conditions, local knowledge, careers

and livelihood, and others. The steps were taken as follows: 1) Teachers trained the students how to study and collect data 2) students studied the research skills for action research through project-based activities from a science teacher and a social studies teacher and 3) students were divided into small groups to collect data from the community. The involvements of community in this context mean sources from local community such as record offices, libraries, websites, buildings, magazines or newsletters, contacts with ex-teachers or pupils, local history groups, local newspapers, the church and old people's homes. Local people can also be used as consultants, classroom helpers and audience (Aktekin, 2010). The data which students obtained by conducting observation, interview, and field note were methodological triangulated by the researcher, school teachers, community people and students as well. The triangulation technique was employed in this step because each offers unique perspectives. The methodological triangulation can support or contradict previous data findings and clarify insights about the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2001).

## **Research results**

The research results were presented based on research procedures which were undertaken in two main steps as follows:

1) The study of the local history contents and locally-related contexts in the area of upper Chao Phraya river community, Nakhon Sawan Province for defining the local history curriculum framework:

As a result of the study of the local history contents and locally-related contexts in the area of upper Chao Phraya river community, Nakhon Sawan Province by the researcher, the obtained data included the local history contents such as the origin of Chao Phraya river community, the story of historical sites and antique places, the waterway transportations and the private travel of King Chulalongkorn in the area of Chao Phraya river community. Regarding to the locally-related contexts, these included customs, traditions, folktales, legends, music and oral histories. A history teacher of 20 years of teaching experiences who was interviewed about local history teaching and learning strategies commented: *"I really believe in this program. I see the students' enthusiasm, excitement for learning, and the growth they've made as far as how much they've learned about their history, place and community. They want to learn more about local stories and beliefs."*

2) The development of local history curriculum based on place-based education approach for grades 4 to 6 primary students:

In this step, I will propose the results into 3 parts: 1) the local history curriculum framework: scope and sequence of the local history curriculum from grades 1 to grades 6 primary level 2) the characters of the prototype of curriculum and 3) the curriculum implementation.

2.1) The local history curriculum framework: scope and sequence of the local history curriculum from grades 4 to grades 6 primary level.

Grade 4: The grade four local history curricula focuses on helping students learn about their roles as members of a family and school community. The development of identity and social interaction are stressed. The students explore self, family, and

school through the five standards. Students learn about families now and long ago, studying about different kinds of families that existed in different societies and communities. Students also begin to locate places on maps and learn how maps serve as representations of physical features and objects.

Grade 5: The grade five local history curricula, students explore rural, urban, and suburban communities, concentrating on communities in the area of upper Chao Phraya river community, Nakhon Sawan Province. The student's own community can serve as an example for studying about and understanding other communities. Students study about communities from the perspectives of the five social studies learning standards. Community studies should include content examples from cultures other than the students' own, and from a variety of perspectives including geographic and socioeconomic. Students continue to learn how to locate places on maps and how different communities are influenced by geographic and environmental factors. They also study about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in their communities.

Grade 6: In the grade six local history curricula, students study Thai local history and national history examples from a variety of geographic areas. The five social studies standards form the basis for this investigation as students learn about the social, political, geographic, economic, and historic characteristics of different watering and land communities. Students also begin to learn about historic chronology by placing important events on timelines. The historic study of local communities focuses on the social/cultural, political, and economic factors that helped to shape these communities. Students study about the significant people, places, events, and issues that influenced life in their local communities. Students can investigate case studies to make connections between local events and issues and their links to national events and issues.

2.2) The characters of the prototype of curriculum: the results can be derived from the local history curriculum based on place-based education approach that has the following characters.

2.2.1) It is an integrated curriculum. The integration was done using the identified themes in each theme-based learning unit from the first and second step of research procedures. The local history curriculum included 6 components as follows: vision, goals, contents and learning experiences structure, learning management guidelines, learning materials and resources, and evaluation and assessment guidelines. The local history curriculum based on place-based education approach for primary school students consisted of six units as follows: 1) Boats, watering and Chao Phraya river way of life 2) History and development of Chao Phraya river community 3) Festivals, folkways and culture 4) Stories, beliefs and language wisdom 5) Local history junior researcher and 6) Junior participation in local community.

2.2.2) It is an integrated curriculum developed by using the local history as the study of the past of smaller communities such as town, rural, suburban area or a city neighborhood and local community contexts as its base.

2.2.3) It is a curriculum emphasizing the development of the students to be the persons who have more knowledge of local history, develop local historical research skills and improve sense of community and belonging. The aims of the curriculum



also prioritize good citizenship before knowledge. The sense of community and belonging which was implanted in the students will immunize them through wisdom to solve problems in terms of life conditions, social, economy, and politics.

2.2.4) It is a curriculum with emphasis on the integrated teaching and learning within content-areas and local community contexts, set flexibly in terms of its time schedule and learning contents.

2.2.5) It is a curriculum that promotes the students to develop the sense of community and belonging through place-based learning and learning from the authentic contexts.

2.3) The curriculum implementation: The implementation of curriculum in the opinion of teachers were good and useful for students, schools and communities. One of the primary social studies teachers, who joined the implementation process of the local history curriculum based on place-based education approach, commented as follows:

*“I have learned more about the community in which I am teaching than anywhere else. This kind of knowledge helps me see what I am doing critically and reflectively. Apart from that, it inspires me as a teacher to have more understanding of my students and the community.”*

Students were proud of their participation and had positive attitudes towards the implementation of the curriculum. The learning achievements of the students were revealed that students had knowledge of local history passing the criterion score after using the curriculum. Regarding to students’ local historical research skills, the results from analyzing the observation form were satisfied and students’ sense of community and belonging were satisfied after using the curriculum.

Teachers noticed the learning enthusiasm in their students and commented on the effect that learning about the unique history of their community had on students. A local teacher of more than 30 years of teaching experiences commented:

*“It makes an impact. Students have to first feel proud of this place because of the burden that is put on them as children and future citizens and they’re starting to realize the power they have... the power to change their community.”*

Therefore, the result shows that the prototype of curriculum was given a good score by the teachers. It can increase the students’ knowledge of local history, develop local historical research skills and improve sense of community and belonging.

## **Discussions**

From the local history curriculum based on place-based education approach to be used in arranging the learning activities, the researcher had found the issues that arise from the curriculum development process which can be discussed as the followings.

1) The study of the local history contents and locally-related contexts in the area of upper Chao Phraya river community, Nakhon Sawan Province for defining the local history curriculum framework: the local history contents and locally-related contexts

in the area of upper Chao Phraya river community included the local history contents such as the origin of Chao Phraya river community, the story of historical sites and antique places, the waterway transportations and the private travel of King Chulalongkorn in the area of Chao Phraya river community. Regarding to the locally-related contexts, these included customs, traditions, folktales, legends, music and oral histories. The local history contents and locally-related contexts in the area of upper Chao Phraya river community derived from the in-depth interview method provided data by local historians, knowledgeable people and experienced social studies or history teachers. The steps of collecting essential data for developing authentic and meaningful curriculum are also consistent with Thongthew (2002) who proposed the guidelines based on the collaborative concepts as the forces to arrange activities or projects successfully in developing the sense of community and belonging in rural primary schools.

2) The development of local history curriculum based on place-based education approach: in this step, I will divide the discussion into 2 parts as follows: 1) the local history curriculum framework and the characters of the prototype of curriculum and 2) the curriculum implementation.

2.1) The developed local history curriculum is a proper and feasible curriculum to be used for arranging the learning activities for students because the scope and sequence of curriculum is meaningfully defined based on the principles of vertical and horizontal organization and the criteria as follows: students' maturity, prior experiences and capabilities as well as the difficulty, up-to-date and balance between the breadth and the depth of the local history contents (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2008). In addition, it is composed of the local history contents, locally-related contexts and the history learning contents from the basic education core curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008) which are authentic and useful for students (Ministry of Education, 2008). Its success appeared from the cooperation from the researcher, teachers across subjects and the knowledgeable community people who have knowledge and understanding about the learning contents and the community learning resources (Thongthew, 2002). This adheres to the national education act B.E. 2542 (A.D. 1999) and revision 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in B.E. 2545 (A.D. 2002) that encourages the stakeholders and communities to take part in arranging the education for the benefits of students' both physical and spiritual development (Office of the National Education Commission, 2003).

2.2) The curriculum implementation: the result shows that the prototype of curriculum was given a good score by the teachers. This is because the curriculum contents reflected the identities of historical community-based contexts including knowledge, wisdom, existing way of life, local resources and cultural values. It can increase the students' knowledge of local history, develop local historical research skills and improve sense of community and belonging. This resulted from the cooperation from the researcher, teachers across subjects and the knowledgeable community people participating in the curriculum development process. More importantly, the students learned more on their community, cultivate pride in their background of their community, and are eager to learn from other community learning resources (Thongthew, 2011). If this good trend can be maintained, the educational crisis would be reduced. The new educational spirit will not separate the students out of their own local communities (Kaewdang, 1998; Wattanatorn & Thongthew, 2007). Finally, the

students will be proud of their own culture and locality, and make their community the better place for sustainable living (Kajornsinsin & Potisook, 2001).

### **Recommendations**

1) Recommendations in developing the local history curriculum based on place-based education approach: the utilization of historical and community-related contexts as part in its curriculum development should have the relevant contents to the community especially in the social studies, religions and cultures learning substance, environmental science learning substance and arts learning substance. The relevant contents make the learning indicators and standards from the basic education core curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008) more authentic and meaningful for the students in community.

2) Recommendations for future research: the development of curriculum based on place-based education approach must come through continuous collaboration with family, school, temple and community. It was important that students participate in the community activities and they were encouraged to take part as an active participant of those activities so they realized their own values and had the feeling of attachment and relationship with the community.

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