

Post-Secondary Education Development in South East Asia: A Model for Curriculum Development in Continuing Educationⁱ

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This article presents a model for continuing education that emanated from the author's involvement in the Participatory Action Research (PAR) component of Simon Fraser University's Adult Education for Economic Development (AEED) Project, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The project's goal was to develop new centers for continuing education at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) in Cambodia and the National University of Laos (NUOL) in Lao People's Democratic Republic, with assistance and mentorship from the Centre for Continuing Education at Chulalongkorn University (Chula) in Thailand. This article includes a discussion and illustration of continuing education based on four dimensions: lifelong learning, outreach, applied and integrated studies, and informal learning environments. The PAR is discussed in terms of how the partnerships emerged in the project, together with a systemic, ecological analysis of continuing education.

Cet article présente un modèle d'éducation permanente qui est ressorti de l'implication de l'auteur dans la composante recherche-action participative du projet Adult Education for Economic Development (l'éducation des adultes pour le développement économique) de l'Université Simon Fraser financé par l'Agence canadienne de développement international. L'objectif du projet était de développer de nouveaux centres d'éducation permanente à l'Université royale de Phnom Penh au Cambodge et à la l'Université nationale du Laos à la République démocratique populaire lao, avec l'appui et le mentorat du centre pour l'éducation permanente à l'Université Chulalongkorn en Thaïlande. Cet article présente une discussion et une illustration de l'éducation permanente reposant sur quatre dimensions : l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie, la conscientisation ou le rapprochement, les études appliquées et intégrées, et les milieux d'apprentissage informels. La recherche-action participative est présentée en fonction de l'émergence des partenariats qui sous-tendent le projet et par le biais d'une analyse systémique et écologique de l'éducation permanente.

'Thumb-Nail History' of Work in the Area

Adult education has been associated for some time with economic development in rural areas. It is not long since Moore and McNamara (1990) noted that, "while adult education has been recognized as a key element in individual and regional economic development opportunity, limited work has been done to examine how adult education can be used as a local development strategy or to evaluate economic returns to individual and community investments in adult

education” (p. 35). These researchers sought ways of orchestrating the connection between continuing education and economic development. Their approach was to develop short-term and long-term training programs that could be quickly designed and delivered to meet the human capital investment needs of individuals and community groups. While this approach provides an economic and development framework, it hardly serves as a way of thinking about curriculum, or even the kinds of opportunities people in developing regions might imagine for themselves. Writing about the same time, Lawson (1989) asked, “as organizers of adult education, how do we determine what kinds of activities we should be organizing and for what purposes? ... is there an identifiable domain of adult education, defined in terms of its practices and purposes, researchable in ways such that a distinct discipline of adult education can emerge, informed by its own distinctive theory?” (p. 301). Ramirez (1990) examined how adult education and community development share objectives of enhancing self-direction, self-reliance, and sustainable learning and development, cautioning that the application of adult education principles to community development in the international arena is only possible under conditions related to power relationships, institutional structures, and community dynamics.

Hamilton (1992) was among the first researchers to explore the relation between community development and intrinsic motivations within the community itself, acknowledging that motivation must be matched with skills and information. More recently, Warren (2003) reviewed how program planning in adult education has evolved from a behaviourist product focus to a humanist process focus through her extensive review of models that have influenced adult education programming. In the field of comparative education, more recent commentators have turned a critical eye to international development and assistance projects based on simplistic training models, without regard for the cultural contexts and difficulty involved in transporting ideas and practices across international borders (Crossley, 2008, 2010).

We can see an increasing concern in the literature for a particular rendition of international development assistance that could be labeled as cultural, academic colonialism, or even a new form of marketeering in the universities. A fundamental concern throughout Simon Fraser University’s (SFU) AEED project, and I think rightly so, was to build capacity within each of the partner universities that would enable its new center for continuing education to act autonomously and creatively in program development and implementation, in research surrounding curriculum and instruction, and in policy development for continuing education programming.

The AEED project involved establishing new centers for continuing education at RUPP and NUOL while, at the same time, building the capacity for regional mentorship at “Chula’s” Center for Distance Education. At SFU, the project was initiated and housed in the Faculty of Continuing Studies. The Faculty of Education was a collaborator in this project, since the project included MEd and PhD scholarships for teaching faculty solicited from the partner universities as teaching and curriculum developers for the new centers. I was selected from the Faculty of Education as the Academic Coordinator of the project, which involved helping to develop these MEd and PhD programs for capacity building of university faculty to staff the new centers as well as assisting the project team from SFU’s Continuing Studies in implementing and assessing the project. I came to this work with a background in science curriculum theory and some experience coordinating large development projects in South-East Asia (e.g., MacKinnon, 2011). Further, having served as Chair of the Senate Committee for Undergraduate Studies at SFU for a time, I brought considerable experience implementing and administering curriculum across the undergraduate programs of the university, developing post-secondary programs, and

conceptualizing the university in larger, more holistic and interdisciplinary ways than one usually experiences working solely within one's discipline in a university.

As this AEED project unfolded, I realized that the project team had no over-arching conception of continuing education that could serve as a guiding framework for program and curriculum development in the new centers the project was creating. "What counts as continuing education?" is a question that is relevant and appropriate to ask in a development project designed to build capacity for developing new programs and curriculum in continuing education. The question of what counts as continuing education certainly was on my mind throughout my involvement in the project. How could this international partnership assist universities in South-East Asia in developing new programs, researching and evaluating them with limited or no experience in continuing education activities? At the very heart of the matter would be the concept of continuing education: How might we think about continuing education and what might be included as program opportunities?

As a member of a development team engaged in PAR, I decided to take on the task of framing the concept of continuing education in a way that might be helpful in guiding the development of adult education programming in South-East Asia in contemporary terms, but also in the future. A dilemma I faced was that I did not want to impose this conception on the project partners, but rather I needed a way to build understanding with them. I thought this might be done by analyzing the achievements of the project itself, the work we had done together. I thought I could develop such a framework using the various program initiatives that occurred in our partner institutions along the way to illustrate and exemplify a broad approach to continuing education, one that could be used by the partners to see the common features of what they had already accomplished in their individual centers, and also in terms of their potential curriculum development activities and deliberations in the future. I felt this contribution would be key to sustaining the efforts of the individual centers in developing new programs and curriculum for a variety of contexts in continuing education, and that such a framework would allow the centers to think creatively about developing new educational opportunities that could contribute to the economic development of their nations.

As the project continued, it became clear that opportunities for program development in continuing education were quite different in the three countries, as one might expect, and the way in which the three centers were thinking about and approaching these opportunities was also quite different. I felt this fueled the need for an overarching framework for continuing education that would show how these different kinds of programs and opportunities emerging from the AEED project were still viable examples of continuing education. What we needed in this AEED project was a framework that gave permission to the three centers to develop new programs by providing a *language* and set of concepts that would assist in justifying the various opportunities for curriculum development in continuing education that would naturally emerge in a developing society.

My Role as an Action Researcher

As the AEED project unfolded, I saw the need to establish some kind of curriculum framework for continuing education that would help to guide the program development of the new centers. Other aspects of the PAR focused on monitoring enrolments and course offerings at each of the institutions, developments in financial aspects of new programs and course materials, assessment of programs developed, and a record of deliberations about possible future program

offerings (Northey & MacKinnon, 2010). It seemed to me that what was needed was a clear conception of what continuing education might include in order to see a range of new possibilities for programs and curriculum. Other researchers have noted that the field of continuing education has been ill-defined (Adamuti-Trache & Schuetze, 2009). I used examples of programs developed by the centers during the project to illustrate various *dimensions* of continuing education in the model I was developing. In this way, I reasoned the model would have more meaning for the partner institutions and hopefully be useful to them in terms of thinking about new potential programs for their centers. Toward the end of the project the team gave a paper together at the annual conference of the Canadian Association of University Continuing Education (MacKinnon et al., 2009), which included the initial version of these dimensions of continuing education, followed by members of the project team reporting on the various developments and achievements that had taken place in their universities.

The initial categories for this model of continuing education came from analyzing how education continues in our lives and society, and how it can be thought of in relation to the current post-secondary education system; how can we think of education as a continuance or extension of the university? How would we think of knowledge mobility from its place of origin in the universities to its place of application in society? I focused on the word continuing to think of various continuums or dimensions of continuing education. The initial nine dimensions, or continua, of continuing education are represented briefly by a short poem; later in the article, they will be collapsed into four main categories I refer to as *dimensions of continuing education*.ⁱⁱ

from cradle to grave,
from city to countryside,
from pure to applied,
from past to future,
from mountain to valley,
from generation to generation,
from mono- to inter-disciplinary,
from formal to informal,
from head to toe.

Context for Thinking About Continuing Education in South-East Asia

We think of higher education in general as a set of processes in the development of nations and the advancement of societies. Post-secondary education or higher education in any country is inextricably associated with the nation's heritage, its present conditions, and its future prospects. Within this context, higher education is one means by which people aspire to improve themselves, to reach out for new opportunities and dreams.

Having evolved from different historical backgrounds and cultures, the public education system in South-East Asia has strong colonial influences from European countries alongside prominent features inherited from Asian traditions. These influences comprise a dynamic context for curriculum development in higher education within these countries. Further, and consistent with global trends in the new millennium, higher education in this region is facing numerous challenges, including increasing student enrolments, knowledge and information

overload in a rapidly changing technological world, and economic restructuring and financial constraint. Not the least of these challenges is the increasing expectation in all sectors, that the education system in South-East Asia will help pave the way to a brighter future, bringing prosperity to poverty-stricken areas.

In the midst of this expectation, the South-East Asian higher education community aspires to closer cooperation with more developed countries in order to produce highly qualified graduates who will increase the region's competitiveness throughout the world (Ahrens & Kemmerer, 2002; Chapman, Cummings, & Postiglione, 2010). Thus, there is a widely held belief that policy makers and practitioners must be informed about trends and developments in higher education systems of other countries and be able to adapt new policies and practices to suit local needs and circumstances. The reasons these countries are looking to the West for answers are many-fold, not the least of which has to do with the transition from Communism to Democracy as ideological orientations in governance and finance. This shift in orientation of higher education in South-East Asia has been exacerbated by profound shifts in the nature of post-secondary education that have been experienced globally in recent decades (Chapman, Cummings, & Postiglione, 2010).

While countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, and Lao PDR have been looking to the West for answers, the post-secondary education system has undergone dramatic changes in North America, Australia, and Europe. Current trends in higher education worldwide have brought about entirely new language in our discourse about the university and its role in society. The Asia-Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2006 report on higher education in South-East Asia mentions four current global trends in higher education that are particularly relevant for South-East Asia: massification, diversification, internationalization, and marketization. Chapman, Cummings, and Postiglione (2010) acknowledge a new or renewed recognition that the international sharing of ideas, strategies of learning and students, is not only of enormous value to systems and institutions but essential to their long-term survival. These researchers provide a useful critique of this ideal that alerts us to the problems facing higher education in South-East Asia in terms of issues of quality, relevance, access and equity, and financing.

CIDA's AEED project focused on the capacity and infrastructure for continuing education in Cambodia and Lao PDR, with regional assistance and mentorship from Thailand and academic upgrading and capacity building leadership from Simon Fraser University in Canada. The national and historical contexts of these countries in South-East Asia provide a foundation for understanding how continuing education might be developed (Ahrens & Kemmerer, 2002; Ayres, 2003; Chandler, 1994; Short, 2004; Walter & Reimer, 2011).

The Context of the Adult Education for Economic Development Project

Thailand is a recently industrialized country, whereas Cambodia and Lao PDR are in transition from agricultural to industrialized economies, adding to the challenges of expanding the post-secondary education system in these countries. Thailand has never been colonized, whereas both Cambodia and Lao PDR have; their education systems have been greatly shaped by their colonial heritage, which has brought about a somewhat precarious state for the education systems in their societies today. In Cambodia, there remains in the general public some disdain and resentment toward the intelligentsia of foreign influences, adding to the challenge of

rebuilding the country's institutions in the wake of the recent and massive genocide of the seventies under the Pot Pol regime (Ayres, 2003; Short, 2004). In Lao PDR, the influences of the Soviet Bloc still heavily shape the education system particularly in terms of its administration, giving rise to some uncertainty about how a centrally controlled system can respond to an open market economy.

As less developed regions, Cambodia and Lao PDR have education systems that are greatly underfunded compared to more developed regions, yet which face escalating demand and expectation (Ayres, 2003). Both countries have a predominately under-qualified academic staff, insufficiently planned curricula, and poor learning resources. The higher education system in particular, is undergoing restructuring in a time of reform in funding and governance, bringing new resources and new effort to develop up-to-date curricula and to improve the qualifications of the professoriate and support staff of the universities (Chapman, Cummings, & Postiglione, 2010). Critical commentaries on the nature of change and its effects on educational development include Ayres' (2003) discussion of the effects of broader structural adjustment on education in Cambodia being fueled by market-oriented economic restructuring and development ideology leading to an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor.

Following decades of influence from the former Soviet Union, the universities of Cambodia and Lao PDR were largely mono-disciplinary until very recently. For example, the National University in Laos was formed only fifteen years ago in 1996 by the Government's amalgamation of nine separate colleges in Vientiane: Vientiane Teacher Training College, National Polytechnic Institute, College of Medical Science, College of Electronics and Electro-technology, Vientiane School of Transport and Communications, Vientiane School of Architecture, Tad Thong School of Irrigation, Dongdok College of Forestry, Nabong College of Agriculture, and the Veunkham Agriculture Centre.

Each of these colleges had been owned and operated by its respective ministry in the Government, for example the Vientiane School of Architecture by the Ministry of Architecture, and so on. The formation of the National University was, therefore, a very significant step forward in terms of establishing a post-secondary education system with a comprehensive university and its associated liberal arts education, with faculties in the arts and sciences capable of interacting in a manner that would bring about creative and innovative new programs and graduates with a broad liberal arts education.

Given this kind of history, there has been modest exposure in the higher education systems and governments of South-East Asia to integrated or interdisciplinary studies; therefore continuing studies, or continuing education is virtually unknown to the people of these countries. With the main goal of the AEED project being the establishment of new Centers for Continuing Education in the National University of Laos and the Royal University of Phnom Penh, the institutional and national context for the AEED project was very complex and dynamic; these Centers are the first of their kind in Cambodia and Lao PDR, not to mention the fact that the comprehensive universities in which they were installed, together with the ideals of a broad liberal arts education, are still very new to these societies.

Dimensions of Continuing Education

The structure of higher education is changing rapidly and dramatically worldwide, in terms of technologies, programs, policies, systems of governance, goals, and approaches in curriculum. In the midst of this change, it is worth remembering that the notion of continuing education, or

extension as it was first named, is only about one hundred years old in North American educational institutions. Both names refer to the idea that the regular operations of the university are somehow being extended or continued in a manner that goes beyond the usual programs and offerings.

While Continuing Education or Continuing Studies departments are quite common in North American universities today, their activities are still in many cases seen as being peripheral to the main functions of the university, namely its research and teaching activities. Usually, these departments have been relegated to developing distance education offerings of select academic programs and non-credit, certificate, or diploma programs in such areas as computer technology, foreign language training, and interdisciplinary studies. Such is the case at Simon Fraser University—the lead institution of this AEED project—with its Faculty of Continuing Studies, which has seen considerable restructuring itself since 2003 when the project was designed and initiated.

While the idea of continuing education is still a fledgling of the modern university, it is useful nevertheless to consider the nature of continuing education in a more holistic sense as a set of continuums that represent various facets or dimensions of this extension of the university. In order to conceptualize the many aspects of continuing education in society today, four dimensions that define the potential for program offerings in continuing studies are considered below, together with local examples from each of the Centers involved in the AEED project. These are the dimensions of *lifelong learning*, *outreach*, *applied and integrated studies*, and *informal learning environments*. Although these dimensions represent analytically distinct features of continuing education, it is important to remember that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Certain programs may have aspects of more than one of these dimensions. As noted above, these dimensions arose from my analysis of the programs created by the partner institutions during the AEED project, my perceived need for a general over-arching framework that would enable creativity and autonomy in future program and curriculum development undertaken by the centers, and my understanding of the kinds of programs usually associated with centers for continuing education or continuing studies.

Lifelong Learning

Perhaps the most commonly understood dimension of continuing studies is that of lifelong learning. This is how education takes shape at various moments or phases throughout our lives, as we speak of education continuing *from the cradle to the grave*. Lifelong learning is a term that is understood in most countries today. It usually conjures images of adult education in today's world when it is typical for adults to return to school for further study, often associated with career changes of some sort, though its meaning has shifted over time, partly due to its rise on the national agendas of many developing countries and its association with economic restructuring (Rubenson & Schuetze, 2000; Schuetze & Casey, 2006).

Adult education has already taken root in South-East Asia in the form of English and other foreign language training and computer or instructional technology. These are the predominant areas of focus for all three of SFU's partners in the AEED project: the Continuing Education Center (CEC) of Chula in Thailand, the CEC of RUPP in Cambodia, and the Continuing and Distance Education Center (CDEC) of NUOL in Lao PDR.

In Chula there is an interesting twist to the English language training programs, in that the most predominant one—the *Go International with English Program*—enrolls 4- to 16-year-old

children and runs almost entirely on the weekends and in summer camps. The Go International with English program of Chula has been very successful and is the main source of revenue for the CEC, which has been a cost-recovery unit since its official establishment in 1996. The CEC at RUPP offers courses in Electronic Equipment and Computer Repair, an Internet-based preparation exam, Test of English as a Foreign Language (iBT TOEFL), an Internet for University Students course, a Web Design course, and a Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) certificate program. The CDEC at NUOL has offered courses in Computer Training and Internet Services and is planning on offering a blended distance education Master's in Business studies beginning in September 2010.

Outreach

A second dimension of continuing education is the continuum *from city to countryside*, which refers to people's access to education as one moves across the landscape from urban to rural and remote regions. This dimension of outreach has been a concern for higher education in developed and developing countries alike, and it is often coupled with the notion of diversification of program offerings. Moving higher education programs into remote regions has included catering to diverse needs and interests, often working with ethnic minority populations. A recent position statement and policy framework from UNESCO (2010), *Reaching the Unreached in Education in Asia-Pacific*, includes a policy recommendation that aptly demonstrates an intensified effort in South-East Asia "[to] ensure adequate investment of resources to provide accessible education of good quality for all, particularly targeting the unreached and underserved populations, and ensure efficient and effective utilization of these resources" (p. 24).

Chula's CEC outreach programs have included professional development in English and Computer Technology for the staff of business and government offices, though these have been offered predominantly in the Bangkok area and less frequently in rural areas. The CEC at RUPP ran a series of in-service workshops for practicing teachers of secondary school science in two rural communities at a Regional Teacher Training College for the first time in the summer of 2009 and plans to offer a full bachelor's degree program in the sciences through week-end study to help rural teachers upgrade from lower-secondary to senior-secondary science teaching: the latter requires a full university degree, rather than two years of study at a Teacher Training College. NUOL offers Business Administration courses to government officials and has considered a program in Law for diplomats and other professional sectors, which are planned as potential offerings of the CDEC. In addition, the CDEC delivered short courses in two rural communities: one on raising animals, another on growing vegetables.

Packaging and delivering courses and programs through distance education is used to reach remote regions in many parts of the world, but the history of distance education in South-East Asia is minimal. Numerous technologies have supported these efforts in other regions, from radio and television programming to recent on-line platforms utilizing the Internet. In South-East Asia however, there remain many remote areas that have no schools whatsoever, and even the urban areas are still developing the capacity for high-speed broadband Internet access.

Distance Education is a very recent phenomenon even for Thailand, which is still predominantly dependent on print-based media materials that are delivered by postal services, though admittedly the production and distribution of these materials is most impressive and represents a massive undertaking by Chula. It is also noteworthy that Chula has operated some

Internet-based courses and that it houses a campus-based radio station that broadcasts foreign language instruction in English, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, French, and Japanese.

Applied and Integrated Studies

A third dimension of continuing education is the continuum *from pure to applied disciplines*. This dimension represents a transition from academic to professional cultures and interests. The university houses pure research in the sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities, and produces knowledge through this research to be disseminated to the public. Of course, this notion has been critiqued and qualified for decades (Dewey, 1929; Schön, 1983), but the idealization is that knowledge derived in the universities is applied when and where appropriate to practical and professional activities in various sectors of society, commerce, and government; in this sense the university can be thought of in terms of the integration of its generated knowledge in the various activities of society. Potential areas of this kind of integration are medical and health professions, judicial and social services, and programs of integrated and interdisciplinary studies. Short courses and non-credit programs in some of these areas have been popular in Continuing Education departments, and some universities have developed bachelor degree programs in integrated, interdisciplinary, and general studies for mid-career adults. To be clear, the word *integration* is being used here to refer to how knowledge and understanding are applied from theoretical studies in the universities to the practical activities of society; since this inevitably involves interdisciplinary studies (Schwab, 1970; Shulman, 1984), I am referring to integration in terms of this interdisciplinary quality, or what Schwab (1970) referred to as *polyfocal conspectus*.

NUOL's CDEC has offered short courses in the medical sciences to health care professionals in rural areas. As mentioned above, the CEC at RUPP is preparing science degree programs for teachers in rural schools and Chula has offered English and Computer Technology courses to government office staffs. All of these programs and courses would be good examples of continuing education as applied and integrated studies, in the sense of both application and integration across disciplines, as is typically the case in programs of continuing studies, and application and integration in the sense that research in the various university disciplines informs professional practice in a variety of contexts, notwithstanding the kinds of critiques that have qualified this influence (e.g., Schwab, 1970; Schön, 1983, 1987).

Informal Learning Environments

A fourth dimension of continuing education is the continuum from formal to informal learning environments. Formal learning environments are those found on the traditional university campus—lecture halls, classrooms, and teaching laboratories. Informal learning environments are sprinkled throughout societies in science, history and art museums, parks, aquariums, churches, temples, tourist centers, zoos, amusement parks, shopping malls, community centers, and so on. Formal learning environments are associated with accredited programs and usually lead to a credential of some sort, whereas informal learning environments usually do not. Informal learning is often associated with hobbies and crafts, such as learning about weaving, woodworking or cooking—all excellent candidates for short courses in continuing education in South-East Asia, but which might go unnoticed, or marginalized in the general discourse about continuing adult education (Mirth, 2003).

All three Centers in the AEED project have considered developing courses and programs in tourism or eco-tourism that would focus on minority groups in Thailand, Cambodia, and Lao PDR as a means of preserving the ethnic diversity of these countries. These initiatives may go forward in Thailand and Lao PDR, but the CEC at RUPP may not have jurisdiction over such a program. The CDEC at NUOL is considering a program in *temple tourism*, which would visit various Laotian pagodas around Vientiane and Luang Prabang, focusing on peace initiatives and spiritual enlightenment through learning about Buddhist and Daoist principles. RUPP's CEC, through a close association with the Faculty of Science, has run special courses for the South-East Asian Ministers of Education (SEAMEO) *Search for Young Scientists* program as well as national and international Mathematics and Physics Olympics camps and exhibitions. Chula's CEC has initiated a pilot course on weaving in a rural community, successfully introducing this activity as a hobby and part-time occupation to women of the community as a means of raising their socio-economic level. All of these are good examples of continuing education programs in this category of learning in informal environments.

Systemic Conceptions of Continuing Education

Any approach to community development ought to consider the educational fabric of the developing community. As mentioned earlier, Warren's (2003) extensive review of models of adult education indicates a shift from behaviourist to humanist approaches, from emphasis on product to process. It is useful to think of continuing education in a community as a network of evolving competencies and understandings, in which people are engaged with one another along what might be thought of as gradients of knowledge, understanding, and ability. Following this view one might understand foreign participation in community building in terms of stimulating the development and exchange of knowledge, understanding, and ability at the local level.

A beginning premise of this project was that educational programs within and among institutions could be designed to link together in ways that enhance the development and exchange of knowledge and understanding in the community at large. Another premise was that the linking of programs and development initiatives would help to strengthen relations among educational institutions in South-East Asia, thereby deepening and sustaining dialogue and analysis about teaching and learning in higher education. To fully grasp this notion of linking we need to think of individuals working together in a concerted and productive way under the guidance of some sort of model or conception of what might be plausible and productive. In order to reform anything one would need to build this sort of infrastructure and we can see in the AEED project how, on a small scale, the design of the collaboration provided the outline for this infrastructure, particularly in terms of encouraging Thailand's Chulalongkorn University in the role of guidance and mentorship within the consortium.

The MED program designed for this AEED project included a group of young scholars selected from among the candidates put forward by the three partner institutions. Through the CIDA grant we were able to provide MED scholarships for 25 people—roughly one-third from each participating country. The program began in Thailand, with all 25 students in a face-to-face course on curriculum theory. The second semester was delivered in Cambodia, again with all participants studying together with an instructor from SFU. The third semester brought the students to Canada for courses at SFU and the fourth semester took place in Lao PDR, again with an instructor from SFU. The fifth semester of this program involved the students' projects that were associated with their comprehensive examinations, which took place in Cambodia,

with the entire instructional team from SFU and official representatives from the three partner universities and the CIDA project team. The MEd candidates presented papers and conference-style presentations of the various curriculum projects that had occurred within their respective centers and implemented in their home universities. All of the SFU course instructors for the MEd program and the project team from each of the partner universities participated in the comprehensive exams, together with some senior administrators, officials from the national governments, CIDA, and the Canadian Ambassador to Cambodia at the time, who observed various parts of the examination process.

Metaphors drawn from the biological sciences are useful for understanding a learning community particularly in terms of a dynamic living system. The metaphor of a seed for example can offer systemic, dynamic analyses of projects and programs. The AEED program was like a seed in that it grew under the proper conditions and became an inter-related part of the community over time. A learning community has a synergy, a life of its own so to speak, which allows it to flower and bear fruit, albeit often in unanticipated ways. But this quality brings a certain kind of unpredictability to the program, which is a good thing because in the end it brings about robust interconnections in the community and ensures that various people are developing initiative and taking ownership in creative ways. Synergy carries with it synchronicity, serendipity, and spirituality, which allow people to bring their beliefs and their aspirations to bear upon their collective efforts.

The concept *ecological* gives rise to systemic ideas of inter-relatedness. Teaching and learning relations are typically thought of in terms of one person in transition—the learner: the learner is in transition from a state of not knowing to a state of knowing. The teacher allows the transition to occur, but does not undergo any kind of change. But if one thinks in ecological terms then the teacher, the learner, and knowledge itself are in a process of formation—teaching, learning, and understanding are all transactional events. There is something to be taken from each exchange by all partners; nothing is wasted. This kind of thinking allows one to see all of the project partners and participants as a community of learners working together in an interwoven fabric of developing understandings and competencies. I think this theoretical platform for continuing studies draws support from notions of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Grossman, 2001) and ideas about the social foundations of learning in practice and communities of practice (MacKinnon, 1996, 2011; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). I believe this theoretical infrastructure in turn, was sharpened and articulated through analyzing the project activities in a way that illustrated a broad conception of continuing education that could provide the foundation for implementing ideas and innovations in higher education within the partnered institutions.

Issues and Conclusion

There is an immediate institutional need to have the CDEC of NUOL and the CEC of RUPP formally acknowledged by their senior administrations as credit-offering units. The Ministry of Education of Lao PDR formally recognized the CDEC in 2006, but the Kingdom of Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport has yet to recognize the CEC of RUPP. This may not be a simple matter given the novelty of continuing education in the country, the nature of doing business in the Government, some restructuring of RUPP associated with the application, and the financial constraints imposed by the global economic recession. In order to achieve this recognition and to move forward in program development and implementation, there is a need

to develop a clearly articulated mission and set of goals for continuing adult education in South-East Asia. The administrators and staffs of the CDEC and CEC will have to do their own promotion and lobbying, especially since the senior administration within NUOL and RUPP has turned over since the inception of this project.

There are similar needs at the national level. Despite the tremendous amount of effort made by Cambodia and Lao PDR, their post-secondary education systems still need further improvement to be known and recognized regionally and internationally. As noted above, higher education in these countries has gone through different ideologies including European, Russian, Vietnamese, and most recently, Western. Graduate students supported by foreign scholarships are bringing influences from Australia, New Zealand, North America, Great Britain, Japan, and Vietnam, as are various development projects from these countries in education. While human and financial resources remain dependent on other regions, it is difficult for these newly created education systems to stand on their own, responding to the needs of students and society, and also satisfying dramatic changes in the labour market as the two countries are transformed from agricultural to industrialized societies.

While the higher education system itself is still fragmented and financially constrained, complications and challenges are likely to arise for Cambodia and Lao PDR in their imperative to expand their universities and continuing education programs. The approach of higher education is to encourage increased private sector participation through marketization to lessen the burden placed on the governments. It is hoped that with private sector participation, market forces can generate the expansion needed, while at the same time, being more responsive to the demands of the economy. But evidence elsewhere has shown that market-driven higher education does not necessarily lead to higher standards of quality in education (Chapman, Cummings, & Postiglione, 2010), and it may be the case that the credentialing function of the university leads to a catharsis of its own. If private participation in higher education is the trend, more coordination at the policy and implementation levels will be needed to ensure that the outcome is not just greater access to higher education, but also better quality of programs in order to allow Cambodia and Lao PDR to take a more prominent role in the emerging nations of South-East Asia.

This paper focused on the effort among four partnered universities to develop infrastructure and human resources to staff new centers for continuing education in RUPP and NUOL, and to build capacity for regional mentorship at Chula, for developing adult, continuing education programs that promise to stimulate economic development in Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. The model presented in this article provides a framework for program and curriculum development in continuing education at the post-secondary level by considering four dimensions of continuing education that describe how the programs that emerged in the AEED project can be considered to be *extensions* of existing, traditional program areas within the universities that participated in this project. In particular, this model encourages us to consider new possibilities for program development that might otherwise be marginalized or overlooked. It emerged in this project as a way of building autonomy in the newly formed centers for continuing education, partially by articulating and justifying the various program initiatives that occurred in the three centers throughout the project.

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Notes

- i Keynote Address to the Fourth International Conference on Educational Reform. Sponsored by the Faculty of Education, Mahasarakham University in Thailand, The National University of Laos, and Luang Prabang Teacher Training College. Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, March 24-25, 2011. The research study reported in this address was funded by the University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development (UPCD) Tier I Program of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through the Adult Education for Economic Development grant. CIDA had no role in production of this address or the decision to publish it.
- ii Taken from CAUCE presentation: MacKinnon, Mitchell, Heng, Tharith, Chanthamaly, Kolakul, & Bovornkitti (2009, May).

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