International Journal of Progressive Education, Volume 10 Number 2, 2014

Teaching Students of Today: The Buddha's Way

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Abstract
21st century students are living on the highway of rapid information technology, residing in homes equipped with modern gadgets that allow them to stay connected through virtual media. The fact that students' mind-sets are changing means that there is a need for corresponding changes in pedagogy. The Buddha is known as 'Teacher of gods and men', who is able to communicate his teaching of the Dhamma to people far and wide, and from all walks of life. What lessons can present-day teachers learn from the Buddha's pedagogy? This article sets to describe the Buddha's teaching methods, and their relevance for present-day teachers and students.

Keywords: Dhamma, pedagogy, Buddha, education, teaching methods.

Introduction

Thus have I heard: 'This Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation … takes delight in worldliness … It is hard for such a generation to see the truth, namely specific conditionality and dependent origination. And it is hard to see this truth, namely, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna. If I were to teach the Dhamma, others would not understand me, and that would be wearying and troublesome for me ... Considering thus, my mind inclined to inaction rather than to teaching the Dhamma' (MN 26.19Ariyapariyesanā Sutta: The Noble Search).

The above words, uttered by Buddha Gotama after gaining Enlightenment (in the sixth century BC), resonates well with teachers of the 21st century AD, who face a daunting task teaching students. Today's students are living on the highway of communication and information technology, residing in homes equipped with modern gadgets that allow them to stay connected virtually through social media, and with parents whose command is their children's wishes. The students' lifestyle, everyday language, hobbies and attitude towards life reflect a post-modern outlook – *anything goes*. This 'anything goes' attitude welcomes anything that brings pleasure and immediate gratification, avoids pain and delayed gratification, and as much as possible, excludes anything that requires self-reflection, moral discipline and social responsibility.

The fact that students' mind-sets are changing means that there is a need for corresponding changes in pedagogy, or the methodology of teaching in schools. But what kind of approach can teachers adopt so that students can feel positive about going to school, have faith in the school and teachers as the purveyor of education, their motivation to stay in school is sustained, and that they become people with character and strong moral discipline from the education they receive from teachers? What kind of pedagogy is appropriate and beneficial for today's students so that they can be taught and guided to generate the right questions, develop the right skills, acquire the right knowledge, cultivate the right values, and live by the right moral principles?

The above scenario set the stage for the subject matter of this article, which is to describe the Buddha's teaching methods and their relevance for present-day teachers. This article argues that the Buddha's methodology in teaching the Dhamma is premised on several pertinent principles and strategic approaches. Buddha's vision is not only to ensure that his message of the Dhamma is understood by his listeners or disciples, but more so, to inspire the listener or learner to translate what he/she has listened or learned into actual action, with the Dhamma gradually becoming his/her way of life or culture.

At the outset, it needs to be said that, even though the reference is Buddha, this article will only focus on his teaching methods, and not on his Dhamma or his Doctrine. Hence, this article will be relevant for teachers, Buddhists or non-Buddhists, who find teaching students of today a formidable and intimidating endeavour.

There are four sections in this article. The first section returns to the educational context as described in the Introduction above, with a brief outline of the meaning of education and the changing scenario of education in Malaysia, in particular. The second section provides an overview of the Buddha's decision to be a *teacher of gods and men* (overruling his prior decision not to teach) and his incisive knowledge of variations between individuals. The third section outlines the Buddha's pedagogy, that is his humane principles and methodological approaches, and how present-day teachers can learn and benefit from the Buddha's pedagogy. The fourth section summarises the important points described in the preceding sections and reiterates the relevance of Buddha's pedagogy for modern-day teachers.

The Context: The Educational Situation

Ajahn Chah (1994, p. 193) gave a simile of the vulture to depict the situation of 'educated people': 'Many people who have studied till university level and attained graduate degrees and worldly success find that there is still something missing in their lives. Although they think high thoughts and are intellectually sophisticated, their hearts are still filled with pettiness and doubt. It's like a vulture: it flies high, but what does it feed on?' Bhikkhu Bodhi (1998), writing on the aims of Buddhist education, makes a parallel observation on the declining state of education in schools: 'Ideally, education is the principal tool of human growth, essential for transforming the unlettered child into a mature and responsible adult. Yet everywhere today, both in the developed world and the developing world, we can see that formal education is in serious trouble. Classroom instruction has become so routinised that children often consider school an exercise in patience rather than an adventure in learning. Even the brightest and most conscientious students easily become restless, and for many the only attractive escape routes lie along the dangerous roads of drugs, sexual experimentation, and outbursts of senseless violence. Teachers too find themselves in a dilemma, dissatisfied with the system which they serve but unable to see a meaningful alternative to it.'

Bhikkhu Bodhi might not have mentioned a specific country or locality, but his observation reflects on many countries of the world (for example, the USA with the most recent tragedy involving a 20 year old man killing 20 children and 6 adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Connecticut, and his own his mother at their home on 14 December 2012 (Melia 2012). The Malaysian government is reported to be considering reinstating corporal punishment for students who misbehaved or showed no respect for authority while in school. Why is education taking a turn for the worse? Instead of being a place to transform students' character, and help students to bring out the best in them, schools are now playing the opposite role, that is, it now functions as a place for bringing out the worst in students. People go to school, but they may not get an education.

One major reason for this sad state of affairs, according to Bhikkhu Bodhi (1998), is a loss of vision regarding the proper aims of education. The word "education" literally means "to bring forth," which indicates that the true task of this process is to draw forth from the mind its innate potential for understanding. The urge to learn, to know and comprehend is a basic human trait, as intrinsic to our minds as hunger and thirst are to our bodies. In today's turbulent world, however, this hunger to learn is often deformed by the same moral twists that afflict the wider society ... In our schools the minds of the young are deprived of the nutriment they need for healthy growth. In the name of education the students are passed through courses of standardized instruction intended to make them efficient servants of a demeaning social system. While such education may be necessary to guarantee societal stability, it does little to fulfil the higher end of learning, the illumination of the mind with the light of truth and goodness.'

Suraj Narain Sharma (1994, p. 189), writing on '*Buddhist social and moral education*', wrote about the degradation of the modern human being, or what he terms as 'inner emptiness' of the modern human being: 'The depersonalising tendencies of social and economic scene are varied and many; the growth of automation and the division of labour have converted the worker into such a slave of the machine that work has become drudgery for him, boring and stultifying; the growth of gigantism in industry, ever increasing bureaucratisation and the development of a routinized life are combined with periods of leisure that drown people's deep discontent with their work …'

This brings to mind Paulo Freire's thesis on the inability of contemporary education system to play its role in eradicating poverty among the poor. The education system has an important role to play in eliminating poverty, but unfortunately, as Freire asserts in his book, '*Pedagogy of the oppressed*' (1972), the education system has failed in undertaking this task. Why is this so? According to Freire, this is so because the education system is very far removed from the actual living conditions, in other words, the social living realities of the students. Most of the students attending school come from poor

family backgrounds, from the rural areas, or slums, but the education syllabus taught to them is not about them, their living conditions, or their history.

Freire believes that the institution of education has an important role in assisting the government to sustainably eliminate the poverty cycle, and to develop critical consciousness among the stakeholders concerned, in particular teachers and students. In order to foster such transformational (and not transactional) change, Freire advocates a change in the teaching methods that were used in mainstream education system. Freire's pedagogical method is a two-way teaching and learning method, involving dialogue-exchange between teacher and student, and the students' real life experiences, or *praxis*. Students will warm up to the discussion as the topic of discussion is something familiar and not foreign, to them. By using words or themes that students have first-hand experience or are culturally familiar to them, the teacher will find it easy to sensitise the students to their own social realities, thereby initiating the 'first turning of the wheel' (to borrow Buddha's words) of critical consciousness in education.

Meaningful dialogue is possible because every word or topic discussed is based on praxis, that is, direct experiences and real living conditions of the students themselves. The teaching-learning environment that evolves from meaningful dialogue based on real life experiences of students becomes more humane and inclusive, unlike the banking system of mainstream education. Under Freire's proposed praxis-based pedagogy, the students will feel they are '*participants'*, rather than '*spectators'*, '*contributors'* rather than '*recipients'*, hence '*subjects*; rather than '*objects'* of the educational process. Consequently, the educational environment will not exist like before, where one party, that is the teachers, 'deposit' their ideas and knowledge onto another party, that is the students unilaterally, or as a one-way exchange flow from the teachers to be consumed by the students (Freire, 1972, p. 61).

This alternative teaching-learning approach which is based on real life conditions of the students will stimulate the mind to think reflectively and critically with regards their own living conditions and social situation. Freire gave a new term for this critical consciousness, that is *conscientisation,* a compound concept made up of *conscience* (consciousness of what is right and wrong, good and bad) and *sensitisation* (sensitivity to real life situations). Such conscientisation provokes the students to not only reflect but also to inquire, question and investigate their historical situation and current social conditions, as well as to analyse the connectivity between the two. Consequently, the students will be empowered to act as subjects to initiate change to their living conditions and real-life situation. Freire's advocation for conscientisation of the education system will enable the system, to stimulate the process of thinking and 'bringing forth' from the students' minds their innate potential for understanding (borrowing Bhikkhu Bodhi's definition of education above).

The Buddha Cares: An Incomparable Trainer and Teacher of Gods and Men

> ' … Then I listened to Brahma's pleading, and out of compassion for beings, I surveyed the world with the eye of a Buddha. Surveying the world with the eye of a Buddha, I saw beings with little dust in their eyes, and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities, and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach, and some who dwelt with fear in blame and in the other world. Just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rest on the water's surface, and some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rise out of the water and stand clear, unwetted by it.' (MN 26.21Ariyapariyesanā Sutta: The Noble Search).

After listening to Brahma Sahampati's appeal, the Buddha decided to reconsider his earlier decision not to teach the Dhamma he has discovered upon his Enlightenment: 'Open for them are the doors to the Deathless. Let those with ears now show their faith. Thinking it will be troublesome, O Brahma, I did not speak the Dhamma subtle and sublime' (MN 26.21 Ariyapariyesanā Sutta: The

Noble Search). Buddha realised that there would be beings who would want to listen to the Dhamma he is preaching and who would be able to comprehend. Having made the decision to teach 'for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of devas and humans,' (AN1.13 One Person; SN4.5 Mara's Snare; DN 16 Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: The Great Passing), the Buddha embarked on a mission to bring the Dhamma to as many people as possible, regardless of caste, colour, creed, custom, class or capabilities. This strategic approach constitutes several important principles.

The Buddha declares that the Dhamma he wants to share with fellow human beings and also devas, is *not a secretdoctrine*: 'These three things, monks, are conducted in secret, not openly. What three? Affairs with women, the mantras of the brahmins, and wrong view. But these three things, monks, shine openly, not in secret. What three? The moon, the sun, and the Dhamma and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata' (AN 3.129 Not a Secret Doctrine; Bhikkhu Bodhi 2005, 88).

The Buddha is able to make such an assertion because heisthe Blessed One, Exalted, Omniscient, Perfect in knowledge and conduct, Fully accomplished, Knower of the worlds, Incomparable Guide for the training of persons, Teacher of gods and men, Enlightened, Blessed. The Buddha *knows*; he has gained insight (wisdom) into the Dhamma (Truth) through his own effort, and able to impart his knowledge through strategic mechanisms so as to bring benefit to the world of devas, gods and human beings. As Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005, p. 88) puts it, 'the teachings of the Buddha shines openly, as radiant and brilliant as the light of the sun and moon. Freedom from the cloak of secrecy is integral to a teaching that gives primacy to direct experience, inviting each individual to test its principles in the crucible of his or her own experience.'

The Buddha therefore embraces the principle of *inclusiveness*, accommodating all who want to learn the Dhamma. The Buddha has said, upon his decision to teach, 'Let those with ears now show their faith.' This also means that the Buddha upholds the principle of *diversity*; his teaching is not reserved for a particular individual, clan, elite, gender, class, able-bodied, locality, or the intellectually inclined. By declaring that he does not teach with a closed fist (in secret), the Buddha is also saying that the Dhamma he teaches is *not a dogma*, *nor* does it demand *blind faith*. Instead, the Buddha cautions the people to not accept his teachings out of reverence and blind faith, and encourages the people to ponder and reflect on his teachings, to question and criticise him, to engage in a dialogue with him.

The Vimaṁsaka Sutta: The Inquirer (MN 47) and Kālāma Sutta(The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry) (AN 3.65) substantiate the Buddha's emphasis of not accepting what is the truth just because the words were uttered by a spiritual teacher. Only through observation and investigation of the spiritual teacher's bodily, verbal and also mental actions can the disciple verify or evaluate the teacher's claim to be enlightened or perfectly enlightened. More importantly, these suttas underscore the Buddha's advice that the truth of the Dhamma lies not just in listening or accepting the Buddha's words. Once the disciple gains confidence that the Buddha is what he says he is, that is a Perfectly Enlightened One, the disciple tries to practise and live by the Dhamma. Through direct knowledge and personal experience, the disciple will gain unshakeable faith in the path laid out by the Buddha towards final liberation from suffering and ultimate happiness, *nibbāna*. Bhikkhu Bodhi's description aptly explains the situation: 'Thus the entire process of training in the Dhamma is rooted in personal experience. Even faith should be rooted in investigation and inquiry and not based solely upon emotional leanings and blind belief. Faith alone is insufficient but is the door to deeper levels of experience. Faith serves as a spur to practice; practice leads to experiential understanding; and when one's understanding matures, it blossoms in full realisation' (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2005, p. 87).

This is precisely the value and code of conduct the Buddha wants to cultivate in his disciples – be they monastics or lay people. The value refers to the importance of not accepting anything as truth out of fear, respect, command or blind faith. The Kālāma Sutta offers an excellent example of how the Buddha explains to the people of Kesaputta, called Kālāmas, the standards for accepting as the truth

and the standards for not accepting as the truth (AN 3.65 Kālāma Sutta; Bhikkhu Bodhi 2005, 89). The Kālāma Sutta brings us to the code of conduct mentioned above. This code of conduct refers to the application of the Buddha's teachings or Dhamma in our everyday lives. This application involves using *direct experience* as the basis for making judgements or for accepting what is the truth or not the truth. The Buddha knows that direct or personal experience can help people to understand their present condition better, and consequently work towards improving their conduct based on this understanding. As Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005, p. 83) points out, the Buddha does not demand that we *begin* our spiritual quest by placing faith in doctrines that lie beyond the range of our immediate experience. Instead he asks us to consider a few simple questions pertaining to our immediate welfare and happiness, questions that we can answer on the basis of personal experience.

Buddha lays emphasis on personal experience based on the here and now because he knows 'that people are primarily motivated to act by a concern for their own welfare and happiness' (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2005, p. 85). Hence, Buddha's method of using the people's personal experiences, or *praxis*, in the context of their present living conditions allow the people to see for themselves how the Buddha Dhamma is applicable to, and beneficial for, their lives here and now. More importantly, the people can also see and experience the benefits of practising directly the Buddha's teachings here and now (refer the Gāmanisaṃyutta: Connected Discourses with Headmen (SN 42.11).

This attention on the here and now also reflects Buddha's sensitivity towards the human physiological condition, in particular, hunger. There is a story of how the Buddha did not want to preach the Dhamma to a hungry man. Why is this so? The Buddha knows that hunger is the greatest disease (Dhp, verse 203 Hunger is the greatest affliction), and there is no ailment which is difficult to bear as hunger, and that is why the Buddha decided not to preach to the hungry man. According to the Buddha, if one is feeling hungry, the pangs of hunger might have prevented him from comprehending the Dhamma fully. Many centuries later, Maslow (1954) used the same principle as the Buddha for his theory on the hierarchy of human needs – with the most basic physiological needs given the first priority.

Having outlined some of the Buddha's principles underlying his decision to teach the Dhamma out of compassion to the multitude of gods and men, we now move on to Buddha's strategic approaches or methods of teaching.

Buddha's Pedagogy: A Matter for Teachers

Freire (1972) has emphasised the need for teachers to 're-educate' themselves first before they could 'educate' their students. By re-education, it means to re-train themselves in the pedagogy of teaching students who come from varied backgrounds, and in particular, 'oppressed' living conditions. More than 2500 years before Freire, the Buddha Gotama has expressed similar emphasis on the importance of developing qualities within oneself so as to be able to reach out and help others develop similar qualities that one has developed for oneself. 'Let one first establish oneself in what is proper, and then instruct others. Such a wise man will not be defiled' *(*Dhp, Verse158 Advisers should set the example first*)*.

As an aspiring trainer of conduct for others, one must first train oneself first, for as the Buddha has declared, 'one who is sinking in the mud cannot for certain pull out another who is also sinking in the mud (MN 8 Sallekha Sutta: The Discourse on Effacement). Likewise, one not sunk in the mud can for certain be in a better position to pull out another sunk in the mud. Henceforth, an aspiring teacher who is 'untamed, untrained' cannot by himself, tame and train another (Siddhi, 1995, p. 15).

How should an aspiring teacher 'tame and train' himself/herself? The Buddha has laid down a set of standards to help and guide the aspiring teacher in his/her own training: 'Verily, Ananda, not easy is it to teach Dhamma to others. In teaching others Dhamma, Ananda, make five things stand up within you, then teach others Dhamma. What five? Teach others Dhamma, thinking: I will give a talk

on the *gradual*; teach others Dhamma, thinking: I will give a talk with the *way in view*; teach others Dhamma, thinking: I will give a talk *out of kindliness*; teach others Dhamma, thinking: I will give a talk *not as a means for gain*; teach others Dhamma, thinking: I will talk a talk *not to my own hurt nor to others*' (AN 5.159 The Venerable Udāyī).

The Buddha has also prescribed how teachers, having trained and developed the qualities outlined by the Buddha above, should carry out their role as a compassionate teacher: (1) train them in the best discipline; (2) see that they grasp their lessons well; (3) instruct them in the arts and sciences; (4) introduce them to their friends and associates; (5) provide for their safety in every quarter (DN 31 Sigālaka Sutta: The Layperson's Code of Discipline).

Besides laying the groundwork for aspiring teachers to train themselves first and develop qualities that would make them good, compassionate, loving and wise teachers, the Buddha has also prescribed and demonstrated several teaching methods, endorsing his status as *'incomparable guide for the training of persons'* and '*teacher of gods and humans*.' Buddha's teaching methods incorporate the following approaches, with the emphasis on gradual approach as the foundation of his pedagogy:

1. *Ānupubbīkathā* – the gradual approach

Ānupubbīkathā, gradual instruction, talk or sermon. The term, as illustrated by Ven. Nyanatiloka (1980), refers to the progressive sermon given by the Buddha, in accordance with the Buddha's knowledge in advance, the capacity and readiness of the listener(s). The Buddha's method was to begin with something simple, basic, and close to the listeners so that they could relate what the Buddha was saying with their own experiences and living conditions.

The Buddha Gotama first practised this gradual instruction on his five former friends, the ascetics Koṇḍañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama and Assaji. These five ascetics were sceptical of the Buddha's sincerity for renunciation, and so, the Buddha used the *ānupubbīkathā* approach by first explaining to them the importance of adopting a middle way (which is beautifully captured in Sona Sutta [AN 6.55 Sona Sutta: The Simile of the Lute]), signified by the Noble Eight Fold Path. Then, when he perceived their minds were ready and receptive, the Buddha began to instruct the five ascetics on the Four Noble Truths (SN 56.11 Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma).

The Upāli Sutta (MN 56.18) and the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11) illustrate how the Buddha skilfully prepares the listener's mind before speaking to him on the advanced teaching of the Four Noble Truths: 'Then the Blessed One gave the householder Upali progressive instruction, that is, talk on giving, talk on virtue, talk on heavens; he explained the danger, degradation and defilement of sensual pleasures, and the blessing of renunciation. When he knew that the householder Upali's mind was ready, receptive, free from hindrances, elated and confident, he expounded to him the teaching special to the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path' (MN 56.18 Upāli Sutta).

The Buddha places great confidence in this gradual approach, beginning with the most basic, that is, to cultivate good conduct or discipline (*silā*), as illustrated in this sutta: "It is possible, brahmin, to describe gradual training, gradual practice, and gradual progress in this Dhamma and Discipline. Just as, brahmin, when a clever horse-trainer obtains a fine thoroughbred colt, he first makes him get used to wearing the bit, and afterwards trains him further, so when the Tathāgata obtains a person to be tamed he first disciplines him thus: 'Come, bhikkhu, be virtuous, restrained with the restraint of the Patimokkha, be perfect in conduct and resort, and seeing fear in the slightest fault, train by undertaking the training precepts …" (MN 107 Ganakamoggallāna Sutta).

One good illustration of the *ānupubbīkathā* or step-by-step approach used by the Buddha Gotama is the story of Suppabuddha the leper (Udāna 5.3 Kutti Sutta: Suppabuddha the Leper; Piya Tan, 2002):

Then the Blessed One, having encompassed the awareness of the entire assembly with his awareness, asked himself, "Now who here is capable of understanding the Dhamma?" He saw Suppabuddha the leper sitting in the assembly, and on seeing him the thought occurred to him, "This person here is capable of understanding the Dhamma." So, aiming at Suppabuddha the leper, he gave a step-by-step talk, i.e. he proclaimed a talk on generosity (*dāna*), on virtue (*silā*), on heaven (*sagga*); he declared the drawbacks, degradation, and corruption of sensuality (*kām'ādīnava*), and the rewards of renunciation (*nekkhammā'nisaṃsa*). Then when the Blessed One knew that Suppabuddha the leper's mind was ready, malleable, free from hindrances, elevated, & clear, he then gave the Dhamma-talk peculiar to Awakened Ones, i.e. stress, origination, cessation, and path. And just as a clean cloth, free of stains, would properly absorb a dye, in the same way, as Suppabuddha the leper was sitting in that very seat, the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye arose within him, "Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation."

Ānupubbīkathā -why did the Buddha adopt this method of gradual, step-by-step instruction? The answer possibly lies in the Buddha's knowledge of the human condition. Human beings, as *manussa*, are capable of thinking, and capable of being trained and educated (*sikkhā*) (Payutto, 1998, p. 1). In other words, human beings have the capacity to be 'educated', to develop their potential to be good, noble, dignified human beings. Through education, that is learning and training, human beings, whether male or female, can be transformed from being mere 'puggala/puthujana', or ordinary person, to *ariya puggala*, noble beings. Buddha sees individuals as existing in their own right, hence the Buddha views all individuals in the same, unattached, unbiased, objective manner. Undoubtedly, those individuals with 'much dust in their eyes, dull faculties, bad qualities and hard to teach' (MN26 Ariyapariyesanā Sutta) will need a longer time to understand his Dhamma, while individuals with 'less dust in their eyes, keen faculties, good qualities and easy to teach' will understand his Dhamma within a shorter time.

Although the Buddha knows that 'few are those beings that are wise, quick-witted, not deaf or dumb, competent to judge the meaning of what is spoken well or ill, and more numerous are those who are fools, slow-witted, deaf or dumb' (AN1.19 Few are those beings); '… when thus advised and instructed by me, some of my disciples attain Nibbana, the ultimate goal, and some do not attain it' (MN107 Ganakamoggallāna Sutta); and 'few are those who clearly see. As few birds escape from a net, few go to a blissful state (Dhp, verse 174 Few are the clear-sighted),' still, the Buddha continues to teach the Dhamma without discrimination.

2. Adaptation Approach

Buddha also demonstrates skilfulness in using existing conditions as a resource to teach the profound Dhamma to his listeners. Rhys Davids (in Siddhi, 1995, p. 200) characterised the Buddha's style of adapting his teachings on prevailing conditions as 'pouring new wine into old bottles". This consists in the Buddha's giving a new meaning to words that were already current. He adapted traditional ideas and practices and adjusted his sermons to suit the temperaments of his hearers, a method that came to be known as 'upaya-kosallam', that is the skilful policy (expedient means) of converting people (Siddhi, 1995, p. 200).

The Buddha has the ability to understand the background of those to be instructed. Whenever and wherever the Buddha imparted his teachings to others, it is said, at first he always ascertains their dispositions and tendencies and purposes, and thus he selected, adjusted and aptly preached the doctrines with reference to the background of each individual or group of individuals. For example, Buddha uses the word "Brahma", then existing as a major idea/belief – Brahma-God – to preach the path leading to the highest goal, by cultivating the four *brahmavihāras*, or sublime virtues (Siddhi, 1995, p. 198 & p. 201). Siddhi (1995, p. 201) also cites another example of Buddha's adaptation approach, that is, when the Buddha gave a brahmin an instruction in the 'ritualistic tenet' of washing away the sin. Instead of going into the river and washing the sin away by bathing (as this could also mean washing away one's good deeds), the Buddha advised the brahmin to take a bath in spiritual culture by harming no living beings, etc.

3. Illustration Approach

Another skilful means of the Buddha is to use analogy, simile, parable, story and fable taken from the everyday lives of the listeners. The Buddha also incorporates beautiful verses in order to make them sweet, effective and attractive (Siddhi, 1995, p. 210). According to the Buddha, he uses analogies 'for there are cases where it's through analogies that knowledgeable people can understand the meaning of what is being said' (MN 24 Ratha Vinita Sutta: Relay Chariots).

The simile of the lute (AN 6.55 Sona Sutta) to explain the Middle Way to Venerable Sona Kolivisa, the simile of the saw (MN 21: Kakacūpama Sutta), where the Buddha tells the story of a wise slave who deliberately tests her mistress's patience, together with several memorable similes, especially the story of bandits carving the listener's limbs one by one with a two-handled saw, to illustrate the correct way to develop patience, and the water-snake simile (MN 22 Alagaddūpama Sutta), where the Buddha, using two famous similes – simile of the water-snake and simile of the raft – conveys the central message of the importance of right view.

To convey the message of not jumping to conclusions upon first impression, the Buddha used the simile of the elephant's footprint as illustrated in the Cūla-hatthipadopama Sutta: The Shorter Elephant Footprint Simile (MN 27).

4. Analytical Approach

According to Siddhi (1995, p. 202), the analytical approach, or *vibhajja-vāda*of the Buddha's teachings is one of the most important characteristics found in the earlier texts. For example, the Buddha uses this analytical method in his second sermon on Anattalakkhana Sutta [The Discourse on the Not-Self Characteristic] (SN 22.59), where the Buddha breaks down the empirical existence of the physical human being into five aggregates – body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness, and their respective elements or constituents. Why does the Buddha use this analytical approach on the human body? The answer is that the Buddha wants to show that there is no abiding entity called 'self' (*attā*), and hence, it is pointless to think that there is a 'self that is mine', 'my self", and 'this is what I am'.

This use of analytical method has also been mentioned by the Buddha himself. For example, in Subha Sutta: To the Brahmin Subha(MN 99), the Buddha was asked whether it is true that householders are capable of doing noble merit and those gone forth homeless are not capable of doing merit. The Buddha's reply: 'Young man, here I have to give an *analytical reply*, not an absolute reply. I do not praise the wrong method, of a householder or of one gone forth homeless. Whether a householder or one gone forth homeless, if fallen to the wrong method it is not possible that he should be convinced of noble merit. I praise the right method of a householder or of one gone forth homeless. Whether a householder or one gone forth homeless, if fallen to the right method it is possible that he should be convinced of noble merit.'

So too, in the Vajjiya Sutta: About Vajjiya(AN 10.94), Vajjiyamāhita, the householder, when questioned by a group of 'wanderers of other persuasions' concerning the Buddha's view, referred to the analytical method of the Buddha: 'No, venerable sirs, the Blessed One does not criticize all asceticism, nor does he categorically denounce or disparage all ascetics who live the rough life. The Blessed One criticizes what should be criticized, and praises what should be praised. Criticizing what should be criticized, praising what should be praised, the Blessed One is one who *speaks making distinctions*, not one who speaks categorically on this matter'.

5. Practical Approach

'Ehi passiko, Paccataṃ veditabbo viññuhi ti' (Come and see, To be personally experienced by the wise). This practical approach or what Siddhi (1995, p. 203) calls the experimental approach

underscores the standpoint of the Buddha regarding the Dhamma, and the Buddha himself. In many suttas, the Buddha emphasises the need not to accept what we have heard blindly without reflection, investigation, critical inquiry and practice. This is so because the Buddha asserts that the Dhamma (Truth or Doctrine) is to be self-realised, with immediate fruit, inviting investigation, leading on (to Nibbāna), to be comprehended by the wise, each for oneself.

The Buddha makes this assertion very clearly in the Kālāma Sutta, mentioned above (AN 3.65; Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2002). Similarly, the Buddha does not want people to accept or reject his teachings on blind faith/emotion or with unquestioning acceptance/rejection. Instead, he provides ways for us to train ourselves to be reflective, critical, inquiring and investigative. Hence, the practical approach as laid out by the Buddha embodies an experiential learning process, whereby the conclusion or truth is arrived or derived through personal and direct experience. This experiential method is clearly depicted in the Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta: Instructions to Rāhula at Mango Stone (MN 61), where the Buddha delivers his first instructions to his son, Rāhula. The Buddha informs Rāhula to reflect on his intentions before acting on them, and to carry through with them only if he saw that his intended action would cause no harm. While acting, he should reflect on the immediate results of his actions; if they were causing any unintended harm, he should stop. After acting, he should reflect on the long-term results of his actions. If he saw that they actually did cause harm, he should resolve never to repeat them. If they didn't, he should take joy and continue on the path (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1999).

The Buddha's last words upon *parinibbāna*, or passing away, reconfirms his standpoint on the importance of practice: 'Behold now, bhikkhus, I exhort you: All compounded things are subject to vanish. Strive with earnestness!' (DN 16 Mahā-parinibbāna Sutta: Last Days of the Buddha). The only way to understand and gain realisation of the Dhamma is to 'practise the Dhamma to see if it brings about an end to suffering within our own minds' (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2002). Bhikkhu Bodhi (1998) makes a similar reiteration that wisdom arises by systematically working the ideas and principles learned through study into the fabric of the mind, which requires deep reflection, intelligent discussion and keen investigation.

6. Syntactical Approach

While the analytical approach breaks down a concept or entity into smaller parts, the syntactical approach refers to the application of one concept in different contexts. For example, *dukkha*, or suffering, which Buddha applies in several but related contexts -birth, old age, sickness and death - as illustrated in the First Noble Truth: 'Suffering [dukkha], as a noble truth, is this: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering - in short, suffering is the five categories of clinging objects' (SN 56.11Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta**:** Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth). The Buddha's intention is not only to explain the meaning of suffering in different contexts, but more so, the message he wants to convey is the idea or truth on impermanency, as depicted in the changing nature of existence, and the futility of clinging on and becoming attached to things not permanent.

7. Question and Answer Approach

The Kālāma Sutta, often written with the sub-title 'The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry' epitomises the Buddha Gotama's receptiveness to questions and debate. This method of dialectical inquiry, which centuries later came to be associated with Socrates, the classical Greek philosopher. The Socratic method is a form of inquiry and debate based on asking and answering questions between individuals with their own viewpoints (Wikipedia, 2013). This question and answer and counter-question method (*paṭipucchā –vyākaraniya*) is aimed at stimulating critical thinking and reflection. The parties involved might not agree or accept the other party's viewpoints, but they might agree to disagree. Buddha Gotama encourages people to pose questions to him, for example, when a certain bhikkhu asked the Blessed One how long is an aeon, and when the Blessed One answered, the bhikkhu

then asked if it is possible for the Blessed One to give a simile (SN 15.5 The Mountain). Buddha himself will also do pose questions to the people who come to see him. In the Siṃsapā Grove Sutta (SN 31.1), the Blessed One 'took a few *siṃsapā* leaves in his hand and addressed the bhikkhus thus: "What do you think, Bhikkhus, which is more numerous: these few *siṃsapā* leaves that I have taken up in my hand or those in the *siṃsapā* grove overhead?" In the Canki Sutta, (MN 95), when the brahmin student Kāpaṭhika interrupted the conversation between Buddha and very senior brahmins, the Buddha rebuked him. However, the brahmin Canki said to the Buddha "let not Master Gotama rebuke the brahmin student Kāpaṭhika … he is a clansman, he is very learned, he has a good delivery, he is wise; he is capable of taking part in this discussion with Master Gotama." The brahmin student Kāpaṭhika then went on to ask the Blessed One: "Master Gotama, in regard to the ancient brahmanic hymns that have come down through oral transmission and in the scriptural collections, the brahmins come to the definite conclusion: 'Only this is true, anything else is wrong.' What does Master Gotama say about this?"

Conclusion

In the Introduction above, questions were forwarded as to how teachers should teach students of today, and how to impart education to these students so that they will become human beings of character, dignity and wisdom. The fact that today's educational system has been 'hijacked' by the demands of the state and market aggravates the task of teachers in carrying out their responsibilities efficiently and effectively. Freire has recognised this education problem in the late 1960s and even went to prison for his perceived 'anti-state' and 'anti-market' ideas. The Buddha, even more so, realised this formidable task of teachers more than 2500 years ago. Despite this realisation, the Buddha was not disheartened for he had unshakeable faith in the Dhamma he discovered through his own effort, own experience, and own understanding. Hence, he preached to all and sundry (except the hungry), travelled from house to house, town to town, village to village, city to city, to preach the Dhamma. Meeting a multitude of individuals with different dispositions, capacities, viewpoints and in different contexts – class, caste, custom etc. – the Buddha had to improvise, adapt, innovate, strategise his delivery methods to render his teaching effective and beneficial to the listener(s). The Buddha did all these out of compassion and loving kindness to help fellow human beings live a life of happiness and ultimately, to end this cycle of suffering.

So, the question on what kind of pedagogy is appropriate and beneficial for today's students (seeking secular or Buddhist education) – the answer lies within the hearts and minds of the teachers themselves. What kind of education do they want to impart to their students? What is the goal of this education that teachers want to give to their students? What would their legacy be?

Teachers therefore need to reflect, investigate and analyse their purpose of education, and be confident in their own analysis of their purpose. The Buddha has provided a systematic, time-tested, experiential and easy-to-implement model of pedagogy. The model is based on the standpoint that every human being is trainable, hence 'educable', that is, each can be trained to 'bring forth' their latent capacity and potential to tread the path of knowledge acquisition grounded on character building, moral development and spiritual advancement. For today's students living in a material and commercial world, the teachers' task is indeed daunting, but not impossible. The Buddha's pedagogy might be worth a try.

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Acknowledgement

Appreciation and many thanks to Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia (BMSM) and Buddhist Research Institute, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU), Bangkok, Thailand for the invitation and opportunity to participate in the 5th International Buddhist Research Seminar. Special thanks also to Bro. Yong Song Kong and Rev. T. Nandavimala for assistance rendered regarding the Pāli text. An earlier draft titled 'Teaching today's students: towards a more engaging pedagogy' has previously been published in COMM*UNITY*, Vol. 1. Issue 1, July-Sept 2008, a quarterly publication by Nalanda Institute, Serdang, Selangor.