

New Publication Co-Authored by USU Professor Explores Lifelong Learning in Thailand

07/16/2026



Deborah Fields with co-author Paulo Blikstein and supporting author Nalin Tutiya-phuengprasert following a day of data collection in Thailand.

For three decades, an educational movement in Thailand has reimagined how people learn, empowering them to solve local problems and improve their quality of life.

Their successes are the focus of *The Society That Learns*, a new book published by MIT Press and co-authored by Deborah Fields, research professor in the Department of Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at Utah State.

“Every time I talk with Debbie about this research, she shares stories of learning. Stories that connect people with each other, with Thai culture and communities, and stories that connect to Papert’s reshaping of learning theory into constructionism,” said Andy Walker, former department head of ITLS. “I’m excited to see these stories in a much longer book format.”

The lifelong learning movement in Thailand was inspired by the constructionism philosophy developed by MIT professor Seymour Papert in the 1980s. Constructionism prioritizes learning by making. It is the belief that people learn best when they create tangible things they can share that then help them build new ideas and understanding.

Drawing on Papert’s teachings, in 1996, a group of MIT alumni from Thailand began searching for new ways to address the challenges facing their country. They applied constructionism to their communities, schools and workplaces, recognizing that they would need to adapt Papert’s philosophy to the context of Thailand. Thirty years later, the efforts of the Thai Constructionist community — through the Suksapattana Foundation — have led to learning initiatives that are now among the longest-running community development projects in the world.

When discussing the release of the new book, Fields explained that the Thai people have kept the entire effort about one concept: learning.

“This book is about learning,” she said. “It tells the stories of how all the transformations came to be. The Thai people have learned about agriculture, finances, social organization, entrepreneurship, mathematics, science, computation, business administration — and most importantly, about learning itself and what they are capable of as learners.”

The book combines 25 years of history through research that includes personal stories about the ways learning has transformed Thailand. The stories detail how a village restored its water supply through collective inquiry, how a farmer solved agricultural challenges through experimentation, and how a factory technician improved productivity by problem-solving.

“Because the project was not about implementing ready-made models but about learning itself, the people developed creative ways to work through these challenges and learned in the process,” Fields said. “They became intentional learners.”

Fields co-authored *The Society That Learns* with Paulo Blikstein, associate professor at Teachers College, Columbia University’s graduate school of education. Blikstein is an internationally recognized scholar in the learning sciences, educational innovation and constructionist education. Fields’ complementary contributions to the project draw on her interest in community-based learning, mentorship and holistic approaches to education. Her research explores how learning communities can support personal growth and participation in society.

In addition to documenting Thailand’s constructionist movement in *The Society That Learns*, the authors provide a vision for how other societies can cultivate lifelong learning and community growth.

The Society That Learns can be purchased at [MIT Press](#).
All proceeds from the book will support the ongoing
educational initiatives of the Suksapattana Foundation for
the communities of Thailand.