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Editor's Note*

Nelly Stromquist, professor of International Development Education at the University of Southern California, and a visiting professor at Harvard University, in an article on how globalization is impacting individuals (and governments) in new and different ways stated:

“Education, at its deeper level, is about helping people to deal with their environment and, as necessary, to transform it. Globalization is introducing multiple changes to our environments and imposing more commonality than divergence” (Stromquist, 2002).

Nowhere is this more obvious than in South East Asia where transnational collaboration has become essential in a number of fields. The need for a common language that would facilitate such collaboration is leading to some new and unique partnerships.

Article 34 of the charter of the South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) specifies that the working language shall be English. Thus, English has become the official *lingua franca*, or ‘neutral’ language, for inter-regional communication among the member nations of ASEAN.

In 2011 the U.S. State Department, with representatives from countries served by the Mekong River, spear-headed the development of pilot training programs aimed at building essential English language communication skills for senior civil service personnel in three fields: environment, health, and infra-structure.

The project is known as the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI). The participating countries are all members of ASEAN: Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Myanmar had ‘observer’ status. Of those officials selected to undergo training, none were native English speakers. Each pilot program consisted of 40-hour, face-to-face workshops and 20 hours of home studies.

There are many challenges facing such English language training projects. One is the age of the officials themselves. It is well known that as we get older developing high level skills in a second or a third language, such as English, becomes increasingly difficult, perhaps, for many, not even possible.

Coupled with that fact is another. The policy papers and formal agreements that will become some of the end-products of transnational collaboration activities will necessarily require a high level of specificity as well as political sensitivity.

These two challenges suggest the need for each member country to include in such working groups their own English language (bilingual) specialists as assistants.

The training program which I have described is but one example of how ‘education can help people deal with their environment and, as necessary, transform it’. Along with education, of course, we need to remember that ‘education’ has never been a static ‘commodity’. It is always being transformed through the efforts of, among others, researchers in the arts and sciences.

* Note from Editorial Board Member Jamie H.A. Wallin, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, The University of British Columbia (Canada) and currently Associate Dean of Faculty of Education, Rangsit University.

We urge researchers – especially those working in South East Asia – to consider directing their research efforts to topics drawn from the three fields which were identified by the organizers of the Lower Mekong Initiative. Below is an elaboration of some of the key sub-themes.

Environment

- sustainable natural resource management, for example fisheries protection, forest management
- cross-border energy cooperation
- renewable energy, for example hydro, solar, wind
- protecting regional biodiversity: wetlands, watershed controls
- food security

Health

- pandemic threats
- control and regulation of medicines
- transmigration – communicable and rare diseases
- hygiene and sanitation

Infrastructure

- responding to disasters – building and repairing medical clinics, emergency shelters, roads, bridges, power lines; developing central disaster operational centers
- collaborating in developing cross-border transportation systems

The *Rangsit Journal of Arts and Sciences* would welcome papers that contribute further to existing knowledge in these three fields, particularly with reference to the particular needs of the region now known as ASEAN.

References

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