

ทุนทางสังคมกับการเสริมสร้างศักยภาพชุมชนในการดูแลเด็กปฐมวัยในพื้นที่ภาคเหนือ  
Social Capital and Potential Enhancement of Community for Caring  
the Early Childhood in the Northern Part of Thailand

รองศาสตราจารย์ ดร.จutamaศ โชติบง<sup>1</sup>

ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร.อุษณีย์ จินตะเวช<sup>2</sup>

Associate Professor Jutamas Chotibang, Ph.D.<sup>3</sup>

Assistant Professor Usanee Jintrawet, Ph.D.<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

The objective of this research was to search for the social capital in community which can be used to develop the potential in the Early Child Development Center for 2-5 year-old children in the northern part of Thailand covering 6 provinces namely Sukhothai, Lumphun, Lumpang, Nan, Chiang Mai, and Chiang Rai. Data collection was conducted through interviewing people in the community who are capable of providing information about social capital in the community including community leader, representatives of Local Administrative Office, representatives of the healthcare service center, parents, and officers in the Early Child Development Center.

Finding of this study showed that the social capital in the community could be used as the basis of the potential development of the Early Child Development Center in the area in 7 forms including 1) human capital 2) group capital/network capital 3) department capital/organization capital/institute

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<sup>1</sup> อาจารย์ประจำคณะพยาบาลศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่

<sup>2</sup> อาจารย์ประจำคณะพยาบาลศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่

<sup>3</sup> Lecturer, Faculty of Nursing, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

<sup>4</sup> Lecturer, Faculty of Nursing, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

E-mail : chotibang.coact@gmail.com, usanee.jin@cmu.ac.th

capital 4) financial capital 5) facility capital 6) natural resource capital and 7) local cultural and traditional capital which were able to be used to develop the Early Childhood Development Center's performance, and to support the long-term community development on child development, concentration, social skills, holding the learning activities for children, transmitting the community culture through generations, natural resources conservation, and also the potential development of the officers in the Early Childhood Development Center in the community. Studying the social capital in the community was important steps in process of enhancing the community which could be conducted together with the analyzing the situation and needs of the community for developing the Early Childhood. Besides, the social capitals were able to be used as the solution of the problems and guideline for promoting child development in community.

**Keywords :** Social Capital, Pre-School Children, Community Potential, Northern Part

### **Background and Rationale**

Early childhood period is the important basis of human resources development since it is the initial of holistic capacity building in physical, emotional, and social dimension, which will have long-term on personality, social developments, and human capacity that related to the strategic country development plan and strategic national research (Office of the National Economics and Social Development Board, 2012); The office of the National Research Council of Thailand, 2012) The strategic plan focuses on educational reform especially the quality of the children, and youth. The capacity development of the pre-school children depends on cooperation from the representatives of various departments including family, community,

school, and society, mainly-focused on family in child development, and the community and society base voluntary participation in every steps of children development (Office of the Education Council, 2007)

The current social conditions, most of parents of the children in those ages have to work outside their home to earn a living so that they are unable to take care of their children full-time. The Early Child Development Center in many areas has become the essential alternative. The key factor determining effectiveness of the preschool center management is the support from all departments related particularly the parents and community which are on the location of the center. The attempt to use the social capital in the community as the important basis in supporting the center's performance becomes one of the alternatives in the capacity development of the center. Performance management of Early Child Development Center in their responsibility scope especially the participation process of community in building and developing the pre-school children through the social capital in community including human capital, network, relation in community and the social, and cultural context which benefits the development of the curriculum for preschool children. Moreover, these strategy also build long-term community strength, and learning each other including knowledge and experience that related to the way of life of people in community. Then group-reliance and social relation possibly occur as these pre-school children grow to be part of the human capital and to be the important power in long-term community development and finally people in community are able to rely on themselves.

Important components of social capital include networks, norms, and trust (Putnam, 1996; Baron, Field, and Schuller, 2000) which are very

essential to the human resource development of the community starting from the pre-school children through using the social capital in the capacity development of the Early Childhood Development Center so that the center could manage social capital and take care of the children for their growth and cognitive development appropriate to their age, altogether with social skills development under the bond with the community. So this study aimed to determine the social capital which benefits the capacity development of the Early Child Development Center in the community in many aspects. The Early Child Development Center in 6 provinces in the northern part of Thailand were selected to study since those areas have the individual cultural and social context. This research could be basis information for using the social capital in planning for the further capacity development of the Early Child Development Center's performance.

### **Objectives**

To study the social capital in the community in order to use for the capacity development of the Early Child Development Center for 2-5 year-old children's performance in the 6 provinces of the northern part of Thailand

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study used the concept of the social capital to develop early childhood in the community because the concept was created from generosity, trust, and experience that leading to the economic and social development. Its consequence may further produce serve as a driving force to perform value added of its community in many aspects of development.

These developments could add values to the community in knowing the problems hence solving and managing the problems on point and finally leading to long-term self-reliance (Worawut Romratanapan, 2005) which activate the continuous and sustainable participation of the people in community.

The social capital could be spiritual, human and culture capital, public fund, and public space or culture space which can be displayed through local religious awareness, local wisdom, human resource and network, natural resources capital, cultural way of life, uniqueness, identity, and generosity (Social Investment Fund Office, 2012). Aside from that, the social capital in the community possibly includes the social relation among persons, institutes, and organization in the individual forms, groups, and network (Ammara Pongsapitch and Benja Yoddamnoen Attick, 2000). Additionally, the way to think and the knowledge system which can be used in way of life in community management are also included (Anan Kanchanapan,1995).

Social capital can be generally applied to the context of politics and economic contexts, and environment management (Worawut Romratanapan, 2008). Using the social ecological model's ecological framework for human development could be used in the different level of the educational development such as micro level: the family support; meso-level: school and community; and macro level: society level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). On the other hand, education is the essential basis in building the social capital. All three levels affect the results of the educational management and children's development in overview. (David, 2005)

This research attempted to search for the social capital in the community and use for the capacity development of the pre-school children's capacity and educational management for pre-school children in the 6 provinces of the northern part of Thailand.

### **Methodology**

This research was a descriptive one, and was the part of plan in the Capacity of a Community Treasure (COACT) project in 2-5 year-old children care which was conducted in 6 provinces of the northern part of Thailand namely Sukhothai, Lumphun, Lumpang, Nan, Chiang Mai, and Chiang Rai. The goal of this study was to search for the social capital in the community which benefits the capacity development of the Early Child Development Center.

### **Sample Group**

In this study 6 communities in the 6 provinces of the northern part of Thailand were selected. One of the Early Child Development Centers from each community was considered as the model of each area which takes care of pre-school children between 2-5 year-old in the community including 1) Wiang Nong-long District, Lumphun Province, 2) Sawankhalok District, Sukhothai Province, 3) Kho-Kha District, Lumpang Province, 4) Nanoi District, Nan Province, 5) Sansai District, Chiang Mai Province, and 6) Watprom Wihan Sub-district, Maesai District, Chiang Rai Province. The key information was collected from those related to what the center who could provide the information of the social capital in the community including community leader, the representatives of Local Administrative Office, the representatives of the healthcare service center, parents, and officers in the Early Child Development Center.

Tools used in this research included the guideline of the social capital in capacity development of the Early Child Development Center which was built to explore the social capital in the community. It can be divided into 6 aspects namely 1) Human capital which are the important person, leader, smart people, volunteers in pre-school children development in the community, and officers in the Early Child Development Center: specifying the name, position, expert, and the work of these people, 2) group/network capital which is the gather of network in the community that tends to benefit the Early Child Development Center such as housewives, youth, handicapped, the elderly, volunteer community network, farmer network, local wisdom teacher, and monk network: specifying the group/network, position, expert, and the work of these group/network, 3) departments/organizations/institutes capital which are able to benefit or to support the performance of the Early Child Development Center: specifying the departments/organizations/institutes, position, expert, and the work of these departments/organizations/institutes, 4) financial capital which are the financial resources that are able to subsidize the Early Child Development Center both direct way and donation: specifying the financial resources name and possible fund and supplies, 5) facility capital which are the facility resources or the location in the community that can support the Early Child Development Center in other aspects, 6) natural resources capital which are the natural resources in the community that can support the Early Child Development Center's performance, and 7) culture and local tradition capital which is the unique local culture such as local yearly tradition, traditional dress, local activities, and useful dialects for the children's development and local heritage in community.

**Procedure** Data collection was collected through the interview all related to the Early Child Development Center in order to get the key information of all aspects of the social capital in the community with survey form. The information givers were expected to appear in the community and had enough potential to support the Early Child Development Center in many aspects.

**Ethical Considerations** : Study approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing, Chiang Mai University. All participants received a complete explanation and written description of the purposes and processes of the study, the methods, the potential risks and benefits of participation, and the protection of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, without any adverse personal impact. Before signing the informed consent form, participants were assured about confidentiality and anonymity and had a chance to ask questions about the study.

## Results

From the social capital survey in many aspects in the community of 6 districts, it was found that social capital and community development are influence on development as a result of the interactions. Social capital facilitates information sharing, decision-making, and project activities action through social networks, rules, procedures, and policy. Social capital facilitates coordination because of enhanced communication between members of communities, thus reducing inefficiencies and reduces uncertainty between members of community. Project activities provide individual community members the opportunity to build a personal sense

of empowerment, which encourages commitment to the community, thus promoting needed stability. Moreover, the types of the social capital which benefit the performance of the Early Child Development Center were divided into the following aspects:

### **1. Human Capital**

In all 6 communities, it was found that the social capital in the human form had ability and capacity to support the Early Child Development Center in many aspects such as community leader. Each community had different roles in the learning course management, propelling and raising awareness of the education in the parents, providing suggestion and fund-raising to develop the center, and enhancing the parents, community and all societies to be part of the center management to push the education to be the tool used in the community development. Human capital composed political leader in the community, the spiritual leader or the religion still plays important roles in enhancing the pre-school children's development especially the roles of monks who give the knowledge, teach the religious moral to the pre-school children, and cultivate the ethics in them. In addition, the monks could possibly suggest the goodness to the teacher/teacher assistants and the educational officers in the Early Child Development Center. In some places, the temples allowed the educational learning center for pre-school children to be built in their area such as the Early Child Development Center in Chiang Rai.

The group of people considered as the important roles as well in enhancing the capacity of children's learning was the local wisdom teacher. Each community has local wisdom teacher in the special aspect. But in the overview of the northern part of Thailand, it was resulted by the uniqueness

of local culture which viewed as the useful identity and can be passed through generations.

6 provinces in the northern part of Thailand, there were many branches of local wisdom teachers namely 1) crafts: reflecting through the easy handmade weaving, paper cutting, and small inventions from materials such as making the local lantern, the traditional flag, and handmade from reused materials in order to allow the children practice the hand skills and muscles, 2) agriculture: the children can learn to plan vegetables, and chemical-free vegetables to support the ingredients for the center's kitchen such as doing fish and mushroom farm 3) local music and art: how to play the traditional local instrument and do Thai dancing can be taught to the children and it helps them focus their mind, 4) traditional sweets and food e.g. how to make and cook local healthy food and sweets for better growth development of the children, 5) herbs: the local way of children's healthcare and the health consultant for parents, 6) carpentry: the local wooden toys could be built from this and could also be the exhibition for the children, and 7) pottery: the pottery could help to adjust the scenery in the Early Child Development Center and draw the children attention.

## **2. Group/Network Capital in Community**

Nowadays many groups or networks in the community have been established and aimed to develop the community with the participation of the people there as well as development of the pre-school children in the community. After studying the activities of groups or networks in the area, it was found that many of them had capacity in enhancing the pre-school children's development of the Early Child Development Center such as the group of the elderly. The elderly shared the activities with the small children

e.g. exercising with them, storytelling, telling local proverbs, and making toys from local wisdom (banana tree horse, banana tree gun). It is also one way to pass the culture to another generation, and creates warm and secure feeling to both the elderly and small children. Furthermore, the group of housewives could be the part of the children's development through their activities including teaching them how to cook especially the local food and sweets, and handcrafting with the materials in the community (making flowers and local toys. The group which has specific ability in the community and officially formed themselves is a part of local wisdom teacher namely the group of pottery: can be taught to the small children and allow them take action.

Other groups in the community have their own work and responsibility could be a part of the small children's development as well such as the group of the monks which could voluntarily teach them about the religious days, and cultivate ethics to them. The group of teachers/teacher assistants and student councils give the small children the knowledge, and create the activities for them. The voluntary health officers could also take care of their health by removing all mosquitos' larva to prevent dengue fever. Additionally, the network of farmers could share the agricultural learning and provide the agricultural learning center for them.

Besides from the network in community, the groups of the Early Child Development Center's entrepreneur also has their own network which can be used as the basis for capacity development of performance in the center as well including the network of teacher/teacher assistants which they always exchange their experience, academic development, teaching media, and strengthen their network continuously. The most important thing

was the parents of the children who need to support the children and cooperate with the center when there are activities.

### **3. Departments/Organizations/Institutes Capital**

Aside from social group and network, the social capital in the form of department/organization/institute in community could enhance the capacity development and the useful cooperation to the Early Child Development Center as well including public health organization (sub-district promoting health hospital and the public health voluntary officers who provide knowledge to teacher assistants and educational officers in healthcare, nutrition (lunch and supplementary food), medical checkups of teacher assistants and the children, cooks and educational officers, and the disease prevention and control.

There are many universities and colleges in the northern part of Thailand considered as the important resources capable of supporting the capacity of the pre-school children care in community such as the Faculty of Nursing, Chiangmai University, Rachabhat Chiang Rai University and Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Rai which had provided academic advice and the expert lecturers to the center, as well as the Faculties of Nursing of Payap University and Chiang Mai University which provide the learning-experience course.

Besides the public organization and educational institute, some of cooperation in the northern area were raised from private organization such as the big shopping mall in Chiang Mai which provide educational equipment and scholarships to the small children, and farms in Chiang Mai which provide flower seeds to grow in the center and in learning activities.

#### **4. Financial and Supplies Capital**

The social capital was as important as the group or the network in supplying the financial and supplies capital. Most of the area in the northern part of Thailand was subsidized from organizations which were directly responsible for the center's performance including Local Administrative Department (Sub-district Administrative Office provide the office equipment and the media for children's learning and subsidized the lunch, supplementary food, compensation, social security fee, equipment's fee, teacher's scholarship, and training course of teacher assistants). In addition, people in community and parents could be part of the supporting as well through donation for educational, and the co-donation with other organizations in specific activities or through the community activities such as Buddhism campaign.

#### **5. Facility Capital**

Facility and area were other essential capitals for the development of pre-school children since the activities need area to broaden their learning. Nowadays the center and community shares the area in doing activities together namely multi-purpose building for meeting, holding community activities (children's day), local radio and wire broadcasting for announcement related to the activities of the center, and the sport courts. Occasionally, the area is used to hold the learning activities sponsored by other learning center for example organic farming learning center, frog farming learning center and sewing learning center. The area is used for some specific activity of the learning center as well such as the antique and history exhibition from museum in Sukhothai.

## **6. Natural Resources Capital**

Natural resources in community can be useful for the learning process of the small children as well. Since many areas in the northern part have natural resources which people in the community could rely on e.g. community forest as food resources of people in community which could be passed to the center, water resources which are reservoir and dam for consumption, agriculture, and daily use, and mountain and hills (learning and food resources or agro-tourism in some cases for children).

## **7. Culture and Local Tradition Capital**

One of the important social capitals in community is the culture capital which can be reflected through the local traditions and ceremony, dress, food, language, and local activities. These things can be used to improve the pre-school in community effectively in the aspects of passing the tradition and culture to the new generations, opening the new experience to the children, and increasing some useful skills in daily life in many ways. The examples of local culture which enhance the children's learning process are Songran festival, lantern festival, Tan Kuay Salak festival (offering food to the monks), fun fair, harvesting festival, and Tan Tung festival. Local dress codes of hill tribes namely Tai, Lue, Yong and other hill tribes, local activities such as bird dancing, lion dancing, sword dancing, Tai dancing, long fingernail dancing, Northern Thai style dancing, and learning local dialects such as Northern Thai dialect, Tai dialect, Lue dialect, Chinese, and Burmese are also included.

## Discussion

From the present study which searched for the 7 social capitals for the basis of the pre-school children's development through the enhancing and cooperating with the Early Child Development Center in childcare management and learning-course management appropriate to the capacity development, it was found that northern part of Thailand has the unique and various social capitals due to the dominant local wisdom and tradition which could develop the children in many dimensions including body, mind, and society. It means not only using these capitals in their community but also transmitting and increasing social capital continuously and sustainably. This also illustrated the development in micro level, meso level, and macro level in the society. Besides, the potential groups and networks are the local wisdom teachers and the elderly in the community who usually participated in the activities of the Early Child Development Center.

However, it was found that many areas were just beginning to search for the social capital's capacity not use it in the Early Child Center concretely yet. The area differences of each center such as Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces were able to reach the more various social capital easily. The social capital in the form of finance or fund from the private organization in the area or in the form of educational equipment, and learning resources from the educational institute in the area were the examples. Some areas already have the social capital mentioned but not yet use it to development ultimately. For example, Chiang Mai has various kinds of social capital but not use it as the basis to develop the center because of some condition.

It was noticeable that the community nowadays lacked of the network connection between the center and the private organizations in the

community which were full of potential to support the center because there was no coordination or channel, plus most of the support were activities or just few times in the form of materials and finance which were not sustainable. Generally, the form and the process of the performance were divided into 2 kinds, “giving” such as donations or giveaway help just to reduce the problems at the early stage, and “supporting” such as enhancing the learning and participation of the community according to the developing concept of each community through the local wisdom with their own way and altogether with the propelling from outside the center, especially the social relation management (Rawiwan Laohanana, Patrarapan Dhamdee, and Worachai Wiriyarom, 2016). The “supporting” cooperation should be focused more.

Whether finding the social capital in community resulting in the potential development of the pre-school children or not depended on the aspect of childcare and child development which should not be focused in only one way. Learning management process of the pre-school and the course enhancing the children’s development proper to their ages should be concentrated or they should be smart, well-manned and happy at the same time especially during the pre-school because the pre-school is the important period of human quality development namely physical, emotion, society, and cognitive (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2013). If the officers responsible for the educational management understand the goal of development, this could open the various points of view of the social capital which could be developed in the broader way, not only in one aspect. Some areas might have the social capital in their community already but not be valued yet as the basis of the pre-school

children's development such as allowing children to do difficult tasks (learn to cook easy food, doing handmade things from the local wisdom or even music and art which the human capital in the community could teach them). This can be considered as the part of children development as well. Moreover, what matters in pulling the resources in community in long-term period were the security and the cooperation of people in the community by relying on the relation in the community to achieve the success.

### **Implications**

Social capital search is counted as one of an important step to study community in various dimensions, and could be processed at the same time or after the problems, situation analysis of the children's development in community. The important thing was an attempt to interpret and divide the social capital in community according to the concrete concept so that the center could find the social capital and use it to support the center's performance. Apart from that, there might be the social capital searching from outside which could be connected with the children development in the area. For example, the organizations or departments in the area have enough potential to be asked for cooperation through the other existing projects such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or the civil state project sponsored by the government as the resources to develop the potential of the continuous and sustainable childcare.

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