

Behavioral Science Perspectives on the Significance of Coaching and Mentoring in the Educational Reform Process

Kanu Priya Mohan¹

Abstract

Coaching and Mentoring (C&M) have proved to be effective techniques for developing people and supporting a change process within organizations. Both C&M have a significant role to play in the education milieu. The process of educational reform in a nation augurs change at multi-levels in the education system since it aims to meet the goals of education that are either new, such as the “21st century goals” or have not yet been achieved. Many countries have recorded evidence that coaching and mentoring of teachers, educational professional, and leaders can make a substantial contribution to sustain the educational reform. The main aim of this academic review is to share the behavioral science perspectives about the role of coaching and mentoring in the educational reform process in the special context of Thailand. The review peruses the research evidence from various countries, and then narrows down to the Thai context where a project on C&M has been initiated to support the educational reforms. The article shares the significance of how the behavioral sciences initiatives at the BSRI could support the implementation of C&M in the Thai educational reform process.

Keywords: behavioral science perspective, coaching, mentoring, educational reform

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”
— Benjamin Franklin

¹ Lecturer, Behavioral Science Research Institute, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand.

Introduction

Human development is steered by an inherent quality to keep learning, and then adapting and creating new things which lead to progress in the current world. Learning at an individual level is supported by building structures at community level, and further by policies and laws at national and even at macro level by world agencies such as UNESCO. For any nation to progress, education is one key area that has to be at the centre of the development policies. Focusing on the Thai context, in the recent decades, Thailand’s educational system has commenced many reforms to support the human development goals. This article reviews the relevant literature and research linked to one such project that has been launched as a part of the Thai educational reform process. The project is about Coaching and Mentoring (C&M) the educators to bring about a sustained change in the educational reform process.

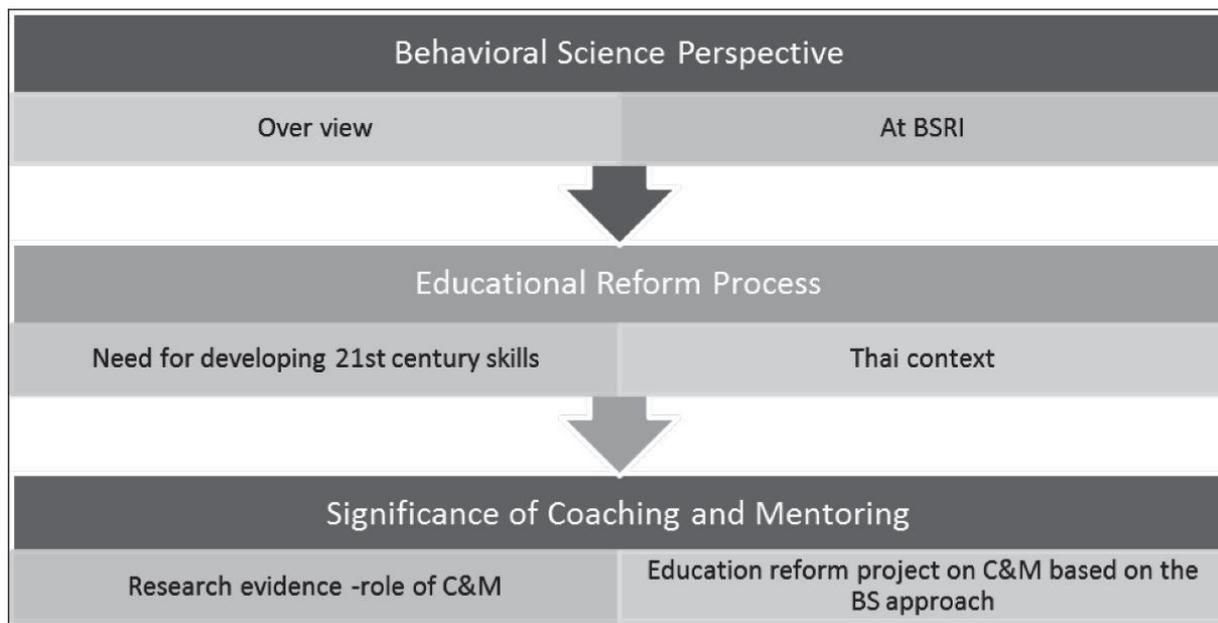


Figure 1: Framework of the academic review

The framework for this academic review (as shown in figure 1) first explores what is meant by a behavioral science perspective; then goes on to discuss the goals of an educational reform process generally, and that of Thailand, specifically; it also addresses the significance of coaching and mentoring in the educational reform process; and finally shares the behavioral science perspective for the C&M project initiated by the BSRI or the Behavioral Science Research Institute at the Srinakharinwirot University (SWU), Bangkok, Thailand.

Taking a Behavioral Science Perspective

This article first tries to address the issue about what is meant by “taking a behavioral science perspective” to understand any problem or issue. Then, it shares brief insight about the research initiatives from the behavioral science perspective being conducted at the Behavioral Science Research Institute (BSRI).

The Behavioral Science Approach

This article embraces the approach of Behavioral Sciences (BS) in understanding the problem of the educational reform process and how coaching and mentoring could be the sustaining solution to support the reform process in Thailand. The discipline of BS has unique contribution in both academic and applied terms since it allows for an inter-disciplinary understanding of a problem related to behaviors of individuals, groups and organizations.

According to Mohan and Peungposop, (2014), the significance of adopting a Behavioral Science (BS) perspective when investigating a problem involves, 1) investigating the individual behavior through a holistic view that involves the individual's interactions with his environment; 2) applying the knowledge from an inter-disciplinary view with contributions from various relevant disciplines such as psychology, sociology, political science, and education (such as in the case of the C&M project); and 3) an application of this BS knowledge to enhance the well-being of the individual in conjunction with his community and environment.

Furthermore, a behavioral science perspective also allows the practitioners to merge the gap between scientific theory and its application in the real life practice (Latham, 2007). Thus, behavioral science knowledge seems the right choice for implementing the project of C&M in Thailand's educational reform initiatives.

Behavioral Science Research at the BSRI

The Behavioral Science Research Institute (BSRI) at SWU, Thailand, has had a unique ground-breaking role in the development of the discipline of behavioral sciences in not only Thailand, but perhaps the whole ASEAN region. The BSRI was formally named as such in 1975, but the institute had been contributing to knowledge and research since the 1955 (See more at the website, http://bsri.swu.ac.th/history_eng.html). The theoretical roots of the research at BSRI have been based on the work of many well-known academicians and theorists. One such work guiding the BS has been the field theory of Lewin (1946, 1951), who was perhaps one of the pioneers of the theory of interactionism, which explains that behavior is a result of an interaction between the person and his situation. He expressed this concept with the following formula: **B=f (PxE)**.

Research at the BSRI has been guided by embracing the multi-level perspective about the interaction of an individual with his environment. This is based on the contributions of several eminent researchers and their theories such as the "interactional model" of Endler and Magnusson (1976), and the "socio-ecological development model" by Bronfenbrenner (1979), who explained that there are levels or "systems" in the environment which have continuing impacts on an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). These are just two examples and there many more which are beyond the scope of the present article.

The research initiatives at the BSRI have been motivated by the goal to understand any human behavior through multi-disciplinary approaches of disciplines such as psychology, education, sociology and others. Furthermore as explained by Suvannathat (1983), the behavioral science research can be identified from two main dimensions: 1) the study investigates human behaviors, and 2) a scientific methodology is implemented to investigate these human behaviors. Highlighting the significance of a behavioral science approach, Chuawanlee (1994), explained that a behavioral science perspective helps to understand human problems as it realizes that the behavior of an individual is influenced by many agents (family, community and society), and also since these agents are organized in several ways that might make it difficult to comprehend with only one approach.

The current article aims to share further how and why the BS knowledge and research is being applied in the context of managing the project for coaching and mentoring in the Thai educational reform process.

The Educational Reform Process

Education is the key to success and most nations across the world have educational reforms in process to support the development goals. Hallinger and Bryant (2013), highlight that much of the world and Thailand along with other South Asian countries has been undergoing education reform to support the goals of the globalized world. Rotherham and Willingham (2009) assert that most educational reforms are gearing up to develop the 21st Century Skills in the students and have many challenges.

The term **21st century skills** refers to "a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed - by educators, school reformers, college professors, employers, and

others - to be critically important to success in today's world, particularly in collegiate programs and contemporary careers and workplaces" (Hidden Curriculum, 2014).

Education is the prerequisite to build the human resources for any nation and educational reforms provide the strategic road map to guide this journey. We go on to understand the context of these reforms in Thailand.

The Thai context of Educational Reform

Thailand has undertaken the process of restructuring education since 1999 when the first national policy was formally launched as the National Education Act (1999) (as noted in Education system Thailand, 2011). The first decade of Thai educational reforms were launched from 1999-2009 and currently Thailand is in the 2nd decade of the Educational Reform (2009-2018).

Hallinger, Chantarapanya, Sriboonma and Kantamara (2000) noted that as compared to the neighboring countries, Thailand was slow to launch the reform process. But there have been continuous efforts and systemic reviews of the educational system to evaluate the achievement levels of the results sought through the reform process. Now, Thailand is in its second decade of educational reform process, which is supported by UNESCO, Bangkok (2011). The new phase of educational reform aims for the ultimate goal to develop 21st century skills in the learners so as to enable them to flourish in the today's world. However, the educational reform process faces many challenges. Kantamara, Hallinger and Jatiket (2006) have noted that though the reforms initiated by Thailand match those of the western nations, yet the biggest challenges have been in their implementation.

To meet up to these challenges the Ministry of Education and other educational bodies in Thailand continuously work to assess and review the reform process. As a part of their efforts the Ministry of Education, Thailand launched the "Education Reform and Coaching Lab" (Public Relations Department, Thailand, 2015) for the educational institutes in various Thai provinces. The Behavioral Science Research Institute (BSRI) was awarded a sub-project a part of the above and is currently implementing this as a "**Coaching and Mentoring project**" at the BSRI.

Consequently, this article moves on to deliberate the significance of coaching and mentoring in the educational reform process.

The Significance of Coaching and Mentoring in Education

The meaning and the role of Coaching and Mentoring (C&M) are explained in the context of educational reforms.

Coaching and Mentoring

Coaching and Mentoring (C&M) are both the new age methods to empower and support the development of people, as they both seek to help people to meet their desired goals of achievement by finding out their own "best ways" for growth. According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2015) "Coaching and mentoring are development techniques based on the use of one-to-one discussions to enhance an individual's skills, knowledge or work performance."

To understand the concepts, we take a look at the definitions of each C and M separately. Defined by the International Coaching Federation: "*Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential which is particularly important in today's uncertain and complex environment.*" Differentiated from coaching, Shea and Gianotti (2009) define mentoring as "*a developmental caring, sharing, and enabling relationship in which two people collaborate by investing their time to enhance growth, knowledge, and skills*".

As both definitions point out, C&M are both focused on enabling growth and development through relationships, between "coach and coachee" or "mentor and mentee". Though they may sound to be the same, and indeed may use similar skill sets, yet there are many differences in the way a coaching relationship is practiced from what is a mentoring relationship.

C&M and the Educational Reform

Researchers note that C&M are an important aspect of an educational reform process as it helps to build up the educational communities (Lofthouse, Leat, & Towler, 2010). C&M have proved successful in the educational reform process in various countries such as - in the context of UK (Hargreaves, 2008), in USA (Joyce & Showers, 2002), in Australia (Ehrich, 2013), and in New Zealand (Timperley, 2009).

As noted by UNESCO (2011), “one of the ways to achieve the reform goal is through teachers, by strengthening their ability to incorporate pedagogical approaches that promote desirable qualities in students”. These pedagogical and structural changes could be based on learner-centered teaching methods and Project-Based Learning (PBL), creative problems solving and so on. To help teachers and educational leaders move forward on a sustained path of the reform process, both C&M provide the necessary support for the individuals and communities. With this, the article moves on to the C&M project that is undertaken by the community at BSRI.

Behavioral Science and the C&M project for Educational Reform

The academic faculty and student researchers at the Behavioral Science Research Institute (BSRI) are currently involved in a project for building Coaching and Mentoring (C&M) expertise among the educational professionals and teachers of Thailand. This C&M project at the BSRI is a part of the 2nd phase of Thailand’s educational reform process, launched by the Ministry of Education’s larger project termed as the “Education Reform and Coaching Lab” (Public Relations Department, Thailand, 2015).

The C&M project at BSRI aims to support the reform process in the educational system in Thailand by developing an appreciation of the knowledge and skills of C&M among the educational administrators in various provinces, principals and heads of educational institutes, and educators/teachers across the various provinces of Thailand. This top down approach aims to create awareness among the participants about coaching and mentoring, and develop their ability to apply C&M skills to enable long lasting impacts that support the goals of Thailand’s educational reforms. UNESCO (2011) had noted that there exist gaps between the government’s reform efforts and the teachers’ practice in the real educational scenario in Thailand.

There are several reasons to support the case of BSRI as one of the project awardees. The main rationale lies in that behavioral science can lead the way to bringing about the change and contributing to the reform, since-

1. BS integrates knowledge from various disciplines and in this case the disciplines of psychology, education, management and social psychology.
2. BS allows for a holistic look at the real problem through multi-perspectives – in this case the national policies, the educational administrators, the school head and the educators themselves.
3. The project leader and team participants are all well versed with BS knowledge, its research and also how to apply research findings.
4. BS allows for a systematic application of knowledge – in developing the process of training of C&M.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A review of the research of C&M shows that if implemented carefully both have been effective in supporting the educational reforms in the western world. In Thailand there is a need to focus on sustaining the change among teachers towards developing the students with the “21st century skills”. Research evidence supports that C&M of the educators and educational leaders, have the impact to bring about this change in the way they teach.

Some aspects of caution must be raised as the BSRI implements the project. Hallinger and Bryant (2013) have synthesized findings from “15 years of educational reform in Thailand” and they “observe that dissatisfaction with progress in education reform is not unique to Thailand”. So the expectations from the C&M project must be reviewed carefully with in-depth analyses of the

achievements of the project and also of the overall success of the Thailand educational reforms. Furthermore as explained by Kantamara, Hallinger and Jatiket (2006), Thailand's previous educational reforms such as the student-centered learning approach, necessitate the amalgamation of the curriculum with the involvement of the local community. For the success of a strategy such as that related to educational reform the information from "outside" must be linked to the "local wisdom" (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013).

To conclude this article, the researcher, who is a part of the C&M project team at BSRI, would like to share an interesting and valuable insight by Knight (2009) - "Theory is the gravity that holds together any systematic approach, including Instructional Coaching". The current C&M project at BSRI is geared to apply the knowledge accumulated through decades of research from the behavioral sciences perspectives, and seeks to achieve the national goals in education with a focus on each individual involved in the process. The quality of learners can be enhanced only when careful attention is paid to the teacher's teaching styles and the educational structures. The significance of both coaching and mentoring lie in that they support the process of change and development in each individual teacher and the educational leader who play an important part in the educational reform.

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