

The Chevron Enjoy Science Newsletter

www.enjoy-science.org

enjoyscience@kenan-asia.org



Chevron Enjoy Science Propels Professional Learning Communities to Continually Develop Thai Teachers

Achieving sustainable education development requires outstanding teachers who possess the ability to create engaging classrooms that bring learning to life for students. When students are actively involved in the learning process, they are able to absorb and internalize knowledge and then apply it in real situations. Given the significant impact of teachers on student growth and achievement, the Chevron Enjoy Science Project has made continuous capacity building of teachers and school leaders one of its core missions.

The methodology for developing an infrastructure for teacher growth begins with identifying effective, experienced teachers and training them to become mentors and trainers for their peers. With support from mentors and trainers, the project delivers its Professional Development model that combines high-impact capacity building workshops for teachers and schools leaders with continuous mentorship support to ensure that teachers can take the inquiry-based pedagogies from the workshops and apply them in the classroom. To buttress the model, the project is now creating Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that bring teachers and educators from schools together to exchange innovative ideas, share experience and knowledge, and inspire one another to provide the best education possible to

their students.

PLCs originated in the United States as a means to support collaboration in multiple sectors, including education. Today, due in large part to the efforts of Chevron Enjoy Science, PLCs are playing an important role in the development of teachers throughout Thailand. The approach is proving effective in spurring knowledge sharing among teachers across schools and stimulating more robust assessments to identify what works in the classroom. PLCs emphasize the importance of teamwork among teachers and embedding evidenced-based practices in the classroom with a focus on improving student outcomes. Ultimately, students are the ones reaping the benefits from this undertaking.

In Thailand, the Teacher Professional Development Institute (TPDI), under the Ministry of Education, has been promoting and supporting the implementation of the PLC approach among teachers. To incentivize teachers to join PLCs, TPDI links PLC participation with career opportunities. A teacher who has participated in at least 50 hours and has continually attended PLC trainings for five or more consecutive years is able to submit his or her work results to the Ministry of Education to open up opportunities to move up the teaching ladder.

Dr. Kessara Amornvuthivorn, Kenan Institute Asia's senior manager for education and leader of the Chevron Enjoy Science STEM component, spoke about the project's work to support PLCs in Thailand:

"The Chevron Enjoy Science Project supports the policy of the Ministry of Education by applying TPDI's guidelines to professional learning community creation. Through the creation of some 60 professional learning communities that reach over 500 schools nationwide, the project has arranged trainings for teachers to receive knowledge about leading effective PLCs. An important method used by the project is the Open Classroom approach that gives teachers the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues to develop ideas to improve student learning. The teachers jointly establish targets for improving lessons and visit each other's classes to observe and provide feedback on how students learn in each class. The observations are then used to revise the lessons and improve the teachers' delivery of the lesson.

"Through the creation of PLCs, we have helped teachers understand that PLCs are important and represent another tactic that can help them reduce frequently-found problems in the classroom. The teachers also realize that PLCs enhance their own teaching skills."

Ms. Kanphitcha Chuchaona, the head of the science department at Bang Krathum Phitthayakhom School in Phisanulok shared the positive results she gained from participating in a PLC supported by Chevron Enjoy Science:

"Previously, I was not able to think of many new activities to use in teaching my students. After participating in the PLC training and exchanging teaching methods and discussing problems that frequently occurred in class with the teachers from other schools, I gained new ideas about creating activities for the students.

Using the PLC approach not only helps teachers resolve common problems they face, it also helps mend the problem of the structure of Thailand's education system.

First, PLCs shift the system to a more decentralized approach because PLCs allow teachers to discuss topics that are most relevant to them and take action based on these discussions. It is a new way of empowering teachers, one that holds them more accountable for student outcomes and creates opportunities for them to make a difference.

But they do not have to do it alone. A second benefit of PLCs is that they reinforce concepts of teamwork, collaboration, and shared responsibility. Teachers work in groups to address common problems they face in schools and come up with shared solutions which they can implement and monitor to determine if they work or need further adjustment. Teachers develop PLCs that build their expertise just as many other professional groups, such as medical doctors and engineers, do.

Third, this new initiative can help address the problems that small schools in Thailand face. There are more than 15,000 small schools in which some teachers are not sufficiently strong in both content and pedagogical knowledge. Through the PLC approach, more advanced and experienced teachers from different schools in the same area can visit their colleagues at other schools and provide professional support to improve the quality of instruction in their classrooms.

Last, PLCs emphasize improving the learning of students. The process of upgrading teachers' credentials often has focused on teachers' training experiences or on the submission of written papers which are disconnected from improving student outcomes. But this new approach requires teachers to prioritize the learning process and outcomes of students and provides evidence of their professional progress by documenting changes in student outcomes.

Committed to continuously improving his skills in order to fulfill his responsibilities as a teacher, it is little surprise that Mr. Sathit jumped at the opportunity to join the Chevron Enjoy Science's new Professional Learning Community (PLC) initiative. After participating in a recent PLC workshop, he reflected on his experience from the training:

"Although I have been continually participating in the project's training and am one of the project's mentors, I still face problems in the classroom. One issue that I especially wanted a solution to address how my science students struggle to summarize the findings from their experiments in class."

At the PLC training, Mr. Sathit opened up his classroom and invited mentors and specialists from the project to observe his class and his teaching methods, so that he could receive feedback about how to help his students better understand lessons and then articulate their findings in their reports.

"A classroom observation under the PLC approach involves a clear assignment of responsibilities. There will be a teacher, a note taker, observers, and specialists, each of whom performs different tasks. The notes are filled onto a form so that once the class observation is finished, the results are presented to the teacher through a knowledge exchange method. This method focuses on improving lesson planning to achieve greater results with students."

In conclusion, he said that the PLC process can be successful "if the teacher is open to criticism about his or her teaching practices and respects transparent feedback. Constructive feedback brings about impactful results and helps teachers resolve various issues through the suggestions of colleagues and specialists. Of course, the issues might not be solved instantaneously because it takes time to adapt one's lesson planning and delivery; however, this period is required so the teacher and the students can develop an appropriate understanding of the new lessons."

To date, 2,760 teachers from 569 schools nationwide have participated in the project's PLC trainings. This year, the Chevron Enjoy Science Project will support 1,200 teachers through PLC training in order to develop the capacity of education personnel and reinforce the importance of knowledge exchange within the Thai education sector.

Beneficiary Updates



Mr. Sathit Wannaphop, a science teacher from Takuapa Senanukun School in Phang-nga, is among the Chevron Enjoy Science Project's most passionate mentors and dedicated participants. He is steadfast in his belief that it is a teacher's responsibility not only to teach the content set out in the curriculum, but also to spark curiosity and instill 21st century skills in students.

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- www.enjoy-science.org
- enjoyscience@kenan-asia.org
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