



## Contributions to Kindergarten Education by Khunying Benja Sangmali: A Legendary Expert in Early Childhood Education from Suan Dusit University

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### Abstract

This article presents a biography of Khunying Benja Sangmali, a legendary expert in Thai kindergarten education; her important concepts regarding kindergarten management; and her valuable methods of instructing kindergarten trainee teachers in the past. Khunying Benja strongly believed in the theory that a trainee kindergarten teacher should have all of the following: knowledge of early childhood education, morals, ethics, and a good personality. Based upon her belief in the student-centered concept, kindergarten teacher trainees are able to learn well through practicums in real situations. Her concepts resulted in the establishment of the 2017 Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (five-year program) at Suan Dusit University. Khunying Benja Sangmali also modernized many early-childhood education concepts, enhanced the identity of Suan Dusit University, and improved foreign language proficiency and technological skills for retrieving information. Her valuable concepts have enabled students following the curriculum of early childhood education to become 21<sup>st</sup> century learners.

### Introduction

The 2017 Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (five-year program) at Suan Dusit University was developed from the reformed 2011 Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (five-year program). In the development of the current curriculum, several theories and concepts were applied, such as the work-based learning concept and the integration of technology learning. In addition, other important management basics included in the current curriculum are the management concepts of Khunying Benja Sangmali, who was an important legendary expert in Thai kindergarten education in the past. These are

modern concepts that could be appropriately integrated with the management concepts in the current curriculum. Moreover, this curriculum was improved in accordance with The 12<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021) and Thailand 4.0, under the scope of the Thailand Qualifications Framework for professional teachers. It focuses on the following main points: personality traits, languages, and using technology for learning. These are specific characteristics of Suan Dusit University's culture which emphasize students' knowledge in activities they have done, and also tie those activities in class to real practice in early childhood schools. La-Orutis Demonstration School and other network schools are places of training which prepare

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those who will be professional early childhood teachers in the future.

### **A legendary expert in Thai kindergarten education**

Khunying Benja Sangmali is praised as one of the legendary experts in Thai kindergarten education by those in the early childhood education field. She laid the foundations for Thai kindergarten education and also constructed valuable kindergarten education methods. The 2002 honorary graduate booklet of Suan Dusit Rajabhat University was published on the occasion that Khunying Benja Sangmali was royally bestowed with an honorary doctorate degree in early childhood education. In one part of the booklet, it is mentioned that after Khunying Benja Sangmali graduated MathayomSuksa 8 (Higher Secondary level) with an English major and a French minor, she applied to Khemasiri Memorial School and worked there for one year. Later, she passed the elementary teacher test and applied to be a government officer in the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Eventually, she was put in a position as a teacher at Suksanari School. In the meantime, she continued studying while working on her secondary school level. When the Ministry of Religious Affairs announced the selection of teachers to study kindergarten teaching in Japan, Khunying Benja Sangmali was one of the scholars selected for this project. During this study, she faced difficulties and illness due to World War II.

Upon completion of this study, she returned to Thailand. Her original affiliation intended to send her to serve as a kindergarten teacher in Phitsanulok. However, one of her concepts was as follows: "If you are a kindergarten teacher, you will be able to teach only 30 kids. If you are a trainer to the other kindergarten teachers-to-be, you will be able to develop a lot of children." Thus, she asked to be the first kindergarten teacher trainer. She first taught in Phra Nakhon School of Culinary Arts. At the same time, she was the principal of La-Orutis Kindergarten School. Soon after, she went to study in the United States. She intended to use her knowledge and develop early childhood teaching in real situations. She not only served the Ministry of Education in the early childhood field, but she dedicated herself to other institutes which were responsible for early childhood learning.

Khunying Benja Sangmali served the government as a special director at La-Orutis Demonstration School, Suan Dusit Teachers College, until she retired in 1975.

The duration of her service at Suan Dusit Teachers College was 32 years. During this time, she was committed to developing early childhood education and training kindergarten teachers until they became as well known as they are at present. As a result of her commitment and sacrifice in this work, she received many honors, the highest of which was the Knight Grand Cross (First Class) of the Most Noble Order of the Crown of Thailand, on December 5, 1986. Due to Khunying Benja Sangmali's work in education and honors received, Rajabhat Suan Dusit Institutional Council awarded her with an honorary doctorate degree in early childhood education as a mark of her prestige.

### **Contributions to kindergarten education made by Khunying Benja Sangmali**

The 2002 honorary graduate booklet of Suan Dusit Rajabhat Institute presented the many contributions to kindergarten education made by Khunying Benja Sangmali, such as the improvement of kindergarten instructional curriculum; the arrangement of training for agencies involved with children, both inside the country and overseas; the development of special educational needs; and supporting educational projects, as follows:

1. She developed a curriculum for kindergarten education in accordance with the nature of children's development. It is said that the curriculum of La-Orutis Kindergarten School is an example of a children's development curriculum.
2. She developed a kindergarten teacher-training curriculum for the Department of Teacher Training. It focuses on both theories and practice in order to produce high quality graduates who are able to put those theories into practice in real situations.
3. She developed a curriculum for training child caregivers-for the Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior-in order to train child caregivers in child development centers all over the country.
4. She developed a curriculum and projects in teacher training, in teacher colleges all over the country under the Head Start project, Department of Teacher Training.
5. She trained nursery and pre-elementary teachers at the Department of General Education.
6. She conducted training of nursery teachers in the Rural Teacher Training Program
7. She conducted training of the Head of the Nutrition Center, Ministry of Public Health

8. She conducted international teacher training under the Thailand-Israel Cooperation Program.

9. She developed special education teachers as part of a special education project at the Department of Teacher Training. As a consequence, La-Orutis Demonstration School began to offer classes to special needs children and it has continued to widen the scope of special education until the present day.

10. She was a radio director of the Ministry of Education, which distributes kindergarten activities to teachers nationwide.

Khunying Benja Sangmali was also a president, a director and an expert lecturer of children's organizations, consistently providing a creative vision or creating value-added kindergarten methods. Khunying Benja Sangmali is regarded as a role model for students of Thai early childhood education. She started by supporting child development and establishing kindergarten teacher training in Thailand. As a result, early childhood education has become a widespread concern; its widespread concepts of educational management in early childhood education have been broadcasted and it has been the subject of doctoral degrees.

### **Educational Administration for Khunying Benja Sangmali's Kindergarten Teachers in the past**

Educational management to deepen a student's understanding of a field requires a good curriculum and quality teaching methods, combined with many other components. In the early childhood education field especially, Khunying Benja Sangmali felt that teachers should be able to put their knowledge into practice and focus on "real practice" together, both from learning and coaching. Practice is an opportunity for the trainees to experience and learn children's habits, which in turn, is an important aspect of being a good kindergarten teacher in the future (Sangmali, 2007). The study and analysis of educational management offered to the past trainees of Khunying Benja Sangmali are as follows.

1. Instruct them to have kindergarten teacher spirituality

Creating good teachers requires building teacher spirituality. Teachers must be like parents. They have to treat children softly and sweetly; and keep them warm. Also, they need to play with children as friends, make them cheerful, and love them all equally. The instructors have to act as role models because constructing kindergarten teacher spirituality takes some

time. Kindergarten teachers are more likely to create a love for children over time, not in a couple years; children maybe rely more on a good role model than in-class teaching.

### **2. Instruct them to understand the principles of kindergarten seriously and deeply**

When teaching children at kindergarten level, teachers have to make them happy by letting them learn from "playing" more than writing or reading, because it conforms to the nature of children at this age. Teaching should focus on activities both inside and outside the classroom, which will help them get integrated learning from their joyful playing. It also encourages children to be creators, diligent, hardworking, mobile, active, supportive, patient, and independent or able to do anything by themselves.

### **3. Instruct them to understand child psychology**

At kindergarten level, teachers need to know the children and get ready to take care of them both physically and mentally with love. To give children warmth, teachers have to be good role models. Teachers should pay attention to their speech by speaking politely, neatly, clearly and rhythmically. Teachers must be careful with their manners because children at this age like to imitate everything. In addition, teachers need to be calm and patient.

### **4. Instruct them to have a kindergarten teacher's personality traits**

At kindergarten level, a teacher has to play all nine of the characters which make up a kindergarten teacher's personality: the lover, player, singer, dancer, narrator, composer, thinker, and performer. In addition, a kindergarten teacher has to be smiling, compassionate, and joyful. It is a sacred spell that has a good effect on kindergarten children's learning. Kindergarten teachers have to treat children with these concepts in mind by constantly evaluating their performances. Moreover, they can always adapt these concepts to match the children's interests.

### **5. Teach kids by using stories and music for children**

Teachers can teach children by using stories and music for children which Khunying Benja Sangmali composed. Each song is cute and easy to understand. Songs such as the Little Bird Song, Goldfish song, Duck song, Kite song, etc. are short and easy to sing, which suits children. These constructs would be good examples for students experimenting in the composition of stories and music for children in the future.

In addition, Khunying Benja Sangmali taught students by using modern teaching methods. This allowed students to be brave and think creatively. The atmosphere in class was fun, not stressful, in order to give confidence to the students and allow them to create various activities for kindergarten children. Moreover, she transferred her kindergarten education knowledge through her writing: kindergarten education books, stories, and music for kindergarten children. It is analyzed as follows (Sangmali, 2007).

### **1. Teaching by giving examples from organized activities**

Teaching by providing examples from organized activities which allow students to understand more clearly, for example, the National Park Study from musical theater acting. It has a natural scene with the sun, big trees, small trees, rain clouds, flowers (roses, jasmines, zinnias), and songs as a background to the acting. It is fun and allows students to acquire knowledge from a natural form of teaching. Learners can remember it and organize this kind of activity with their children. They can acquire knowledge from a real performance. When they are kindergarten teachers, they will do their jobs with trust and confidence, as well as create other activities. They could regularly organize unusual activities which allow kids to experiment.

### **2. Teaching by using simple words and making them concrete**

Sangmali suggested teaching using simple words and letting students perform with them to make them concrete. For example, in a math class, we can use the example of a trading market, which should have a trader and a buyer. Teachers should use real-life situations related to maths, geography, and history in their teaching. They should try to make it fun. They could use the same situations in many subjects. Kids would not be under stress and learn without distraction.

### **3. Teaching by letting them debate rather than memorize content**

Khunying Benja Sangmali's teaching style emphasizes practice and letting students debate to express their opinions in order to obtain more understanding than with memorization. Therefore, the examination to evaluate what the students have learned focuses more on the explanation than on memorization, such as drawing the lyrics of the Duck Song. Another example is one which requires students to explain how to teach in steps from 1-10. They have to explain exactly how they teach in orderly steps.

### **4. Teach them by letting them think, do things, and solve problems by themselves**

This involves making them think, do things, and solve problems by themselves, by giving them only a title without any instructions. This assignment allows them think, do things, and solve problems themselves. Also, they exchange their opinions and comments with each other.

### **5. Teaching through her writing, textbooks, stories, and music for children**

Teaching through her writing, textbooks, stories, and music for children is another way to teach how to disseminate knowledge. Learners and those who are interested in kindergarten education gain knowledge and understanding of the content with regard to both theory and practice. Also, it enables them to practice in real-life situations.

### **The educational management of Khunying Benja Sangmali as it is presently applied to the Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood education, Suan Dusit University.**

In over 80 years of history, Khunying Benja Sangmali was the first head of a kindergarten teacher training department and she played an important role in laying the foundations regarding the training of Thai kindergarten teachers. It started with the success of La-Orutis Kindergarten School, which was founded as a Montessori school in 1939. The Department of Teacher Training, led by ML Manich Chumsai, Head of Department of Teacher Training, accepted trainees who had completed the certificate of the elementary school teacher, who then attended a one-year course to train as kindergarten teachers. The Kindergarten Teacher Training Department was established in the 1941 academic year. The kindergarten teacher training was expanded by Ms.Benja Tungkasiri (Khunying Benja Sangmali). She proposed curriculum reforms regarding the training of kindergarten teachers (1941-1942), in the form of a kindergarten education curriculum. It is considered to be the first kind of educational management for kindergarten teacher training. Next, the curriculum was developed sequentially until it became what is now the Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education, at Suan Dusit University. It could be said that the work of Khunying Benja Sangmali was essential in the establishment of the Thai early childhood education program at Suan Dusit University.

The Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood

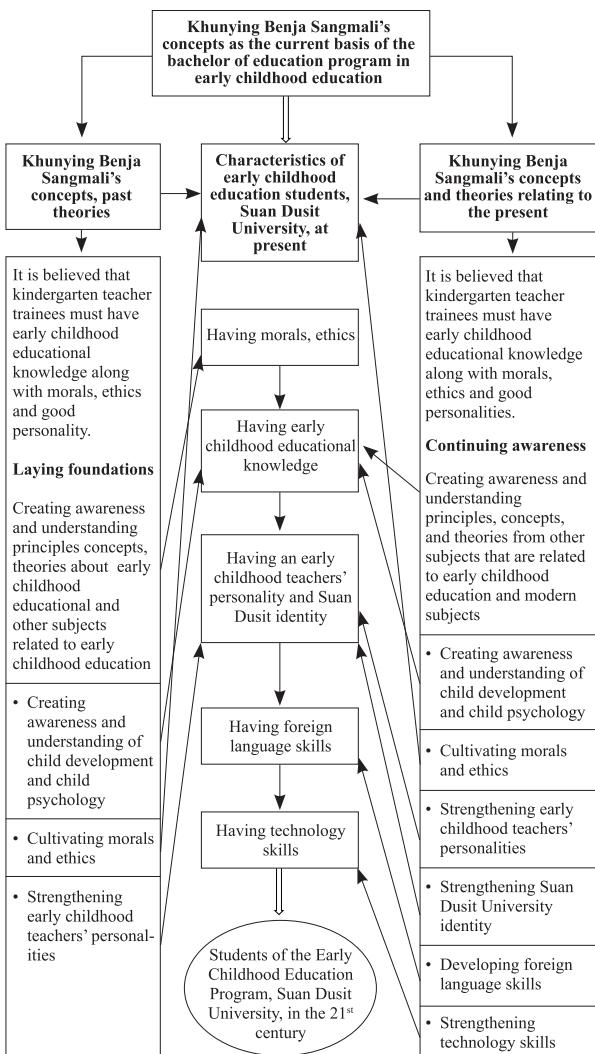
Education at Suan Dusit University exhibits the unique identity of the university, which is based on the fact it was the first kindergarten teacher training school of Thailand. It has improved on its former curriculum and has offered the Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education (five-year program) since 2011. The teaching methods of Khunying Benja Sangmali, who is a legendary expert in Thai kindergarten, have been brought into the curriculum. They are used to guide students in the important ways they can improve and develop in order to make progress and integrate education into the 21st century world effectively. It focuses on developing early childhood education graduates with morals, ethics, and ability to follow the Code of Ethics of the Teaching Profession. It allows students to understand the development of early childhood skills in the 21st century and enables them to follow development in other fields. Also, the curriculum ensures that an early childhood teacher has the appropriate personality and is able to develop in their regular job by carrying out research. Moreover, it enables teachers to be academic leaders. The curriculum of the Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education (five-year program), at Suan Dusit University (2017), includes the following teaching principles.

### **1. Teaching based on the principles of early childhood education**

The developed 2017 Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education (five-year program), at Suan Dusit University, is based on the principles of early childhood education according to Khunying Benja Sangmali. It emphasizes laying the important foundations for freshmen to understand the principles, concepts, and theories of early childhood education. Also, students have to understand the development of early childhood in each age range. Moreover, the study of morals, ethics, the Code of Ethics of the Teaching Profession, and having an appropriate personality for an early childhood teacher is integrated into the program. Students begin to cultivate the

spirit of being a kindergarten teacher by observing kindergarten teachers' habits at La-Orutis Demonstration School (formerly La-Ourtis Kindergarten, Suan Dusit University) and other network schools. Learners can truly understand what they have been learning, and see close contact with love, affection, and the spirit of being a kindergarten teacher from their first year of higher education. It can also lead to a teacher becoming an early childhood leader in the future, according to Bhulpat (2015), who states that being an early childhood leader is dependent on a number of elements. Those elements include teaching and learning knowledge, good human relations, appropriate personality traits, ability to meet with anyone and understand the needs of others, etc.

In the following year, students learn more deeply about the theory of early childhood education, such as in the following subjects: the child's brain and learning, creative arts for early childhood teachers, literature for early childhood children, and music and dance for early childhood teachers. A number of interesting subjects that identify Suan Dusit University were added to the 2017 Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education at Suan Dusit University (five-year program). For example, 'modern housekeeping' was one added subject that is in keeping with the 21st century world for early childhood teachers. Also, there are math and technology subjects for early childhood children, science and technology subject for children, etc. Moreover, there are some subjects that add value to their work and continuing education, such as English communication for early childhood teachers, English reading in early childhood education, English writing in early childhood education, etc. These subjects strengthen students with regard to morals, ethics, early childhood educational learning, early childhood teacher's personality, Suan Dusit University identity, foreign language skills, and technology skills, as shown in the figure below. It shows Khunying Benja Sangmali's concepts as the current basis of the Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education, at Suan Dusit University.



**Figure 1** Khunying Benja Sangmali's concepts as the current basis of the bachelor of education program in early childhood education at Suan Dusit University

## 2. Teaching with emphasis on practice combined with early childhood education theory

The revised curriculum of the 2017 Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education (five-year program), at Suan Dusit University, adhered to the principles of teaching based on the practice of Khunying Benja Sangmali. It assigns students to practice at La-Orutis Demonstration School and other network schools. Thus, students from freshmen to seniors are able to gain professional experience. Moreover, teacher training for super seniors (5<sup>th</sup> year students) involves teaching in a school for one year. First year students, or

freshmen, have to learn about early childhood teacher's tasks, and get to know about children, teachers, and schools for early childhood children. Also, they have to observe surroundings inside classrooms, outside classrooms and in school areas. Second year students, or sophomores, have to learn specific skills which promote early childhood instructors. In addition, they have to observe teachers' tasks, classroom strategies, media use, evaluation, and children's behaviors. Third year students, or juniors, need to participate in teacher training, help others as assistants, or work as educational staff. Also, they need to take care of classroom management, setting up classrooms, arranging displays, classroom administration, development of disciplinary procedures, and creating relationships between schools and society. Fourth year students, or seniors, have to prepare for teaching practice in schools, join teachers' activities, and provide study plans or plans for teaching practice. Also, they have to develop instructional media on a case-by-case basis in order to solve problems for each set of students. Moreover, they have to practice in real early-childhood schools. Finally, fifth year students, or super seniors, have to practice teaching in early childhood schools on a full-time basis.

### 3. Teaching using active learning

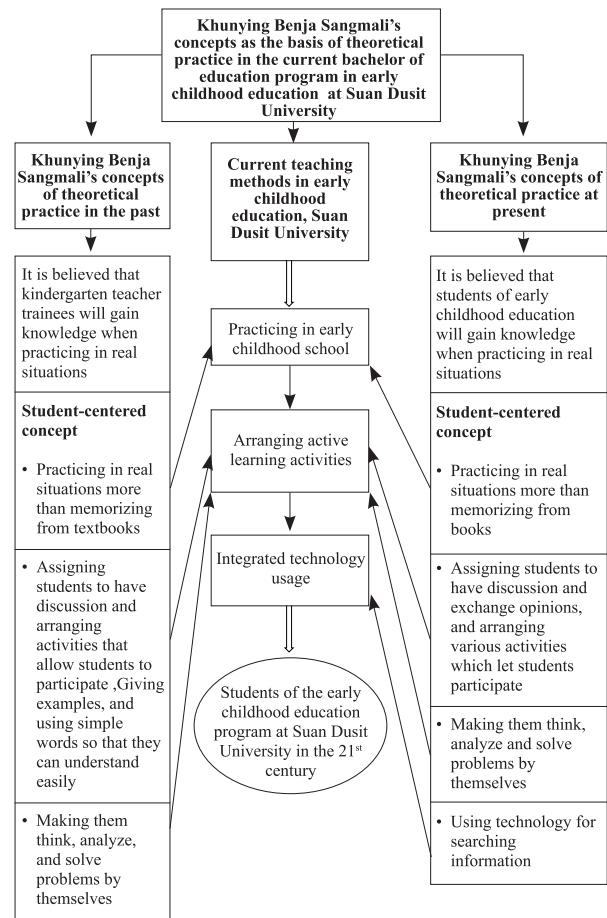
The updated curriculum of the 2017 Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education (five-year program), at Suan Dusit University, emphasizes the teaching methods of Khunying Benja Sangmali. They were brought in to guide students and adapted for present-day use. There are many concepts. Instructors teach by giving examples, or by using simple words for easy understanding. Also, the curriculum makes students participate in debates rather than just listening. It focuses on creating understanding through real performance. These teaching methods from the 2017 curriculum combine nicely with the teaching of active learning. Both of them are linked, so students are able to develop higher order thinking skills effectively. They help students to analyze and evaluate data well in new situations. In addition, students are motivated to study. It is a kind of learning that tries to reduce knowledge transfer from instructors to students and enhance the skills of students. Moreover, it helps students to participate in class by assigning them to do more than only sitting and listening. Learners should participate in activities such as reading, debating, and writing. It focuses on exploring the attitudes and values of students. Also, learners are able to develop higher-order thinking

in their analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Students and instructors receive feedback from reflection quickly (Phakdeewichit, 2013).

However, all of this corresponds with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, which is based around practicing in a team with friends. It emphasizes developing skills in learning and searching for information more than knowledge itself. Teachers and students have changed the ways in which they work, from solitary working to working and learning in the roles of teachers in a team. It focuses on work-based learning, project-based learning, activity-based learning, problem-based learning, and science- and research-based learning. There is also creative communication-based learning through practicing listening skills, exchanging knowledge skills, teamwork skills, and skills in using communication technology. Moreover, there are independent study (IS) by hypothesis formulation, researching knowledge from learning sources and information sources, conclusion of a body of knowledge, effective communication and proficient presentation, community service, and the public mind (Panich, 2011), as shown in the figure below. It shows Khunying Benja Sangmali's concepts as the basis of theoretical practice in the current Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education, at Suan Dusit University. This program leads the way in teaching and mastering active learning.

#### 4. Teaching using technology to drive instruction

Suan Dusit University has brought the guidelines of its 2017 Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education (five-year program) up to date in order to develop "professional early childhood teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> century". The new generation of kindergarten teachers needs to learn continuously as The Teachers' Council of Thailand continues to set important standards for teaching professionals. The use of information technology and communication is seen as an important tool in driving instruction, and corresponds to Niamsorn (2015), who says learning methods in this era have changed from the old days. Therefore, early childhood teachers need to change paradigm. In 2007, the Secretariat of The Teachers' Council of Thailand set the traits, or working behaviors, which are desirable qualities in the educational profession. There are 12 standards of professional practice in education which are related with information technology. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate policies to promote and develop learners to have appropriate technology knowledge in accordance with the standards of professional practice



**Figure 2** Khunying Benja Sangmali's concepts as the basis of theoretical practice in the current Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education, at Suan Dusit University, which leads the way in teaching and mastering active learning.

in education.

However, Suan Dusit University conducted research to study the possibility of using technology in teaching and learning. The program started in the year 2012, and has operated since then with full force in the educational personnel development project of the local government, Ministry of the Interior, in association with Suan Dusit Rajabhat University. In the second phase, since 2014, the project has been extended to the educational management of the Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education at Suan Dusit University, with regard to the revised curriculum for 2011 (five-year program), regular program. In 2016, the project continued to be involved with the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education at Suan Dusit University, with regard to the improved 2017 curriculum (five-year

program), which is the current curriculum. The educational management is based on the work-based learning concept and the integration of technology in the context of a new educational format which makes education accessible. Besides that, it involves the development of the change from solely in-class learning to lifelong learning using smart devices. The university applies the iPad as an instrument for learning. Learners bring their own learning devices to learn and access the university's systems, based on the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) concept, which contributes to an educational environment that supports the integration of technology and instruction. It is called the "Digital Ecosystem" (Chompudange & Thongkaew, 2017).

In addition, the university applies I Tune U Courseware management. It is a curriculum management system to gather content, lessons, and activities, so the learners and the instructors are able to access learning resources and exchange knowledge from the curriculum with each other. It allows learning activities, debates, discussion and the exchange of opinions to be set up. Also, jobs in each set of subjects are assigned in this system. In addition, students need to compile their observations from the teaching of La-Orutis Demonstration School, which is a place to study and a role model of early childhood educational management. Learners can expand their worldview in learning, and they are able to research other content from leading universities all over the world. Students can obtain skills in 'learning to learn', which leads to lifelong learning in the future. Moreover, it provides the WBSC database for learners and instructors. It systematically gathers the E-portfolio, portfolio during study, scores, and school records of students. It is also a way to communicate through the network system effectively (Janthorn, 2014).

## Conclusion

Khunying Benja Sangmali, a legendary expert of Thai kindergarten in the past, has created many valuable pieces of work on kindergarten education. She is a role model for the educational management of the current Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education, at Suan Dusit University. Learners take action through practical teaching, which is an opportunity to think, perform, and solve problems by themselves. They are able to exchange opinions rather than just memorize the theoretical content. Also, they learn through arranged activities which can be performed in real situations in

kindergarten classes. Overall, students gain concrete knowledge and understanding, and they could adapt their experiences and use them in real-life situations. All of these policies are the basis of the principles of kindergarten education that are studied in the current 2017 Bachelor of Education Program in Early Childhood Education (five-year program), at Suan Dusit University. They give an important basis of educational management to students who attend the program. Moreover, various important and needed skills are added, such as English skills, technology skills, etc. In particular, students are able to use the integration of technology, which is an important tool in 21st century learning. Learners will become graduates who are full of knowledge in early childhood education, with morals and ethics in the teaching profession, and will be able to use technology effectively in the future.

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