

How to improve buddhist education in asian countries?

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Buddhism has existed for more than 2550 years and spread all over the world. After his enlightenment, the Buddha constantly taught and converted the people to become good Buddhists. His great disciples and Buddhist patriarchs, generation after generation, continue illuminating the Buddha's teachings. Education plays an important role in the propagation of Buddhism, Buddhism is preserved and flourishes over time and space. Through education, the Buddhists understand the Dharma (Buddha's teachings), then practice the Dharma. Education is very essential for the Buddhists to exchanges ideas, inherit the Buddha's treasures, cultivate themselves and ultimately to become saints.

There are two kinds of Buddhist education: formal education in forms of learning and teaching Buddhism in schools, classes, academic degree programs, ... and informal education in forms as preachers give lectures to the public, and teach the people in groups

or as individuals... In many Asian countries where Buddhism is a major religion there are two types of education: secular education and Buddhist education. In Buddhist system of education there are elementary Buddhist schools, secondary Buddhist schools, intermediate Buddhist schools, Buddhist colleges, Buddhist Institutes for preachers, and Buddhist Universities.

Learning and teaching are very important and continuous processes of a person from birth to death. Therefore, investigation and investment on learning and teaching shall produce the best profits in our lives. Especially, a teacher must know how important his career is, and in order to carry out teaching task satisfactorily, he must be trained in pedagogy and understand the nature, aim and methods of education, learning and teaching.

Of all beings, mankind is the most evolved being. Man is primarily distinguishable from the lower animals because of his educability, intelligence; desire to be active, energetic, original, moving ahead. Education is an important factor deciding progress, achievement, success. Through education man acquires necessary knowledge, skills, promotes his intelligence, and ensures his progress.

Education

To carry out the task of education well, first of all, we should know : what is education?

The word education is derived from the Latin word “educare” which means “to bring forth.” It was the Latin author Varro who said. “Educat obstetrix, educat, nutrix, instituit, paedagogus, docet magister” which means, “the mid-wife brings forth, the nurse bring up, the tutor trains, and the master teachers”(Panurge 2007). Accordingly, education doesn’t merely mean the acquisition of knowledge or experience, but “it means the development of habits, attributes and skill which help a man to lead a full and worthwhile life” (Taneja 1974, p. 5). We can also find in Taneja’s (1974) book, a list of definitions of “education” given by famous philosophers and educators:

- Education “develops in the body and in the soul (of the pupil) all the beauty and all the perfection of which he is capable of” - Plato
- Education develops man’s faculty, especially his mind so that he may be able to enjoy the contemplation of supreme truth, goodness and beauty in which perfect happiness essentially consists - Aristotle
- Education is the process of development of innate powers of man - Mahatma Gandhi
- Education is not merely acquiring knowledge, gathering and correlating facts; it is to see the significance of life as a whole” (Krishnamurti 1981, 14)

Education is to draw the best in people and to develop their faculties. It is to foster the highest degree of peoples’ excellence. It aims at all-round development of individuals. Education is a complicated affair, as it is supposed to equip people for life. As Dewey claims, “Education must provide for the development of the individual and for his participation in society” (cited in Archambault 1964, xxi).

Buddhist Education has many great aims: to help people learn about Buddha’s teachings, understand about themselves and the world, perfect themselves, make the best use of life, make themselves the most useful to the society and others, establish good relationship with others, build up an ideal paradise on earth, end all kinds of suffering, guard people living in peace and happiness, realize Buddha’s nature inside themselves, and become Buddhas. Every Buddhist, through many ways, should have good Buddhist education and training to fulfill his religious purposes and make his best living.

Learning

The task of the students is learning. Now, we must explore : what is learning? How to facilitate the learning process?

Learning is the process of acquiring knowledge or skills. Ruggiero (1998, p. 25) states that “we can obtain authentic knowledge in any one of three ways: personal experience, observation, and report from others. The first is the most reliable.” What actually happens within

the learner when he learns? Hilgard and Bower (1975, 13) draw an image illustrating that learning processing as:

Learning is often concerned with the acquisition of knowledge. Let us think for a moment about what that means. Acquisition refers basically to a change in “possession”: at one time, the organism did not “possess” a given bit of knowledge; at later time, it did. What caused that acquisition? At a minimum, something had to happen to the organism to change its state of knowledge. Typically we suppose that the organism had some specific experience which caused or was in some way related to the change in its knowledge state—either the world put some sensory information into it, or it may have tried out some more action and observed the consequences.

Bearing this in mind we can figure out which roles the teachers and learners take in the process to assist learning fruitfully as

- The teacher should design for problems-based learning in the class.
- The curriculum should indicate the expectations and satisfying outcomes of the course.
- The students themselves learn by practice, through trial and error. The teacher should probe and know the expectations and desires of the students. Lessons in the class should be connected in some ways with the student’s life, then he would try to learn and get the experience.
- There are strong relationships among environmental events and behavior. Classroom should be a good controlled setting to produce desired behavior and result.
- Volunteering in participation is important for learning.
- The teacher should prepare and present in the class some problems regarding the issues in such a way that can cause “insight” or “aha” moments in students, then students can understand the deep nature of the issues and all the solutions.
- With knowledge about considering the students’ scheme and structure, the teacher must sketch out an appropriate curriculum that stimulates their students’ logical and conceptual growth,

considering the students' scheme and structure. This emphasizes a learner-centered educational philosophy.

- Planning experiences to create opportunities for assimilation and accommodation.
- **There is a strong link between society and school, social relationships and cognitive developments or functions of cognition.**
- **Thus, all the social contexts of the lecture, all the activity settings, or interactions in classroom have significant impact on learning and development processes of the students.**
- The way to learn or to remember is to grasp the meaning and significance of facts presented.
- - The teacher must create a culture for learning in which students are provided favorable means to construct knowledge themselves as
- "Culture is "the way of life and thought that we construct, negotiate, institutionalize, and finally (after it's all settled) end up calling 'reality' to comfort ourselves." (Bruner 1996, p. 87)
- "Now, school is a culture itself, not just a preparation for it, a warming up." (Bruner 1996, p. 98)
- Constructivist education states that if students were given appropriate instructions to pursue concepts on their own they would gain a better understanding. The teacher would then engage students in active dialogue and guide them when necessary so that students would progressively discuss, work together and build their own knowledge base, rather than be "taught."

The teachers must understand the ways in which the students learn. The teachers must constantly seek the best and most efficient means of teaching. I believe this part should be a useful source for a teacher to refer and draw teaching skills so that he would avoid failing in a haphazard manner and confusing situation.

The students don't sit leisurely and wait for the knowledge to be imparted to them easily, but they must take some active roles in the learning processes. Learning is essentially a processes of knowledge construction in which the learner must play an active role. The teacher must know that and should prepare for the settings and the roles for the students to play. The minds of the teacher and students

should engage and function in harmonious rhythms.

The learning process is not simply to input new information into mind put to “wrestle” with, but means to understand, digest, make connections, reflect, and apply it in learner’s life.

In Vietnamese, we have a saying just like: “knowledge is what remains after we have forgotten all things learned.” Since knowledge is not easily and directly imparted, it is gradually, firmly, and deeply constructed by the learner: “All knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known” (Belenky, et al. 1986, 137). Teachers should always bear in minds three principles of learning:

1. We learn best by doing.
2. We learn best when there is a need for learning.
3. We learn best new things in term of the old. (Gilbert G. Weaver 1960, p.52)

Students learn best when they are given opportunities to think, play around, and act in the settings for some new knowledge to be adopted. Unless students are shown or feel new information or knowledge—why it is important and how it relates to them in some ways now and after— they won’t put sincere efforts in learning. New knowledge must be built on prior knowledge or cognitive structure of students.

Two notable philosophical foundations for learning to be effective are:

Empiricism is the view that experience is the only source of knowledge. Special emphasis is given to sensory experience, although some allowance is made too for knowledge derived from intellectual reflections regarding relations among a number of experiences...

Rationalism is the general philosophical position that reason is the prime source of knowledge, that reason alone rather than authority or spiritual revelation, or intuition, or sense data is the only valid basis for knowledge, belief and action. Understanding, the comprehension of knowledge from reason, should be the aim of empirical as well as philosophical investigations. (Hilgard and Bower 1975, p. 5 & 7)

Teaching

The task of teachers is teaching. Having grasped what learning is. Now we explore the meanings and processes of teaching.

Teaching consists of the activities of educating or instructing; activities that impart knowledge or skills. Generally, we have three teaching strategies as Sternberg and Spear-Werling describe :

The first strategy is *lecture-based or didactic*: The teacher simply presents the material to be learned, there is very little teacher-student interaction, except perhaps for an occasional question from a student requesting clarification, or an occasional question from the teacher. In addition there is no interaction among students, at least not any interaction relevant to the topic at hand.

The second strategy is a *fact-based questioning approach*: The teacher asks the students many questions, which are designed primarily to elicit facts. The feedback from the teacher revolves primarily around responses such as “right,” “good,” “yes,” “no.” In this strategy, there is much teacher-student interaction, but the interaction tends to be brief, and follow up to individual questions is generally limited. Just as in the didactic strategy, there is little or no student-student interaction unless it is “covert interaction” such as about what to wear to the dance on Saturday night.

The third strategy, a *thinking-based, questioning approach, or simply as a dialogical approach*, is the one that we argue is usually the most appropriate for the thinking of thinking skills. This strategy can be characterized as thinking-based questioning approach, or simply as a dialogical approach, because it encourages dialogue between teacher and student. This dialogue may be either oral or written. In this strategy, the teacher asks questions to stimulate thinking and discussion. There is generally no one right answer to these questions, so feedback like “right” or “wrong” is generally not given. Instead the teacher tends to comment on or add to what students have said, and may even change stance on an issue to play the devil’s advocate. If the discussion rambles too far the field, the teacher may make comments or ask questions that serve to focus the discussion. Thus, in this

strategy, distinctions between student and teacher tend to blur, and the teacher becomes more of a guide or a facilitator, rather than a teacher in the traditional sense. Unlike the fact-based questioning strategies, the dialogue strategy has a lot of follow-up to individual questions. There is also more interaction among students with the dialogical strategy than with the other teaching strategies (Sternberg and Spear-Werling 1996, p.38).

Still, nowadays “routine, tradition, accident, and transitory, accidental influences,” are still prevalent in Buddhist schools. More research and better methods of learning and teaching should be introduced into these schools to improve educational performance in those schools. Some teachers still stick fast to their traditional ways of teaching. I wholeheartedly back up the progressive educationists who are trying to accelerate educational reforms.

In many Asian Buddhist schools that I have learned in and visited, the first strategy, lecture-based or didactic, is mainly used. Now I strongly feel the need for alternative or balanced use of the other two teaching strategies: fact-based questioning approach and dialogical approach, or teaching with more interactions between the teacher and students as well as between students and students in classroom. A teacher should not always adopt only didactic strategy but be flexible in ways of teaching: “Teaching takes the form sometimes of training and at other times of indoctrinating, instructing, and conditioning” (Green 1971, p.21).

Students in Buddhist schools are more often taught what to think than how to think. Education within most academic disciplines has been primarily concerned with presenting students with “facts” on a variety of topics—the “knowing that” while offering little about “knowing how.” So, improving students’ thinking skills involves encouraging them to think about not only what knowledge is generated, but how that knowledge is generated. The teacher not only focuses on imparting information or knowledge, but also and more importantly teaches and enhances students thinking skills, behavior, habits of learning or how to learn. Learning is not ended after leaving school; learning is a lifelong task. Students should be equipped tools to continuously learn and explore:

“Learning is never-ending pursuit of knowledge. It extends far beyond the acquisition of factual information. It consists of the exploration of uncharted territory. Learning demands questioning and probing into realms—known and unknown.” (Reed and Bergemann 1998, p.391).

A good way to obtain knowledge is through the inquiring mind interacting with others and with the world can be thought of in this way:

“Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in this world, with the world, and with one another.” (Freire 1993, p.53).

The role of a good teacher

In religion or Buddhism, the teacher should not be respected to an extreme extent as to be identified with truth. The teacher is only a guide and everyone must search the truth for himself with the help of his guidance:

“An educator is not merely a giver of information; he is one who points the way to wisdom, to truth. Truth is far more important than the teacher. The search for truth is religion...To create a new society, each one of us has to be a true teacher, which means that we have to be both the pupil and the master; we have to educate ourselves.” (Krishnamurti 1981, p.96).

The Buddha clearly instructed us to consider his teachings as the finger pointing at the moon. Finger is just a means by that people should get the aim the moon, the Truth. Many people mistake the finger, the label, the teaching, for the moon that is the experience itself. In Buddhism, no matter how much one learns, as long as he still relies mainly on external authorities and is proud of the mass of literature he gathers, he is no more than a bookworm. The most important things for him to do constantly are to reflect, introspect, to understand himself and realize the truths contented in booked knowledge, then and only then, he can manifest all these values in his activities, living and in relationships with other people. Krishnamurti

shed light on this issue as

“The ignorant man is not the unlearned, but he who does not know himself, and the learned man is stupid when he relies on books, on knowledge and on authority to give him understanding. Understanding comes only through self-knowledge, which is awareness of one’s total psychological process. Thus education, in the true sense, is the understanding of oneself, for within each of us that the whole of existence is gathered.

What we know call education is a matter of accumulating information and knowledge from books, which anyone can do who can read. Such education offers a subtle form of escape from ourselves and, like all escapes, it inevitably creates increasing misery. Conflict and confusion result from our wrong relationship with people, things and ideas, and until we understand that relationship and alter it, mere learning, the gathering of facts and the acquiring of various skills, can only lead us to engulfing chaos and destruction” (Krishnamurti 1981, p.17).

Careful planning will ensure that skillful thinking will be infused within the context of curriculum and instruction.

1. Show the need for the infusion of critical thinking skills into the school curriculum
2. Present a practical model for including critical thinking in the practice of teaching.
3. Explicate this model by demonstrating its applicability and consistency with current cognitive and developmental research.”

Developing critical and creative thinking in the processes of learning and teaching

Education is used to transmit knowledge from the teachers to the learners. But it can only be done through thinking and no other ways, since “Genuine knowledge is inseparable from thinking minds” (Paul, 1992, p.656)

The Buddha himself was a greatly critical, thoughtful, reflective person with meditative mind.

He was a critical student, learnt by discussing, debating or even challenging to his teachers.

His laws are determined by the accidents of time, place and situation. Because the Buddha dharma has always adapted to people's different abilities and allowed free choices, the teachings are diverse. The Buddha freely preached the Law according to the occasion and the mental and spiritual capacities of his listeners. It may be safely said that within his teachings there are ways of preaching suitable for all kinds of people. The Master has labored to expose students to the fullest possible range of the Buddha's teaching.

He delivered his sermons suitable to the temperaments of his hearers, this method is called as '*upaya-kosalla*,' i.e. expedient means

the Buddha gave his students the utmost freedom to choose what to keep for themselves, what to believe or act, that is unique in the history of religions as describes in Kalama Sutta :

'Yes, Kalamas, it is proper that you have doubt, that you have perplexity, for a doubt has arisen in a matter which is doubtful. Now, look you Kalamas, do not be led by reports, or tradition, or hearsay. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, nor by mere logic or inference, nor by considering appearances, nor by the delight in speculative opinions, nor by seeming possibilities, nor by the idea; "this is our teacher". But, O Kalamas, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome (*akusala*), and wrong, and bad, then give them up... And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome (*kusala*) and good, then accept them and follow them.'

He allowed his disciples to examine even the Buddha, himself, until the disciples are convinced by the true value of their Master. In Buddhism, we should not accept things because of external authorities, but we must judge them with our reasons. The Buddha often encourages all the people and his followers to listen, then think about his teachings and feel free to question him. There is much room for creation and flexibility in Buddhism. They should accept what they understand, and apply them into their lives fruitfully. So, the way

the Buddhists learn and practice Buddhism (dealing with problems of life) is similar to that of the scientists dealing with scientific matters.

Because of that, Albert Einstein remarked:

“The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that could cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism” (Dukas and Banesh, 1954, p. 21).

So, Buddhism was found by the Buddha—a great critical and creative Master. This is shown through every thought, word and action of his life. Buddhist patriarchs, from generation to generation, have developed his teachings and introduced them to people from East to West in many different ways. A Buddhist is not a blind follower, subservient to a super power, but should be a critical and creative person in believing, learning, practicing, and exchanging ideas to others. Every Buddhist learns and practices Buddhism creatively according to his own capacity, working and living environment. More than anyone else, the teachers in Buddhist schools should be the inspiring agents in inheriting and transmitting the quintessence of Buddhism that help to produce qualified successors and spread the seeds of Wisdom, Compassion, and Emancipation of Buddhism widely.

In Buddhism, wisdom leads to liberation. Also, a person enjoying freedom can easily enrich his knowledge. He is given opportunities to learn, practice, test, and act to gain knowledge. He can advance and transcend all previous limitations. Then, knowledge and freedom enable all progresses within the individual or society.

Yes, I like the idea that the best things the best teacher can teach us are how to think and how to learn because they are the keys—the decisive factors leading to success in education and life.

The cultural, scientific, and social progress of any country depend

on the extent of the development of creativity among its citizens. In modern times the progressive nations try to develop critical thinking and creativity in their next generation. Needless to say, everyone recognizes that such quality help a person and people to achieve their goals, to do things effectively, satisfactorily, successfully. So, one of the major tasks I am aiming at is to help them develop their minds, their thinking, their inner selves, potentials.

Everyone's mind has a great potential. The problem is that some don't know how to mobilize that resource. Once this potential power is activated properly, all the solutions to human problems and the key to success can be found within the "frame of mind":

"...any solutions to the human gap as well as any guarantees for the human future can be sought nowhere else but within ourselves. What is needed is for all of us to learn how to stir up our dormant potential and use it from now on purposefully and intelligently" (Gardner, 1993, p.369).

Robert Glaser (1984, p.27) asserts that: "If the acquisition of good thinking skills is to happen in school, particular attention needs to be focused on that special goal. It is not likely that students will obtain this goal coincidentally with the achievement of other objectives." He stresses that "abilities to reason and to think can only be attained when the thinking skills are interwoven with acquired knowledge and not left as subsequent add-ons."

It is obvious that "education must be concerned with the social group and prepare a person to play his part in it, shaping man to lead a moral, useful and cooperative life in the community or guiding the development of the human person in the social sphere. Awakening and strengthening both his sense of freedom and his sense of obligation and responsibility is an essential aim. He must know all his parts in communities and society, which he belongs to, and in order to be successful he must be good at them. It is education that can help him to learn these parts well as well as help him to perform them well." (*Jacques Maritain*, 1943, p. 13)

Life is like a river ever running. Everything is in the process of

constant change. In this rapid world, when facing changes or in new situations where booked knowledge and past experiences can't be any kind of help, then only critical and creative thinking can help one deal with situations, or changes timely. To prepare for that, students must form a habit from schools to work with change and to expect change. That is why critical thinking is vital for survival, adaptation, and progress in personal and social life.

Many schools and cultures have not done enough for that. Yes, it is also the problem with Asian Buddhist schools. Unless he has the capacity to analyze the new situations, knows his base, his position, decides where to start, with whom and which manners to deal, what to learn first in the new environment, he could hardly survive or develop.

Mankind not only learns to preserve the past treasure but also learns to create new things for progress and development. That is why amongst all the living, human life is the most evolved creation in the universe. Education must aim for that otherwise the society will stand still or advances slowly. Education should produce creative people. Creative minds and creativity are not born but trained, educated and developed.

The existing problems of Buddhist education in Asian countries :

The present problem existing in Asian Buddhist schools now is the overuse of didactic or lecture method with so much authority of the teacher and with less or no activities and interactions of the students in the classrooms. I call it the traditional way of teaching. Throughout this paper, I campaign and present all necessary tools for teaching with more interactions and effectiveness,

I have observed that there are still weaknesses in learning and teaching Buddhism, especially in Buddhist schools in Asia and Asian American Communities. Having experience with many Buddhist classes I attended, getting contact with some Buddhist schools now, and with Buddhist educators, I find that learning and teaching are not very well conducted in these schools.

In classes, many of the teachers just simply introduce the bibles and scriptures, and the students passively listen the instruction and are told to memorize and worship the lessons. The teachers have good knowledge and rich experience in Buddhism—they are the experts in Buddhism, no question about that—but the problem is that many of them were not well trained in the field of education; they don't possess many good skills, techniques, methods of teaching. They just conduct one way—information transfer without much interaction in classes. The students are so passive and they are not led to engage in activities good for learning processes. The teachers just care for imparting information and don't care training the students how to think, how to learn. This causes many students to feel bored, tired, or even sleepy. Consequently, the students can't explore all the aspects of Buddhism; they can't get the quintessence of the Buddha's teachings, build up their thinking, and enhance their personal development fully.

How to deal with these problems?

A big concern of mine and of all Buddhists is how to learn and teach Buddhism effectively. I have devoted myself to the cause of propagation of Buddhism. Now I this paper to make a contribution to Buddhist education. This is an effort to shed light for overcoming the weaknesses of Buddhist schools by means of:

- Collecting good skills, tools, and methods for learning and teaching
- Preparing myself for teaching Buddhism effectively
- Helping create good examples of educational environments that can be observed and multiplied into many units to develop good Buddhist educational systems
- Helping the teachers who would like to make a shift from traditional teaching to more interactive teaching
- This papers aims at providing necessary steps for traditional teachers to take a move beyond traditional approaches of transmitting information to students in Buddhist schools as

Setting goals of the class

When running the class, Buddhist teachers should aim at two goals

at the same time: to impart my knowledge, experience and skills to them; and to help them to develop their own thinking skills to know the ways of learning by themselves and to digest all the things they acquire. The best things a teacher can teach a student are how to learn or how to think for themselves so that they can find their own way through the problems and concerns they meet in life. Mental reflection is necessary for students to become conscious of their thinking designs and to become skilled at applying them to new situation.

The teachers must make the class a supportive environment and care to develop students' thinking by classroom instruction, modeling, practice, and careful coaching. If education strives to prepare the students for a productive life in society, the educational system must accept responsibility for supporting and developing creativity. The classroom is a place that should encourage independence, risk-taking, and intrinsic motivation, all of which have been found most conducive to creativity. Then role of the teacher is important in the development of creativity of the students.

Preparation before the class

Preparation before the class is important and decisive for all processes and achievement in the class. The time in the class is always limited so preparation can help the teacher to make the best use of it. Preparation makes a teacher an active instructor, avoid passive and embarrassed moments, perform all things in a good order. The teachers are to do many things beside class as reading books, newspapers, magazines, articles, watching television, talking with people, hot issues happening in real life then they have to connect these things with curriculum and activities in classes. A good teacher must grasp the syllabus and know exactly the goals he should reach in this class, the tasks he has to perform, the strategies he has to follow and all other things, such as questions, exercises, assignment, visual aids, and materials to be prepared. With good preparation, a teacher is confident to perform the tasks well and can become a critical and creative teacher. The teacher should show up in the class in time.

Setting up a good atmosphere in the class

In order to perform the tasks effectively, the teacher must be like an *orchestra* conductor to guide the students as if they were members in the music band. The teacher should be a dear person, best friend to the students, always encouraging and supporting students, make the class a supportive community, a family as close as when one of them can't attend the class or misses the class too much. The teacher must pay attention and care about the mood of all students so that can help in making change to the plans, teaching, giving questions or tasks to them accordingly. Teachers and students should have an open relationship built upon trust. The student should feel that his teacher is generally trying to help and also feel able to approach his teacher for any needed help. The teacher should be active, moving around the classroom whenever possible so that the teacher can get close and contact every student physically and psychologically. In this way, the teacher can understand the students' problems and give timely guidance to them.

Inside the class, cultural conditions must be favorable for the growth of creativity in that traits favorable to creativity are more easily available such as freedom, divergent thinking, emotionality, playfulness and originality, so creating such environmental conditions stimulates critical and creative thinking of the students. Students should not face ridicule or negative criticism. I express my views to the students, listen to theirs attentively, and acquaint them with other views. The students are free to give their own ideas, to challenge anything that they disagree. The teachers recommend, not force them to accept all of my words. The combination of freedom and basic guidance contributes to an environment conducive to creativity. The teachers can serve as a stimulus for creativity through their feedback, directing, questioning, and explaining. They enthusiastically encourage the students to develop more than one solution to a problem then can see greater creativity in problem solving. They encourage creative and critical thinking such as emphasizing depth, encouraging freedom in thinking and creativity, welcoming questioning attitudes, giving students opportunities to participate and "think through", asking students to evaluate issues,

using a variety of activities and assignments to help students actively take parts in class activities and trying in opening up their minds, and exploring the subjects. I am trying my best to be close to them, to maintain positive teacher-student relationships.

The role of a teacher is primarily that of a facilitator. He provides them clear instructions and encourage divergent thinking and creative responses through techniques such as brainstorming and by using questions to examine and expand her students' thinking. He would be able to direct the students to information sources and help them to use good reasoning skills. Both group and individual investigations and activities should be included in the curriculum, and students should be given responsibility for their own learning. He relates to students as individuals, respects students as persons, must be friendly toward students, accessible to students, be a dynamic and energetic person, enthusiastic about the subject, enjoy teaching, have an interesting style of presentation, and have self-confidence. As the instructor, he gets the discussions in the class moving and keep it on track. He must find problems to solve, know how to ask questions to bridge the gaps between what they know and what they don't know. A good teacher should make the class enjoyable and make the lessons more interesting. From time to time, He tells stories and share my own experience to the students.

He helps children learn to think and solve problems in creative ways by giving them the freedom to make mistakes and by respecting their ideas. He encourages them to take risks, explores the matters deeply, independently, and apply their knowledge, experience in the present living situation or in the future. The best way to enhance creativity is to create a climate that is conducive to increasing task motivation. In this way, we are able to explore deeply ethical dimensions of issues, and the students will be better able to form their own moral views.

He must be warm, kind, sympathetic to the students, concerned for students' progress, encourage class discussion, invite students to share their knowledge and experiences, invite criticism of my own ideas, interact with the students in many ways. He acts as the performer in the class; I uses signs, movement intentionally, all which

have purposes of conveying the meanings for the instruction. During the time in class, he helps keep students motivated and involved. He makes the best use of motivational aids such as providing competitions, praises, written comments, and prizes reasonably. A good teacher needs to appear in control at all times and able to deal with any situation that may arise. He is able to maintain a general authority over the classroom but still remains open and approachable to students.

Humor can be an effective tool in teaching; humor can contribute a positive environment for learning as “Laughter is the Best Medicine.” At times, when speaking, we want to use it as a break before going on to something else. It enables us not only to create an affective or positive environment, but is a source of enjoyment. Humorous situations allow the students to express themselves without fear of ridicule and criticism. Anxiety and stress is reduced and the students are encouraged to take more risks in doing all things designed in the class. It can allow the shy or timid student in our class to participate with the group work, as Provine, a neuroscientist engaged in studies of the development, evolution and neural mechanisms of behavior said, “Indeed, the presumed health benefits of laughter may be coincidental consequences of its primary goal: bringing people together” (Provine 2000).

Brainstorming can be an effective way to generate lots of ideas and then determine which idea(s) best solves the problem. The instructors present a problem and then ask the students to give ideas, solutions or answers. A person collects their ideas and write on the board in a certain amount of time. Everyone is free and encouraged to give his/her own ideas. Then, we all the classes together analyze the ideas generated and gathered to draw a best solution from them. The students are happy with brainstorming because they feel that they all contribute their parts during the course of developing and finding the solutions.

Teachers should have useful techniques to enhance the creative process. Students are invited to choose those they are drawn to and add them to their own repertoire of talents. The best way to enhance creativity is to create a climate that is conducive to increasing task

motivation. Teachers should support the studies of the children, love them, care for them, care about all the difficulties and all their academic tasks, and hope that they do well in school and have good future. If that extrinsic motivation is in place then the intrinsic motivation of the children is promoted and the children have favorable conditions to do well and to be creative.

Time and Tasks Management

The teacher has important tasks in designing and leading activities for classes. The teacher decides the choices of lessons, activities, and assignments depending on the mood of students while conforming to the curriculum standards set by educational authorities. A good teacher should have a clear goals and task for each class.

We know that in order to perform creatively one needs to have interest, freedom, and time. If a student is assigned many tasks or difficult tasks with little time or in rush, then how can he understand the problems, try different ways for the solutions, take part in all necessary processes and find out the best solutions? If he has to do his assignments, homework and academic tasks in haste, and if he just wishes to pass the exams and the courses, then he does not have the chance to conduct intense studies and make something creative as a result of his studies. Like every organ take time to grow, that person is potentially creative, but does not allot enough time to this activity. Teaching is a problem of making a bridge between the teacher's idea and intention and the students' ideas and knowledge, so interaction with students and understanding their responses are very necessary and that take time.

The teachers should try to make the best use of precious time in classes. Time must be set out for communicating and sharing ideas and the teachers are to announce the time limited for them and remind them with the remaining time for the task. Not giving students enough time to ask questions leaves students with only a partial understanding of the material. Students who were confused about an assignment or a certain fact would be left to figure it out on their own and not to have the appropriate, accurate information that should be provided by the teacher.

The assignments and exercises help students to develop thinking power since : “Assignments that compel students to thinking their own way through the logic of the content, using their own experiences, their own assumption, and their own ideas.” (Paul 1992, p. 302)

facing some difficult tasks, students can encourage themselves by asking: Why don't I try the task? Is it really impossible? Wasn't I successful in a similar situation in the past? Why should I set back instead of moving ahead? In that way, students are trained to develop thinking power, reasoning, creativity, self-confidence, and courage. The teachers must give immediate response to students' questions or answers, provide timely feedback, and explanation to help them find the ways out of the deadlock. They work with them as a partner through the following processes:

- Listen and talk in productive ways, being open to accept many different ideas
- Ask better and different questions
- Organize and guide peer work, group work, collaborative thinking, brain storming, and problem solving are important for learning and teaching
- Apply judgment, praise, encouragement, guidance when appropriate
- Reconcile opposites
- See relationships among options, make new connections
- Elaborate, extend, refine ideas
- Analyze the dialogue, conversation, or discussion, judge the strength of arguments, reasoning, and evaluate solutions

The teachers should set up the class in a way as involving a great deal of discussion, interchanging of questions and answers between teacher and students and between students with one another. Such discussion, if it is to be educationally profitable for all concerned, must involve them in thinking. From time to time they provide chances for dialogue. It can be in the form of student-to-student dialogue, group discussion, or presentation in front of classes. That helps students to think, search, work, share, reflect, discuss, assert, change themselves or receive many good things from others. They use key tactics to enable members to engage more in discussing and learning process:

pausing (to allow time for thought), paraphrasing, expressing your concerns, probing (to go further), putting out your ideas and pulling them off the table (i.e., suggest and withdraw ideas in a timely way), paying attention, presuming positive presuppositions, providing data (always important in discussion), pursuing a balance between advocacy and inquiry (keeping a balance between your position and those of others). They help students to grow up day by day through small things, bringing out the hidden potentiality inside students.

Developing Good Habits in the Learners

Students should learn and act actively in the class. In every matter they should listen, learn, think, question, doubt, wonder, explore, analyze, debate, advocate, hypothesize, idealize; they should create, exchange ideas, generate alternatives, ask questions and anticipate outcomes. Some of the knowledge we take for granted may, in fact, not be true, so students should look at the matter with fresh eyes

Now I suggest twelve methods that can be applied in teaching to help the students to achieve their goals as

1. Provide in-class time for individuals and groups to just think and let their ideas marinate.
2. Reward creative ideas and products through public recognition—even if the ideas are still developing or perhaps fail.
3. Encourage students to take unique and different approaches in their work and reward any efforts in this direction.
4. Allow mistakes and model positive, supportive responses to mistakes. Encourage learning from their mistakes.
5. Encourage mental flexibility—taking other viewpoints that they might not usually take.
6. Explore the environment to stimulate curiosity about their world.
7. Question students' assumptions and guide them to dig deeper and consider their beliefs and others' to expose students to other ideas.
8. Stop evaluating or judging too soon. There is a time and place when ideas and their constraints need to be considered, but not too soon or the process will flounder.

9. Foster cooperation rather than competition.
10. Offer choices.
11. Encourage dissent and diversity.
12. Regularly provide positive feedback.

Reflection and Evaluation

After each class, The teachers should spend time to think of that class to evaluate what are strong points, weak points in that class. What experiences and lessons are drawn out of that class? What change should they make to perform better? They have to grade the assignments carefully, fair-mindedly because comments, grading, prizes serve as means for aspiration, motivation, and stimulation for the students. They should also notice what progress I have made in teaching and they have made in learning and growing. What did the students do well, what not? Why so? What are unexpected? Sometimes they have a meeting to evaluate the class together, publicly or secretly (by writing comments, complains without names) to send remarks for others.

Public Speaking

The students are trained to deliver public speaking, especially on Sunday for the Buddhist Temples. It requires a lot of knowledge, skills and experiences to carry out the task well. Critical thinking helps students how to doubt or believe, how to select a topic for talk and discuss, how to raise an issue and how to guide the audience take part in the same journey-in-process. Don't let the audience just sit idly or fall into sleep; stimulate them to follow, act, enjoy, share, question, and solve the problems all together.

Prospects for Better Buddhist Education

In general, in Vietnamese Buddhist schools around the world, though the students pass the entrance test, their backgrounds or levels are very different. The University needs the presence of Buddhist Monk lecturers who are of great Buddhist virtue and Buddhist knowledge. Unfortunately, currently there are many lecturers who have not been trained in pedagogy, so they don't possess many teaching skills. We

need to have more and more Buddhist Teachers trained in pedagogy. Moreover

The Buddhist Research Institute in Hochiminh City, Vietnam should organize more and more seminars and workshops in Buddhist teachings to evaluate the present Buddhist schools, point out strong points and weak points, provide solutions and then make publications regarding techniques for teaching and learning available in Buddhist schools. The Ministry of Buddhist Education of Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation should have more programs, sending educators to visit Buddhist schools and sit in Buddhist classes, work closely with Buddhist Teachers, and provide opportunities for the teachers to exchange teaching's experiences.

We are planning some good changes in our University. The curriculums are posted in our University's website and we welcome comments and suggestions. Buddhist educators are going to conduct seminars, workshops, symposium on Buddhist education to exchange views on theories, skills, practices of Buddhist education. The Dean of Academic Affairs has scheduled to meet with representatives of students to listen to their ideas and opinions about modifying learning and teaching activities in the School. We need more investment in Buddhist education. In summer retreats most Buddhist Teachers gather in a place for some weeks. We must have ways of making best use of these opportunities for exchanging experiences of learning and teaching Buddhist.

I will continue to research on the project and contribute to Buddhist education. Some questions in my minds now are: How can we (I and those who have the same concerns and tasks) get attention of the teachers who prefer conventional teaching and encourage them to change into more interactive ways teaching? Which authorities or organizations can help or cooperate in making changes for the better? Who are the ideal teachers? How can Buddhist teachers meet together and discuss on the issues more and more? Who are responsible for improvement in Buddhist education? Where can we find source of needed funding? How can the concerns of all the related organizations be focused and become the impetus for a bright prospect of Buddhist education in the future? I believe that with joint

effort, Buddhist schools will be great schools where all the teachers and students live and grow actively every moment and the time at schools are the best time and most influential in their whole lives.

Many more things waiting for us to do, I am doing my best and hopping for better and desired change in Buddhist education in a near future.

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