

OXFORD STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

# Religion and Education

comparative and  
international perspectives



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EDITED BY MALINI SIVASUBRAMANIAM  
& RUTH HAYHOE

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# Religion and Education:

## comparative and international perspectives

Edited by

**Malini Sivasubramaniam & Ruth Hayhoe**

*Oxford Studies in Comparative Education*

Series Editor: David Phillips



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CHAPTER 9

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## **The Buddhist Approach to a School-based Curriculum: the effective learning innovation that promotes human values to learners for sustainable living in Thailand**

**PRAPAPAT NIYOM,  
ART-ONG JUMSAI NA AYUDHAYA,  
WITIT RACHATATANUN  
& BENJAMIN VOKES**

**SUMMARY** This chapter will examine the development of religion in education in Thailand. It will present three case studies: Sathya Sai School, Roong Aroon School (RAS) and Panyaprateep School. Each focuses on integrating religious principles into the school-based curriculum and on the contemplative practice and learning process of their classroom management. Through scientific analysis of the human learning process, the integration of core religious teachings and encompassing the complete environment, these three cases provide examples of how Buddhist and other religious mindfulness practices are integrated into the curriculum, along with sustainable living, learning principles and values which serve to holistically transform learners in the Thai school system.

### **Historical Background: religious-based education in Thailand**

More than one hundred years ago, prior to the establishment of the Ministry of Education, the first Thai schools were started in Buddhist temples, with monks as teachers teaching only Thai boys to read, write and solve mathematical problems, along with Buddhist principles. Subsequently, a few conventional private schools with a western standard curriculum were established by Christian missionaries. Later, the Ministry of Dhamma-karn



(the management of holistic teaching and learning) was established to launch a conventional school system that combined Buddhist principles in its curriculum (Chaiyaphon, 2011). In 1941, the name of the ministry was changed to the Ministry of Education. Thai schools, public and private alike, are required to teach morality and ethics as one of the main subjects in their curricula (Chaiyaphon, 2011). Buddhism has been the foundation of Thai education.

### **The Current Situation of Religion in the Education System in Thailand**

The Thai Constitution states that Thai people are free to believe in any religion of their choice (Office of National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, 2011). However, the Buddhist religion has been strongly rooted in the Thai nation. Consequently, more than 94.6% of the Thai population are Buddhist, while 4.2% are Islamic, 1.1% are Christian, and others 0.1% (National Statistical Office, 2015). However, every Thai person has the liberty to choose his/her religion, as well as the school type in which he or she wants to study. Actually no matter which religion the students' families are, it is not uncommon that Buddhist students as well as those of other religious backgrounds also attend the same Christian Church-supported schools as well as public government-supported schools. Nevertheless, morality and ethics are still required as subjects in the compulsory curriculum of the Thai basic education system provided in every school in the country (Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards, 2002).

Schools in Thailand can be grouped into six major types of school offering different religious-based education in their curriculum:

1. The government conventional public schools include 30,816 schools which accommodate over 6,856,272 students (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, 2016). These schools follow the basic standard curriculum which requires eight major subjects in terms of content. Social Studies include morality and ethics, which can be individually arranged to offer the specific study of either Buddhism or other religions at every level.
2. Within the above numbers of government public schools, 79 schools were admitted into the Buddhist Approach School Project, launched by the Bureau of Educational Innovation Development in Education, under the Ministry of Education, in 2003. At present, 22,736 schools are in this project incorporating traditional practices and additional activities in addition to the regular curriculum (Bureau of Educational Innovation Development, n.d.).
3. Twenty-eight private schools under the support of Christian Churches provide and maintain separate religious teaching, either Christian or Buddhist practices of three periods of 50 minutes a week. However, the different practices in the above three types of religious-study in



these schools do not generate any conflict (Office of the Private Education Commission, 2015).

4. A total of 2548 schools with 247,471 students are privately owned Islamic schools called Tadeega or Pornou schools, mostly situated in the southern part of Thailand, that teach the Muslim students religious subject matter in the evening after conventional school hours (Office of the Private Education Commission, 2015).
5. In order to support poor families in the remote villages, there are 409 schools with 47,089 Students (National Office of Buddhism, 2017). Phrapariyatidham, or government-supported boarding schools, have been developed from the Buddhist temples which offer dual systems of conventional education together with Buddhist teaching for the novice monks.
6. Nearly 20 privately owned Buddhist/religious approach schools have been applying the Buddhist principles with mindful meditation and similar practices fused with learning. The curriculum design, pedagogy, evaluation process and learning environment, including school culture, are created in order to nurture in students the characteristics of self-learners and sustainable living. One of the differences between these schools and those in the previous categories is that Buddhist or other religious practices are not limited or confined within either the traditional practice or the conventional learning (Chuencharoensok, 2013).

The three case studies in this chapter are part of this last group of 20 schools. They are known as alternative and innovative schools because they integrate inner life learning into the modern schooling system. This current movement of integrating contemplative and inner development into the existing schooling system is gradually being experimented with in Thailand. Although these schools are different in their learning process they share a common ultimate goal of human development. Moreover, the leaders of these three schools are not educators by field of study. They are an engineer, an architect and an economist by training but they all have direct experiences in Buddhist/universal religious-based practices. They share the common vision of wanting to transcend the limitations of formal religion and they strive to interpret the true essence of human living which could be learnt through daily school activities.

### **Methodology**

To understand education and the learning process, scholars developing the transformation of 'Buddhist Schools' contemplate the true meaning of education and its ultimate goals. The learner's environment and how it is interacted with and interpreted can lead to self-knowledge and wisdom.



The Learning Process

The Learner

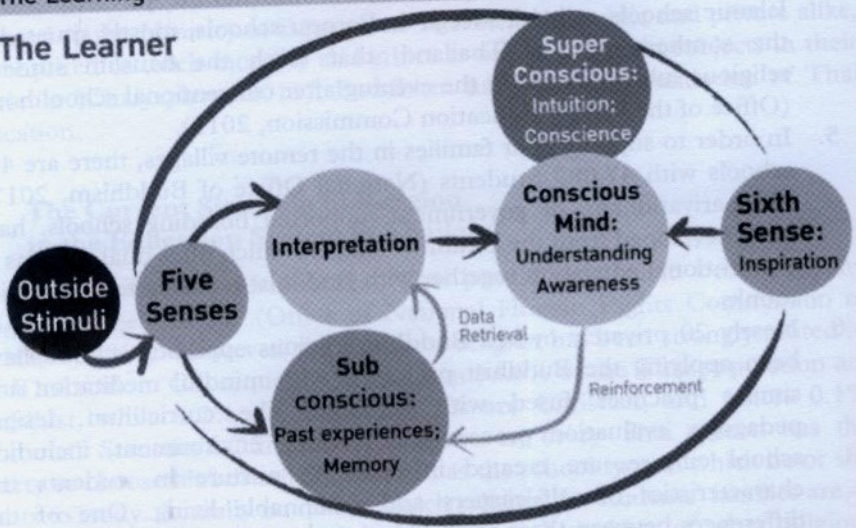


Figure 1. The learning process of Sathya Sai School from Dr Art-ong Jumsai Na Ayudhya.

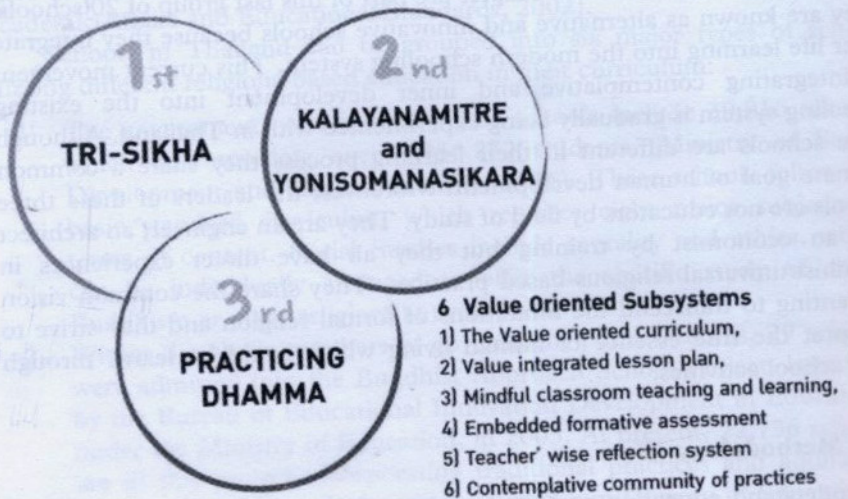


Figure 2. The three major Buddhist principles and six subsystems for the conceptual framework of Roong Aroon School.

The roles of love and compassion are noted as critical factors to the framework for developing right thoughts and actions and conduct with others. The development of these schools was founded on this principle of integrating this deep learning process for the development of the whole human in ways not limited to an individual child, but affecting the potential of the entire learning community. It is essential to develop the learner's capacity to interpret the information from the environment and develop self-knowledge and wisdom in order to expand love and compassion. This process of reflection is deeply rooted in Buddhist core principles and practices (Jumsai Na Ayudhya, 2003).

The Buddhist Approach to a School-based Curriculum is based on the three major Buddhist principles – Tri-Sikha, Kalayanamitre and Yonisomanasikara – and on the four principles of Satipatthana on the Noble Eightfold Path (Niyom, 2001).

### 1. Tri-Sikha

Tri-Sikha is comprised of 'Sila' (right speech, right action and right livelihood), 'Samadhi' (right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration) and 'Panna' (right view and right intention), which are learned to enlarge and deepen the capacity of detachment from the causes of grievances and uncontrolled likes and dislikes, and to nurture truth and the most possible harmony in living (Payutto, 2004).

Our subconscious mind stores all our past experiences as 'memory' by interpreting information from our environment. What we saw, heard, received through our sensory organs, or emotionally felt, experienced, thought or acted on, as well as our environment, are stored in our subconscious mind, as shown in Figure 1. The school leaders understand that aggressive behavior can be programmed into children's subconscious minds through a variety of stimuli. It is now becoming clear that in order to promote good character in children, the desired human values must become an integral part of all subjects taught in schools to be infused as part of the data stored in children's subconscious minds. The school's atmosphere or climate should be charged with love and peace. All teachers should be a model of the values and desired characteristics in children (Jumsai Na Ayudhya, 2003).

In these Buddhist Approach Schools, the physical environment is carefully considered to include open natural spaces to allow the students to experience and learn from nature.

### 2. Kalayanamitre and Yonisomanasikara

*Kalayanamitre* means wise spiritual guides or trainers, which includes teachers and parents who have a direct impact on the learners. In the specific meaning identified by Venerable Somdet Phra Buddhakosajarn (Prayudh



Payutto) in *The Dawn of Education* (Payutto 2002) there are seven characteristics, as follows: being lovable; being worthy of esteem; able to be emulated; being a counsellor; being a patient listener; able to deliver deep discourses; and not leading to a useless end.

*Yonisomanasikara* means wise reflection, or the 10 deliberate thinking systems. Phra Buddhakosajarn (Prayudh Payutto), the venerable Buddhist scholar, also mentions these in his book (Payutto, 2013), and puts forward *Yonisomanasikara* as a thinking framework which contains the following 10 elements:

1. Applying good inner values
2. Awareness of true state
3. Focus on present situation
4. Problem solving according to Four Noble Truths
5. Explaining based on facts
6. Element stratification
7. Finding cause-effect
8. Connecting concept-objective
9. Judging true-artificial values
10. Comparing advantages-disadvantages

Another viewpoint, according to the explanation from Steve Weissman (2011), is that '*Yonisomanasikara*', as 'wise reflection', helps us integrate the concentration and mindfulness developed during formal meditation into everyday life. In every facet of interaction these two concepts are nurtured and developed in the school communities. These schools have analyzed the learning outcomes and organized their inputs and outputs in a process to intrinsically develop these core states of learning.

### **3. Satipatthana: the key principles of mindfulness practices**

According to the Buddhist belief, truth can be found in the search within. This is the beginning of the search for self-knowledge or knowledge about self or self-realization. When it is found that the conscious mind becomes calm and peaceful and does not react emotionally to various stimuli as before, the ability to concentrate is improved and memory is enhanced. As a result, there is an improvement in the learning process. The conscious mind needs to be stilled and completely calm for intuition to occur.

The Buddhist Approach Schools interpret and apply these principles of the exterior and interior to support the process and encourage deeper learning holistically and build a contemplative community by adding more input of learning opportunities and practices for the spiritual development of their teachers and students, including parents. They also change the learning process to facilitate more time and space for learning by doing through the real situation and problem-based learning, whereas the formative assessments are more concentrated. Certainly, the output and outcome of the students



cover more dimensions of moral and ethical character building as well as cognitive achievement. This brings out inner strength and wisdom in children (Panich, 2014).

### Three Case Studies

The three case studies are Sathya Sai School, Panyaprateep School and Roong Aroon School. Table I provides basic information about each school.

Name of schools	Sathaya Sai School	Panyaprateep School	Roong- Aroon School
Founder	Dr. Art-ong Jumsai Na Ayudhya	Dr Witit Rachatatanun	Assoc. Prof. Prapapat Niyom
Organization and Funding	Sathaya Sai Foundation Private School	Panyaprateep Foundation Private School	Roong- Aroon School Foundation Private School
Honoured Adviser-	Sai baba	Venerable Phra Acharn Jayasaro	Venerable Somdet Phra Buddhakosajarn, (Prayudh Payutto)
Established	1992	2008	1997
Location	Lop Buri, Thailand	Pak Chong, Nakorn Rachasima, Thailand	Bangkok, Thailand
Setting	Rural/119 acres	Rural/32.4 acres	Urban/20 acres
Type of a School Level	Boarding K1-K3,G1 – G12	Boarding G7-G12	Day school K1-K3, G1 – G12
Selection process	Interview and essay both parents and students	Parent workshop, selection based on parent's attitude	Parent workshop, selection based on parent's attitude
Fees	Full scholarship	Tuition based	Tuition based
Number of Students first year/current	14/356	10/100	96/1200
Number of teachers	59	40	140

Note : More than 85% of students are Buddhist.

Table I. Basic information of the three schools.

#### *First Case Study: Sathya Sai School*

Sathya Sai School is a privately owned school situated in the Lopburi province, in the north of Bangkok. Dr Art-ong Jumsai Na Ayudhya, a former NASA engineer, established this school through funding by the Sai-ba-ba, a



renowned leading spiritual master from India. It was the second Sathya Sai School to be established outside of India. Today there are many Sathya Sai Schools around the world – for example, in Australia, Nepal, Indonesia and Canada. Sathya Sai Schools follow the national curriculum of Thailand but it is imperative that the essence of human values is blended into the academic subjects.

The school provides full grants to every child, from grade 1, especially to those from poor families in the remote areas. The emphasis on knowledge becomes the second stage after the need to develop how the learner interprets his or her environment. This process is ‘mindfulness’ as described in Buddhism. In the educational environment, these principles of practice are organized to promote a learning environment that carefully cultivates a curriculum to guide teachers and parents along this path.

With the goal to provide life-skills training and self-sufficiency, Sathya Sai School has organic farms located near the campus to support their meals as well as a solar farm which generates electricity and additional income for the school.

#### *Second Case Study: Roong Aroon School (RAS)*

Roong Aroon School (RAS) was established with support from the Plan group of companies and their partners as a private school in Bangkok. Associate Professor Prapapat Niyom, from the Faculty of Architecture of Chulalongkorn University, was the leading pioneer for laying out the concept of the school according to the Buddhist principles. Its expansion to a higher education institution, Arsom Silp Institute of the Arts, in 2007 was supported by the Roong Aroon School Foundation, with a similar conceptual direction to the school. The institute offers three major programs of study: Holistic Education; Architecture for Community and Environmental Development; and Social Entrepreneurship. Both RAS and Arsom Silp Institute apply the Buddhist concept in their teaching/learning direction, academics, curriculum, pedagogy and school culture.

The heart of all of Buddha’s teachings is the concept of learning at RAS. The meaning of education has been interpreted in Roong Aroon School according to the Buddhist principles which view the most powerful human value as the learning capacity cultivated through proper practices. The school’s core belief is that ‘life is learning or learning is life’ (Payutto, 2004).

RAS has rearranged and redesigned the basic standard curriculum into the school-based curriculum to enlarge and deepen its goal of learning achievement to go beyond merely content- or subject-based learning. The school’s core philosophy is that child development, particularly spiritual wisdom, needs the holistic learning system and process that can be obtained by special spaces, practices and key factors for learning corresponding to the Buddhist principles. The ultimate goal of education should be to enlarge and



deepen the students' accomplishments while also attending to human development (Chantrasook, 2006).

*Third Case Study: Panyaprateep School*

Panyaprateep School, located in Nakorn Rachasima province, was established with a view to serve as a prototype of Buddhist wisdom education – a holistic form of learning, covering both aspects of body and mind development and the essential academic and life skills and occupational development, infused with training of moral values. The vision of the school is to enable the community of students, teachers and parents to develop their own self-reliance and to constantly train to become wise persons. The school's founder, Dr Witit Rachatanun, notes the tendency of authorities to see Buddhism as a belief system and therefore overlook the unrivalled system of human education that lies at its heart.

The school is a co-educational secondary boarding school under the guidance of British-born Buddhist monk and Chief Spiritual Advisor of the School, Venerable Ajahn Jayasaro. Panyaprateep's vision is to enhance the depth of the education it offers by providing a warm and supportive environment, or 'a second home', in which students may navigate their way into adulthood guided by the Buddhist principles of all-round flourishing. Panyaprateep's aim is to create an atmosphere, environment and curriculum that are in harmony with the Buddhist path to enlightenment, but adapted appropriately to the needs and capacity of the school students.

**Whole School Revolutions:  
value-oriented curricula and pedagogy**

At Satthya Sai it is observed that in order to promote good character in children, the desired human values must become an integral part of all subjects taught in the school. This way, human values will become an integral part of the data stored in children's subconscious minds. The school's atmosphere or climate should be filled with love and peace. Teachers should be a model of the desired characteristics in children. Values and desired characteristics should also be an integral part of all sports and extra-curricular activities. The long-term memory is activated when there is an association or connection with real-life situations and experiences. Thus, instead of teaching values as a separate subject, there should be an integration of values in all subjects. Both intra-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary integration are necessary. The children are brought up in an atmosphere of love, reverence, mutual respect, cooperation and spiritual discipline.

The children begin their day at 5.45 a.m. in the prayer hall along with teachers and the other staff of the school. They respect all religions. They start with a Buddhist prayer, 'Buddha Sharanam Gachami', and chant a few



Buddhist verses. This is followed by three Aums and Gayathri mantra which leads to Light Meditation. The prayer session ends with an Education on Human Values (EHV) teacher narrating a value-based story. This is the healthy start to induce in the child right thinking, right behavior and right living throughout the day. Sattyha Sai employs a variety of teaching techniques to ensure the students are engaged in the learning process. The school has a unique way of teaching these values. For instance, Peace could be the theme for one of the weeks. During that week all subjects taught will carry the significance of Peace and its sub-values such as concentration, honesty, patience and self-confidence.

The three major components in the Roong Aroon School (RAS) learning process are head, hands and heart. According to this holistic process of learning, the major learning units in RAS from kindergarten to primary and secondary are designed with the aim of integrating the real-life situations into whatever subject matter the students should have. The main themes of each year or three semesters are to be agreed by the teacher team of each level. According to the selected theme, the teacher team will design the lesson plan into a project/problem-based unit which is derived from three objectives: Knowledge, including subject matter; Skills, covering the essential twenty-first-century learning skills; and Values, the most important part of learning outcomes. Then the learning process, space, media and activities are arranged according to those achievement targets. Modifying the conventional system to achieve a value-oriented curriculum, RAS has included the 'Value Integrated Learning Curriculum', based on the three major learning mindsets of heart-hand-head, as the framework as well as the process of development.

The teacher teams work with the principals regularly through the year. The standard curriculum is studied and analyzed to understand the whole structure in terms of the O-L-E (Objective-Learning process-Evaluation), and the requirements of each course, including the indicators. The teachers are able to identify and integrate any special requirements in addition to the core value aspects into that O-L-E system. With this adaptation of the standard Thai curriculum, RAS has developed its own system where the 'roadmap' of key-stage implementation for the year and the term is designed and prepared in advance.

The principals provide guidance based on the Yonisomanasikara thinking system, to help teachers understand the correlation of dynamic cycles. The increased understanding of the complete learning cycle corresponds to the outcome-based curriculum. The more the value outcomes of the students are expected, the more 'learning by doing' or 'active learning' through project/problem-based learning units is required. The learning process also requires a thematic approach to lesson plan design, which normally integrates the critical issues of Thai society, such as conservation and management of natural resources – forests, rain water systems, soil, energy and so on – which requires a longer field study period. When the



teachers understand this thinking system of cause and effect, they are able to integrate these value aspects into most steps.

The aim of Panyaprateep School is to integrate developmental principles across all school activities, both in and out of class (Ratchatanun, 2006). To implement this, each year has an integrated study theme, which includes a theme-based subject and field trips, and culminates in an end-of-term exhibition and performance for the school community. Each theme addresses the challenges we face in the world today and aims to equip the students with the appropriate skills, tools and knowledge to address these issues. Thus, the first area of education is devoted to the physical world in which we live and to developing a wise and balanced relationship towards it, including obesity, its causes and associated health risks, consumerism and media and its influence on our relationship to possessions and the use of technology and consumption habits and their detrimental impact on the environment. Although the core curriculum (including such subjects as Thai language, mathematics, science, and social and cultural studies) is stipulated by the Ministry of Education, the guidelines are flexible enough to accommodate the unique concerns of a Buddhist developmental model. In the holistic system of this model, education is conceived of as being fourfold – namely, an education of:

1. the child's relationship with the material world;
2. the child's relationship with the social world;
3. the child's ability to deal wisely with toxic mental states and cultivate uplifting mental states; and
4. the child's ability to think well and to reflect on experience.

This model not only prepares children to make a good livelihood, but also allows them to see that life is deeper and richer than working in order to consume.

Panyaprateep School identifies the critical component of the curriculum as being to develop the child's ability to think well and to reflect on experience. The 'gem' of the Buddhist tradition includes training the ability to think with reason and without bias, to think creatively and innovatively, to think constructively about one's thinking, and to be able to reflect on experience and learn from it. This skill can be used to evaluate, solve problems and make decisions, and ultimately raise student achievement. A tool of the school is to use the Buddhist approach of the Four Noble Truths in order to develop perspective and understand what causes things to happen. First, the students identify the problem, then they evaluate the causes of the problem, before deciding the solution. Finally, they decide the path of action that will lead to and achieve the solution.



## **Examples of Integrating Buddhist Principles into the School Systems**

The ultimate goal of the three case studies is human development through the holistic learning system which aims to encourage the highest achievement of each learner, not only in their knowledge and learning skills but also in their spiritual development. These three schools have been applying the Buddhist principles into the school system in various ways. One example from RAS shown in Figure 2 illustrates how these three principles are applied and organized in school practices.

Applying major Buddhist principles to the school system through the core value-oriented operating systems, the Buddhist School's mission is designed to create the right activities and platforms according to the purpose of students, teachers and parents. Academic and pedagogy subsystems in the school are thoughtfully designed to apply the true meaning of learning content embedded with suitable values in the contexts which are rarely found in traditional institutions.

### *First Tri-Sikha*

Most Buddhist approach schools usually apply this principle as their school's core value. Tri-Sikha is more likely interpreted as the right way of human learning and living (Prayutto, 2004). From these three example schools, these principles are integrated into the classroom and the greater community as explained below.

### *Meaningful Teaching and Learning*

The more meaningful the teaching and learning in the classrooms, the higher the engagement and learning ownership that the students have. In this 'integrated or holistic learning process', learning spaces are provided for the students to experiment, which includes observing, trial-and-error practicing, problem solving, sharing and learning, managing information and communication, etc. The most efficient learning context is based on real-life situations and work-based, problem-based platforms that the learners can participate and engage in.

In addition to the basic knowledge and the twenty-first-century learning skills, the students' experience should be enhanced and nurtured through either the regular mindful classroom learning or the meaningful routine activities, both at school and at home, to achieve well-rounded capacities developed from self-awareness, self-actualization, wise reflection and being fully directed learners with values.



*Moral and Ethical-based Routine Activities*

This process includes extra-curricular teachers who inspire and impact the students who also need regular development of self-awareness and actualization in extra-curricular classes (i.e. arts, sports and music classes). Once these teachers realize the value and their impacts on the teachers and learners, they become more inspiring teachers or change agents rather than teachers who transfer content or knowledge to students that are mere transmitting messengers.

The teachers are able to tap into the students' inner power of learning from inside, through regular contemplative dialogues, sharing knowledge alongside their students or challenging the students with more difficult or complicated exercises than they can imagine.

*Developing the Child's Emotional Development*

Emotional development includes strengthening the ability to restrain negative impulses, promotion of the wholesome desire for truth and goodness, patient endurance, resilience and good humor, meditation practices to enhance mindfulness, inner peace and clarity of mind, and the promotion of loving kindness and compassion.

In addition to the morning activities at Satthya Sai school, students are led in mindfulness activities before each and every lesson to prepare them to go deeply into the area discussed.

In another approach, Panyaprateep School uses the 'Four Right Efforts' as a tool for self-development. The first is to 'stop' negative actions that are causing problems. The second is to 'prevent' negative actions from arising. The third is to bring about and 'generate' positive actions that have not yet arisen. The fourth is to 'sustain' and develop further the positive things.

An integral part of school life at Panyaprateep involves daily as well as weekly 'awake and aware' practices that are geared to stimulating self-awareness and self-reflection. Students and teachers gather for a period of morning and evening chanting and mindfulness activities such as sitting meditation, walking meditation or Qi Gong. On a weekly basis, the Chief Spiritual Advisor, Venerable Ajahn Jayasaro, comes to the school to receive alms, meet with students in small groups, and give school-wide teachings. This is a special opportunity to consult with the teacher on any important matters.

*Value-oriented Lesson Plan Design*

In preparation for teaching, RAS teachers prepare each lesson plan with the recognition of the values behind that subject content and of the value of building character through specific learning activities. The teachers consider the issues and systematically identify the objectives in every lesson plan. Although teachers plan individually, they also have the opportunity to



practice Kalayanamitre through teamwork as often as possible with the school principal and other teachers. This collaboration is essential in order for them to share and learn from each other and practice mindfulness in their planning (Niyom, 2008; Mohjhaw et al, 2013).

#### *The Mindful Classroom Teaching and Learning System*

The teacher is able to facilitate all students in this type of classroom and lead each student to the learning attainment targets, and ultimately to the targeted values. Through this type of classroom, the students are able to learn to cultivate their self-actualization and characteristics of right intention. Skillful teachers can provide different larger spaces, and learning activities in which students can share their creativity. This is the crucial opportunity which brings mindfulness practice into real-life situations and helps to cultivate the students' character.

#### *The Embedded Formative Assessment System*

With this systematic thinking process, the teachers will learn to be aware of relative cause and effect through the use of skills by applying wise reflection. This platform was selected to obtain the embedded formative assessment suggested by Professor Vijarn Panich in his 2014 book (Panich, 2014), and the constructive way of learning evaluation corresponding to the mindful classroom teaching and learning.

Whenever the learning objectives focus on the students' outcomes and the required standard, the teachers' observation of their students will be more accurate. It is easier for the RAS teachers to follow the more attentive assessment introduced by Professor Panich than the previously used guidelines, which followed only the learning objectives stated in the lesson plan. Through the properly pre-planned learning activities, the teachers are able to anticipate the outputs and the outcomes to achieve better results. As the teachers have already prepared the 'value'-integrated learning objectives in their lesson plan in advance, they can easily focus their observation on 'students' ability to learn', as well as exercise more constructive reflection.

At the last part of those plans, teachers need to prepare the evaluating system to apply the embedded formative assessment in order to help each student develop through his or her performance. In doing so, the teachers are trained to have a mindful, thoughtful and compassionate relationship with their students as if they are their learning partners in the classrooms.

#### *The Teachers' Wise Reflection System*

Teachers prepare the evaluation system to apply the embedded formative assessment in order to help develop and guide each student through his or her performance. The most important facet of the teacher's teamwork is the



group reflection/dialogue which is organized as the BAR (Before Action Review) and AAR (After Action Review) activity.

The AAR-BAR platform guided by Kalayanamitre principles provides an open and secure space for sharing and learning from the results obtained from the classroom teaching and learning. Both success and failure are candidly reflected upon and respected as the teachers' learning experiences. This practice helps support the more effective development of both teachers and students.

Through these regular dialogues in weekly meetings, RAS finds that the teachers develop wise reflection and the ability to share better than being given evaluation notes. Similarly, the teachers prefer in-class observation by their team to enhance sharing their experiences in the AAR-BAR meetings. Mindful speaking and deep listening are also essential.

### *Contemplative Community of Practices*

In the three case studies, social awareness and interpersonal skills are fundamental to achieving both school and life success and play a key role in both the curriculum and life in school. The aim is for students to develop a wise and balanced relationship with others by developing self-awareness and communication skills and contributing to the well-being of the school and society. It includes teaching the foundations of Buddhist morality as a scheme for living together wisely with trust and integrity, as well as learning about sociology and history forged with life skills.

As a tool towards developing good relationships and harmony among community members, Panyaprateep School uses a so-called circle of friendship. The school uses the circle meeting as a weekly open forum to express gratitude and appreciation for all the good things one sees in other people, and to offer apologies and forgiveness for unskillful actions one has done to others. This regular heart-opening exercise, in a sincere manner, proves to be a powerful tool to strengthen positive and constructive relationships among all community members and helps resolve a lot of conflicts that have arisen.

### *The Community and Learning Partners: families-community-social groups*

Another unique aspect of the Buddhist Approach School is the community that is comprised of Family-Temple-School. The interconnected relationship of sharing and learning among students, teachers, parents and monks and other contemplative wise spiritual teachers or trainers has been encouraged in a variety of different platforms and activities, such as formal mindfulness meditation training, daily praying and morning assembly, Kalayanamitre classroom contemplative practices and Buddhist traditional activities.

The schools also stress the need for continuous practice in order to get used to mindful behavior, knowledge and investigation. This practice guides



students out of attachment to desire, as taught by the Buddha. Students are taught mindfulness even through their body's every movement (i.e. every time we breathe, swallow or chew). At RAS, students are introduced to the formal practice of four or more continuous days of these mindfulness practices to help sharpen the basic skills of awareness in addition to informal practices for applying self-awareness in daily life.

In order to provide a convenient place for regular contemplative practices, RAS has built a retreat center named 'Guru Sati Sathan', which can accommodate 60 trainees at a time, with full facilities. It has well-arranged meditation areas for individuals and groups, with monthly scheduled activities for their staff or other interested people. Many experienced teachers and monks willingly help teach participants at the retreat center.

In addition, the development of the 'Mindful Parents Classroom' at RAS is composed of a prerequisite 30 hours of training workshops of sharing and learning activities combined with mindfulness practice for parents of new students held over nine continuous weekends before the beginning of the first academic year. During the training the school designs simple activities to challenge the parents' self-awareness and to build the basic relationship of trust between parents and children. For example, when parents and children have lunch together, the teachers observe how parents behave towards their children. Are they over-directing or under-disciplining their children? In another example, when playing sports in the field with teamwork regulations, could parents recognize themselves if they are blocking their child's motivation by either over-deciding or stealing the child's opportunity to do it by him/herself?

The mindful reflection discussion in AAR helps remind them of their mind's behavior, such as how they feel when they see their children fail to manage their lunch according to their expectation, and how they react to that feeling. These reflective questions are necessary to help parents practice mindfulness in their parenting. For example, if they could revisit the actions, what would they rather do or not do?

Many kinds of activities can be exercised as long as the AAR session is integrated as an important element for everyone to be able to share and delve deeper into the value of self-awareness or actualization to be more ready to be Kalayanamitre to their children. Currently, the parents' self-organized group of Buddhist training and studying activities has regularly arranged special events in the school. They invite renowned guests or monks to present the essence of Buddha's teaching or lead the contemplative practices in daily life, in addition to organizing religious excursions. These activities help inspire and encourage strong attentiveness to one's development of self-awareness, which results in the improvement of the parents' behavior and of their relationship to their family.



### *Teachers' and Parents' Mindful Dialogue*

At Panyaprateep, parents in the school system are regarded as the 'second-tiered students' who have to be trained continually to be skillful parents. They are invited to be closely involved in the school activities, in the learning process of the students and for their own training and development. Parents are strongly encouraged to participate in parents' retreat programs organized fourteen times per year as a half-day event. They are also invited to join school trips.

At RAS, a platform is scheduled for teachers and parents to make their relationship more mature and develop communication with the right view and trust. The teachers are guided and trained to apply dialogue skills. During face-to-face conversation, mindful listening and speaking in accordance with the guidelines of Kalayanamitre and Yonisomanasikara are encouraged.

In addition to teachers and school personnel, others in the broader school community are able to network and establish this culture of a Buddhist-approach community as a focal point of contemplative development and as a foundation to support a strong civic society. As families become more involved in the children's activities, the children will be happy and will develop their own good habits. In this regard, the dynamic system of interconnection will help sustain the sense of community and create a more harmonious society.

### **In Conclusion**

When compared with the past and the conventional approach of Christian schools or the Buddhist temple schools, including the novice monk schools in Thailand during the previous century, this chapter has shown a new direction of religious application in the schooling system in Thailand. The discussion of the concept of learning and teaching in the three case-study schools represents the different ways of applying the essences of religious principles as guidelines for practice in schools. These case studies have clearly demonstrated how the deep interpretation from the heart of any religion as well as the integration of this into the whole process of the schooling system can leverage the modern education system. Not only students, but teachers and parents also are able to be trained in the holistic mode of learning and contemplative practice, in order to develop both body and mind as well as academic and life skills infused with moral values.

The key to achieving a holistic learning process is the interpretation of a value development system derived from religious principles. While each of these schools are different from each other they still share the ultimate goal of a state of wisdom in human development. These schools demonstrate how the interfaith dialogue between the different religions could be shared and learned. Furthermore, we realize from these schools' experiences that the power of knowing oneself and of the moment of here and now is always



found existing in each individual, no matter what the spiritual practice. These practices can be strengthened to develop personal understanding, love and compassion and to transform learners within a revolutionized system with religion integrated into education.

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