

A Buddhist Sunday School and a Community

โรงเรียนพุทธศาสนาวันอาทิตย์และชุมชน

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Abstract

This article presents how and what a Buddhist Sunday School in Thailand does for the benefit of the community. Content is about provided lessons and supported learning activities to students of a Buddhist Sunday School. In addition, description of expectation of parents, and community towards a Buddhist Sunday School and students' achievement both in physical and in mental health.

Keywords: a Buddhist Sunday School, instructional method, Community Strength, the self-training; the Kāya Bhāvanā

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้กล่าวถึง โรงเรียนพุทธศาสนาวันอาทิตย์ ในประเทศไทย ว่าทำอะไรและทำอย่างไร เพื่อให้เกิดประโยชน์แก่ชุมชน เนื้อหาของบทความมีรายละเอียดเกี่ยวกับ กิจกรรมการเรียนการสอน รายวิชาและกิจกรรมที่ส่งเสริมให้นักเรียนได้เรียนรู้นอกเหนือจากกิจกรรมในชั้นเรียน นอกจากนี้ บทความยังกล่าวถึง ความคาดหวังของผู้ปกครอง และชุมชน ต่อผลสัมฤทธิ์ด้านสุขภาพกายและจิตใจของนักเรียน

คำสำคัญ: โรงเรียนพุทธศาสนาวันอาทิตย์ ระบบการเรียนการสอน ชุมชนเข้มแข็ง กายภาวนา

1. Introduction

Thai children have low academic performance, due to scoring of basic knowledge in the country annual test: Ordinary National Educational Test (O-Net), the OECD's, and the PISA tests (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Program for International Student Assessment test) of its 2015 global rankings on Thai student performance in science, reading, and mathematics is under standard. Thailand ranks No. 55 out of a total of 72 countries in Program for International Student Assessment test (PISA). Unpleasantly, the PISA 2015 results of Thai students is lower than the results in 2014 for all subjects. While, Singapore ranks No 1, scoring 556, 535 and 564.

Thai Government tries to solve the problem by focusing on both budget and time for studying and learning. Thirty-six point four percent of the 2017 total budget of financial support is allocated. A policy of student's learning interest and time allotment in school called "Moderate Class, More Knowledge" is also launched.

Ministry of Education has put effort on policy of "Moderate Class, More Knowledge" is expected by school, educator and parent that it supports student in learning successfully. Learning evaluation is expected a better result either on the basic knowledge test, O-Net, or, the PISA. Ministry of Education has put effort that Thai students would have ability in applying knowledge to practice. Ministry of Education hopes education would solved problem.

King Rama IX, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej views on education, that, "In order to develop the nation, one should have not only knowledge but also other necessary qualifications". HM. King Bhumibol Adulyadej also gives examples that one should: "--- be ashamed to commit a sin, be

honest in thought and action, be grateful to the country and benefactors, be unselfish, and be good hearted and kind to others.” His Majesty King Rama IX also remarks on education that education can be divided into two kinds. One is academic education, which will be useful to the country after the students graduated. The other is the knowledge of dharma-Buddhist ethics that leads to ways of thinking and behaving in order to benefit oneself.

Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, Office of the Prime Minister, Bangkok, declares the overall objectives and development targets of the Twelfth Plan (2017-2021) follows the main targets that Thai people should have a good value-system, possess discipline, attitudes and manners according to the norms of society. Thai people should also be receptive to learning, practical, well-informed, responsible, physically and mentally healthy, spiritually refined, self-sufficient and able to represent Thainess. The Thainess is the Thai culture and tradition and many more.

In addition, the National Education Act of 2017-2021 have set the goals for achievement upon completing basic education. Parts of those focus on students’ ability of critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, cross-cultural understanding, collaboration, teamwork and leadership, communications, information and media literacy, computing and ICT literacy, career and learning skills, and compassion.

Researches concern that happy learning will help students in learning. UthaiPAYUCK, D. stated in “The Development of the Buddhist Instructional Model for Enhancing Environmental Conservational Behavior of Young Children” that Buddhist Instructional Model and lesson plan is considered qualified for Thai students. Finding reveals that students perform better in the Buddhist Instructional Model class. It provides opportunity and encourages young children in learning happily through environmental and conservation behavior.

2. Concept of a Buddhist Sunday School

This article focuses on the Buddhist Sunday School under the patronage of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU.) main campus at Wang Noi district, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province, Thailand.

2.1 Background of Buddhist Sunday School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University

Buddhist Sunday School all over the Kingdom of Thailand, and also Buddhist Sunday School in the Buddhist Thai temples in foreign countries, is the result of establishment of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. The university has a strong commitment as the leading center of knowledge in Buddhism and aims to integrate the knowledge with various sciences for human beings with the concentration to educate people, conduct excellent academic research for the development of university’s academic studies and for the benefit of happy society.

2.2 Promotion of Buddhism: His Majesty King Chulalongkorn, King Rama V, found Buddhism necessary for security, prosperity and peace in the country. This resulted His Majesty King Rama V support monks in education. His Majesty stated to consistently support Buddhism and monks. His commitments was the strong will in supporting Buddhism.

2.3 The Sangha Administration Act: His Majesty King Rama V issued the Sangha Administration Act in B.E. 2445 (1902). The 1902 Sangha Administration Act systemized the Sangha administration across the country. According to the Act, equality educational opportunity for all, both laymen and monks, was granted.

2.4 Establishment of Buddhist Sunday School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University: In 1953, a Buddhist Sunday school in Bangkok was founded by His Venerable Phra Pimondhamma (Ard Asabha Thera), after His official visit to the Buddhist temples in the country of Burma and Sri Lanka. His Venerable observed that there was a Dhamma class for young children and for those who are needy. When He came back from the visit, He proposed the idea of establishing the Buddhist Sunday school to administrators of Sangha and the monk-students of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. Later, in 1958, the Buddhist Sunday school in Bangkok was first formally introduced at Wat Mahathat Yuwarajangsarit in Bangkok.

2.5 School campus: There are four campuses of Buddhist Sunday schools under the patronage of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU). They are as 1) Buddhist Sunday School, MCU, first and main campus, is

located in Wat Mahathat Yuwarajangsarit, Thanon Maharat, Phra Nakhon District, Bangkok. Classes are officially operated since 13th July, 1958.

2) Buddhist Sunday School, MCU, Suansom school campus, Somrongtai Sub-dist., Phrapradang Dist., Samutprakarn province. Classes founded in 29 June, 1985.

3) Buddhist Sunday School, MCU, WatTri Samakkee School campus, Bang Muang Mai Sub-dist., Mueang Dist., Samut Prakan Province. Buddhist Sunday classes founded in 8th June, 1995.

4) Buddhist Sunday School, MCU, WangNoi campus is located at Lam Sai sub-district, Wang Noi district, Ayutthaya province. It is an expansion of Wat Mahathat and Wat Si Sudaram.

2.6 School administration: School administrator is elected and promoted by the Sangha authority. School President, Vice president and the key management personnel are Buddhist monks in a high rank. Laypeople also have opportunity to work for other positions in the school administration too but in the level of assistant.

2.7 Instructional system of Buddhist Sunday school: The school instructional system of Buddhist Sunday school in Thailand and also in Thai Buddhist temples in other countries is under supervision of Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Culture. Financial and necessity is supported by Department of Religious Affairs, group of Buddhist followers, and four campuses are under the patronage of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. In addition, a large sum of budget is donated to the benefit of Buddhist Sunday school by Buddhist supporters. Supports are in the form of volunteers as teachers. There are Buddhist monks and laypersons who are professionals in specific career.

Curriculum and subject: Curriculum and subject is graded in three levels, beginners, intermediate and advance. Subjects taught are in three categories. They are compulsory, elective and supported learning activities.

2.8 Subjects provided in Buddhist Sunday school, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya: The subjects are Buddha Dharma taught by volunteer Buddhist monks in the morning. Later in the afternoon session, elective subjects are taught by volunteers lay persons. Volunteers lay persons are specialist in local wisdom and crafting arts.

There are two types of subjects, compulsory and elective. The compulsory ones are History of Buddhism, Buddha Dharma, integrity and morality, including with Philosophy of Buddhism and other beliefs. The electives are general subjects as in schools of formal education. Elective subjects are crafting and arts, local Thai music and dance performance of local wisdom. Many activities are similar to the process of general public schools in the country. By the way, differences from other schools are

compulsory subject. Buddhist Sunday school provides compulsory subjects on Pali study, Buddhist Chanting Practice, Meditation session, and Leading of Buddhist Ceremony Practice.

2.9. School fee: The school is free of charge, resulting from the statement above, that school is supported by Department of Religious Affairs, group of Buddhist supporters, and Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University foundation. On the other hand, every applicant in the school is required on taking Buddhism and History of Buddhism as compulsory subject. There are three main compulsory subjects and some elective subjects provided. The compulsory subjects are Buddhism and History of Buddhism, the Buddha's teaching-'Dharma', integrity and morality including Philosophy of Buddhism and other beliefs. The elective subjects are local handcraft, classical and local Thai arts and music. The elective subjects are offered in accordance to the volunteers at certain school.

However, there are Buddhist Sunday schools in other countries that support themselves, for example a Buddhist Sunday School at Dharma Gate Buddhist College, Budapest, Hungary. Children who go to school pay for the school fee, but it is in a small sum

3. Community Strength

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University is the key supporter to Buddhist Sunday schools in Thailand. That is a great number of monks and lay-people volunteer teachers. Many of them are former students of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University

In addition, the mission of the University is to nurture young children to opportunity in learning. This specific reason leads to the establishment and management of Buddhist Sunday schools.

As a consequence, Buddhist Sunday schools support communities by welcoming children to come under the caring and sharing of the school with Buddhist monks volunteer as teachers. School provides meditation practice class to students. "A Development of the Instructional Model through Integrating Buddhist Concepts to Nurture Caring Behaviors in Nursing Students" reveals by Kosolchuenvijit, J. states that following Buddhist wisdom of the Four Noble Truths supports and encourages students on concepts in nurture caring behaviors.

In return, community around the Buddhist Sunday schools have opportunity to do good deed. Many people offer financial support and free lunch and others to students. Some specialist volunteer to teach, for example, English and other traditional Thai classic art. These lessons are great benefit to student in both physical and mental. Chimplee, K. reveals, in "Knowledge Management Models for Local Wisdom in Wickerwork Handicrafts: A Case Study of Local Community Enterprises in Nakhon Ratchasima Province" that local art relates to the knowledge, abilities and experience, which the elders have helped to create and transferred from generation to generation. The local knowledge is part of the social learning, influencing the way the younger generations think and live their daily lives. Local knowledge identifies knowledge through a collective thinking and decision-making process. It acquires and captures knowledge both within community and the neighbor.

Phrakhrupalad PrakobThanavuddho revealed the results of a research entitled, "Buddhist Based Happy Learning of Students in Buddhist Sunday School of MCU that students are happy in learning using learning method integrated with BuddhaDhamma. The learning meets requirements of students, their guardians and community. The learning plan is based on the Threefold Training principles. Findings shows that students were happy in learning

Attending Buddhist Sunday School is different from students' actual school, students are in different environment from home and the practical school. Students study by observing the monk-teachers. They are encouraged to practice analytical thinking "Yonosomanasikāra" automatically. They

slowly developed practicing the virtues for a good household life, or virtues for lay people-Gharāvāsā-Dharma. Those are Sacca, Dama, Khanti and Cāga.

Parents and guardians said that they would like their children to be in the environment that children practice morality and integrity. Their opinion is that Buddhist Sunday School decreases their work of looking for activities for their children on weekend. In addition, the two younger parents see that having their children in relaxing classes with teachers who practice morality and integrity, is a sign of cultivating a better behavior in their children.

In conclusion, students' performance of behavior and their learning outcome confirmed that they are happy learning in the school environment. Students like their classes, their teachers and friends. They are happy to be with their teachers.

Volunteer teachers practice the Kāya Bhāvanā in the form of sharing and caring for students. This Kāya-bhāvanā is a part of Bhāvanā 4. Teachers help students learning through physical development, first. Next, while students are in the process of the training for physical development, they are continuing onto the cultivation of the heart. At the same time, the Sila-bhāvanā, is developed too. At the end, Paññā-bhāvanā: intellectual development of individual would be in progress. Then, happiness would be increased individually.

4. The self-training: the Kāya Bhāvanā

Development of happiness in Buddhism focuses on Paññā Bhāvanā, one of the Four Bhāvanā. The word Bhāvanā referring to prosperity or training for better achievement. The first one is development of physical training called Kāya Bhāvanā. That is the training and learning through the body organs. They are eyes, ears, nose, tongue and the physical body. Kāya Bhāvanā is a practice of living friendly in the environment with caring and sharing. For example, first, the eyes and the ears are for watching and listening to the benefit of concentration towards the path of wisdom. Second, consumption through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, must be carefully concentrate, if we really want those things.

The second Bhāvanā is development of a being in morality and integrity called Sila Bhāvanā. Sila Bhāvanā is the training and practicing a moral conduct, observing precepts with regulation and social rules. The person is said to know how to earn a living with honest efforts, and performs his economic duties properly. A person with Sila Bhāvanā also associates with learned people that are helpful to the livelihood.

In addition, the third one is the development of mind called Citta Bhāvanā. It is the training of the state of consciousness. It is the cultivation of the heart and mind towards integrity and morality. The heart and mind is perfectly fulfilled with quality and competency. With the Citta Bhāvanā, the person enjoy his good health, and confident in conducting his life and duty with wisdom.

5. Conclusion

Necessities in learning social studies, religion and culture that religion and culture is stated to enables learners to acquire knowledge and understand the lives of human beings as both individuals and as coexisting members of a society. The learning area of social studies addresses student self-adjustment in harmony with environmental situations. Students are capable with morality and the ability to adjust knowledge gained for application in leading their lives as good citizens of the country and desirable members of the world community.

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Phra Thataroth Adipanyo (Silasila) confirmed the research entitled Development of Buddhist Sunday School Model Based on Virtues Conducive to Growth (Vuddhi Dhamma) that apart from the compulsory subject, the elective subject of local wisdom took part in relieving social problems caused by youth. Buddhist Sunday school of Wat Gounchorn-wanaram, Ban Nongkuanchang, Tanbon Nongsongkorn, Muaeng District, Mahasarakam Province provides local wisdom class in elective subject. Local wisdom taught in this school was preservation of food called Jaew Bong, the popular northeastern spicy fish paste. Students also learn how to pleat, drape or smock the fabric for decoration of the podium, welcoming table, information board or platform.

Experiences and the accumulation of learning in a Buddhist Sunday school nurture students and community to have a strong and healthy relationship.

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