

INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF HOLISTIC EDUCATION



EDITED BY
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International Handbook of Holistic Education

Providing a comprehensive overview of holistic education's history, conceptions, practices, and research, this Handbook presents an up-to-date, global picture of the field. Organized in five sections, the Handbook lays out the field's theoretical and historical foundations; offers examples of holistic education in practice with regard to schools, programs, and pedagogies at all levels; presents research methods used in holistic education; outlines the growing effort among holistic educators to connect holistic teaching and learning with research practice; and examines present trends and future areas of interest in program development, inquiry, and research. This volume is a must-have resource for researchers and practitioners and serves as an essential foundational text for courses in the field.

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Acknowledgments

Compiling a Handbook is a mammoth task and inevitably includes many people. I would first like to thank my co-editors. I am grateful to Bruce Novak for initiating this project and then asking me to take the role of lead editor. I am grateful for this and the work he has done in editing the first section on Foundations. Sam Crowell has edited the last section and because of his work in Latin America he was able to obtain the chapter on the innovative doctoral program at Las Salle University in Costa Rica. The other editors live in Toronto and have met every month to keep the project on course. Marni Binder is one of those people and has edited the second section on Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum. Marni has also read chapters outside her section and provided very valuable feedback on these chapters and the Handbook as a whole. Kelli Nigh's contribution to the Handbook has been enormous. She has edited the section on research and has worked tirelessly on this manuscript. Her work has been invaluable to this project.

I am so grateful to my Graduate Assistant, Erica Killick. She has gone over every chapter and made sure it conformed to the Routledge guidelines. She also carefully cross-checked the references in every chapter. We could not have completed this project without her help. We would like to thank our colleague Mary Beattie for her valuable assistance with proof reading.

The editors are grateful for the staff at Routledge. First, I would like to thank Naomi Silverman, who conducted a review of our proposal and finalized the project with Routledge. I had worked with Naomi in the 1980s on a curriculum text and it was wonderful to connect with her again around the Handbook. Naomi retired and her successor, Karen Adler, has since provided valuable direction and support. We have also appreciated the assistance of Emmalee Ortega, who responded to so many of our inquiries about preparing the manuscript.

There are 57 contributors in this Handbook. We are grateful for the time and effort they have put into their chapters. We believe together they have given us the present state of holistic education as well as its promise. In some cases, we tested their patience with requests for revisions, but the authors always responded in a helpful and constructive manner. We recognize that there are people we were not able to include in the Handbook. We want to acknowledge all those working in this field who have inspired us to carry out this project.

I am very grateful for the support of my department, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto for space that has been created for holistic education. I have taught courses in holistic education and contemplative education since 1985 and supervised 40 doctoral students in the field.

At a personal level, we would like to thank our partners and families for supporting us through this project. At times it may not have been easy for them but their support has been invaluable.

John (Jack) Miller

Holistic Education in Thai Buddhist Schools

Prapapat Niyom

In this project in Thailand, Buddhist principles (BP) were integrated into schools as a way to support whole child education. The Roong Aroon School (RAS) research team provided leadership to Buddhist Approach Schools (BAS). The Buddhist principles serve as a key factor to encompass whole-child development and to engage active learners with values, mindfulness, and self-actualization.

Background

Over a century ago, prior to the establishment of the Ministry of Education, the first Thai schools were established in Buddhist temples, with monks teaching only Thai boys to read, write, solve mathematical problems, as well as study BP. Subsequently, the Ministry of Dhamma-Karn (Education) was established to launch a conventional school system that combined BP in the curriculum (Education Management Information System Centre (EMISC), n.d.). In 1941, the name of the ministry was changed to the Ministry of Education. Consequentially, Thai schools, public and private alike, have been required to teach ethics as one of the main subjects in their curricula (Chaiyaphon, 2011). These facts serve as evidence that Buddhism has been the foundation of Thai education for many years. Another fact that substantiates the importance of Buddhism as our national foundation is the high percentage of Buddhists in Thailand, 94.6%, according to the National Statistical Office, 2015. However, every Thai is free to choose his/her religion, as well as the type of school they attend. Recently, BP in the curriculum have declined and can only be found in the ethics section of social studies in the compulsory curriculum of the Thai education system.

During the first education reform period, 1997–2006, the BAS model was designated to be one of the five additional innovative programs proposed for schools to choose their approach to education reform. At present, 22,736 schools out of the 30,816 conventional public schools joined the project, incorporating traditional practices and extra activities in addition to the regular curriculum (Bureau of Educational Innovation Development, Ministry of Education, 2017).

Paradoxical Aspects in Thai Buddhist Schools

The Thai BAS agreed that adopting BP into the teaching and learning practices of their school systems could facilitate the ultimate goal of a well-rounded person in all dimensions, including psychomotor and cognitive skills, as well as building the students' character. However, the curriculum

and pedagogy still depend on the existing curriculum, which focuses primarily on the cognitive domain. BAS, in a conventional schooling system could hardly achieve whole child development, especially with respect to helping students develop moral values. In order to manage two different directions in their schools, BAS decided to combine traditional and disciplined Buddhist activities with the conventional classroom teaching, in the hope that the students would improve their learning outcomes as well as their moral values.

Subsequently, during the fifth to the seventh years of the project, measures were established to evaluate the BAS program. A set of 29 indicators was formulated from the analyzed evidence of an earlier research study that focused on the status of BAS (Niyom, 2015). The indicators represented both the “input factors” and the “outputs and outcomes”, and were then organized into five categories of best practice: 1) the seven elements of physical environments; 2) the four Buddhist holy day activities; 3) the five extra learning activities and contemplative practices; 4) the five general good behaviors, such as smiling, bowing nicely to pay respect, a healthy diet, saving or economizing, and learning with perseverance; 5) the eight supportive factors for the Buddhist way of living, such as:

- not selling junk food in school;
- not scolding students;
- appreciatively announcing good practices in front of the morning assembly;
- reflecting on those good deeds during home room;
- writing a journal of good deeds experienced by teachers and students;
- and passing the minimum standard test of Dhamma Sueksa;
- meditating at the beginning of each meeting and regularly having monks teach in the school.

(Bureau of Educational Innovation Development, Ministry of Education, n.d.).

Unfortunately, these 29 indicators themselves led to an increased concentration on extracurricular activities and attained only some specific outcomes while continuing to separate ethics from classroom learning.

In order to nurture the human core values of self-awareness and interconnectedness in oneself and the cosmos, BAS was compelled to respond to those indicators and the national examination test scores. The BAS program then faced a serious dilemma. Could this innovation positively impact educational reform? During 2010–2012, there was evidence of decreased budget support, from over 200 million baht to less than 20 million baht. The number of registered schools in this program dropped from over 20,000 to 12,000 schools, due to the promotion of more challenging education reform innovations than the BAS initiative (Bureau of Educational Innovation Development, Ministry of Education, n.d.).

These challenges were noticed by Roong Aroon School Foundation (RASf), which had been experimenting with its own holistic integration of Thai BAS into its school curriculum and pedagogy, from its inception 20 years earlier. From 2007 to 2008, the RASf has been involved with the public BAS program by providing training for the BAS coaching team. The training is for almost 1,200 personnel in all parts of the country (Niyom, 2008). The RASf also launched an additional follow-up program by arranging peer coaching to those BAS schools. Subsequently, RASf was invited to join the advisory committee on the screening and nominating of awards for best practices of the BAS in 2014.

Upon increased involvement, the RASf became more convinced that it should propose research that would be more conducive to sharing its knowledge with the BAS. The research proposal titled, “The Transformation of Buddhist Oriented Schools as the Basic Bovorn Community” was submitted to the Thailand Research Fund. The proposal was written to promote a holistic perspective in the integration of BP and the 27 best practices in the BAS in 2014. A three-year participatory action research and development project was granted for the period of January 2015 to March 2017.

Research Focus

The RASF had 20 years' experience with implementing holistic approaches. Thus it became one of the most important contributing elements in the BP objective to introduce human core values that can be developed and integrated into the school curriculum and pedagogy. The establishment of the required BP into the school's organization were analyzed and developed as tools and indicators for the selected schools. Basically, those implementation tools were only guidelines, which could be adjusted according to each school's local context. The research revealed just how much these target schools were able to achieve whole school development as they applied the BP core concepts to the school curriculum.

Analyzing the BP Essence: Application to Schooling

Considering the meaning of education in terms of BP, Somdej Phra Buddhakosajarn¹ (Payutto, 1988/2012) suggested, in his distinguished text of *Buddha Dharma*, that we use a synonym for the Buddha's teaching in the term, Sikhaboth, while calling those who practice Buddha's teaching a Sekkha person. It was widely known that this Pali word Sikha, or Sekkha, or Sueksa in Sanskrit represents the original meaning of education in the Thai language. Actually, the heart of the Buddha's teaching means "right practice" and is called the Noble Eightfold Path. When applied to everyday life The Eightfold Path enables us to become enlightened. Imparting these principles into education encourages the student to engage in self-practice so that they understand their interconnectedness with the cosmos, thereby achieving the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

However, when the modern schooling system adopted the term of education, the previous Buddhist interpretation was diluted from its original meaning. Instead of maintaining the holistic dimension, the conventional education system increasingly depended on a standard curriculum that led to content-coverage and test-score based outcomes.

In contrast, throughout RASF's 20 years, there has been continuous experimentation with how much the school could benefit from the original interpretation of Sikha and from accommodating such a holistic perspective. Roong Aroon School (RAS) was one of the pioneers in launching this concept into its school. Founded in 1997, RAS, a privately owned and not-for-profit organization, set out to be a BAS, with the aim to foster whole child development. Following the Buddha's teaching, decoded by Somdej Phra Buddhakosajarn (Payutto, 1988/2012) in his eminent text of *Buddha Dharma*, Tri-Sikha was one of the major principles of Buddhism that was then applied to the BAS program. Actually, the Tri-Sikha: Sila-Smadhi-Panna is the concise trifold pattern of the Noble Eightfold Path, which means the single way of nurturing and achieving the highest state of mind or enlightenment. This core principle focuses on self-practice or one's inner learning to nurture self-actualization, which is a central goal of BAS. RAS applied the Tri-Sikha principle into the school system curriculum to clearly state the ultimate goal for student learning.

Generally, the learning objectives are well defined in the three domains: knowledge, skills, and attitude. However, in the case of RAS, the attitude domain provides an opportunity to connect the value and wisdom based learning outcomes to the first two domains. This emphasis is appropriately placed as an objective of the school curriculum to adhere to the holistic mission of the school. The school, therefore, can become a place where students learn to nourish their inner life along with learning to acquire knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, RAS formulated a special template called, "One Page Lesson Plan" in order to integrate the value based objectives into the content, the learning process, and the evaluation plan. This template (Table 30.1) was the basic guideline for each teacher so that they could guide their classroom learning towards the development of the whole student. Accordingly, it became one of the practical tools for this action research.

Table 30.1 One-Page Lesson Plan: an integrated value objectives based lesson plan

Scope of content	Value based objectives			Process of learning	Evaluation
Subject Matter	Knowledge (Head)	Learning Skills (Hands)	Value (Heart)	Learning by doing & reflective share & learn	Process/tools Formative assessment & summative evaluation

Research Tools

In launching holistic concepts within the 27 target schools in this research, the three core Buddhist principles: the Tri-Sikha, the Galayanamitre–Yonisomanasigarn and Satipattathan, have been the foundation for tools and mechanisms incorporated into the school practices for research.

First principle: Tri-Sikha; Sila–Smadhi–Panna (self-discipline–mindfulness concentration—wisdom), is the first key element in the value based goal of BAS for whole child development. RAS described this first core principle as a holistic learning goal: Life is Learning or Learning is Life (Somdet Phra Buddhakosajarn) (Payutto, 1995).

Second principle: Galayanamitre to Yonisomanasigarn is interpreted by Steve Weissman (2011) as friendly guidance to wise reflection. This principle is derived from an initiative by Somdej Phra Buddhakosajarn in his book, *The Dawn of Education* (Payutto, 2002). This principle can be summarized in the golden phrase: “When the first glimpse of sunlight appears at dawn, it means that the sun will rise towards its highest peak”. Similarly, when all the aspects of Galayanamitre to Yonisomanasigarn are promptly integrated into a student’s learning process, then it is possible to reach their highest capacity to learn: “In RAS, the two principles were stated as the second core principle in a ‘Value oriented academic system’” (Mohjhaw, Tubsree, & Chomdokmai, 2013).

Third principle: Satipattathan means mindful meditation. These are specific self-practices for developing the quality of mind into a state of wisdom where there is liberation from the two extremes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. From RAS experience, it was found that the community of practice was the key success of BAS when the spiritual leadership among parents, school leaders, and teachers was cultivated. These adults changed their roles from being supervisors to learning partners of the students. This principle was stated as the third core principle, “Contemplative Community of Practices”.

Buddhism in Schools: The Core Principles Framework

These three Buddhist Principles and their applications are presented in an interconnected cycle as shown in Figure 30.1.

The three principles were applied and presented to the target schools, together with each set of indicators for implementation. The following is the three sets of criteria and indicators used for implementing and evaluating tools in the 27 BAS target schools:

First Core Principle: Tri-Sikha

Criteria: Value oriented school curriculum and lesson plan with holistic learning goals.

Indicator: 11 sub-indicators covered the value oriented curriculum, integrated value objective lesson plan (See Table 30.1), mindful active learning processes and an embedded formative assessment system.

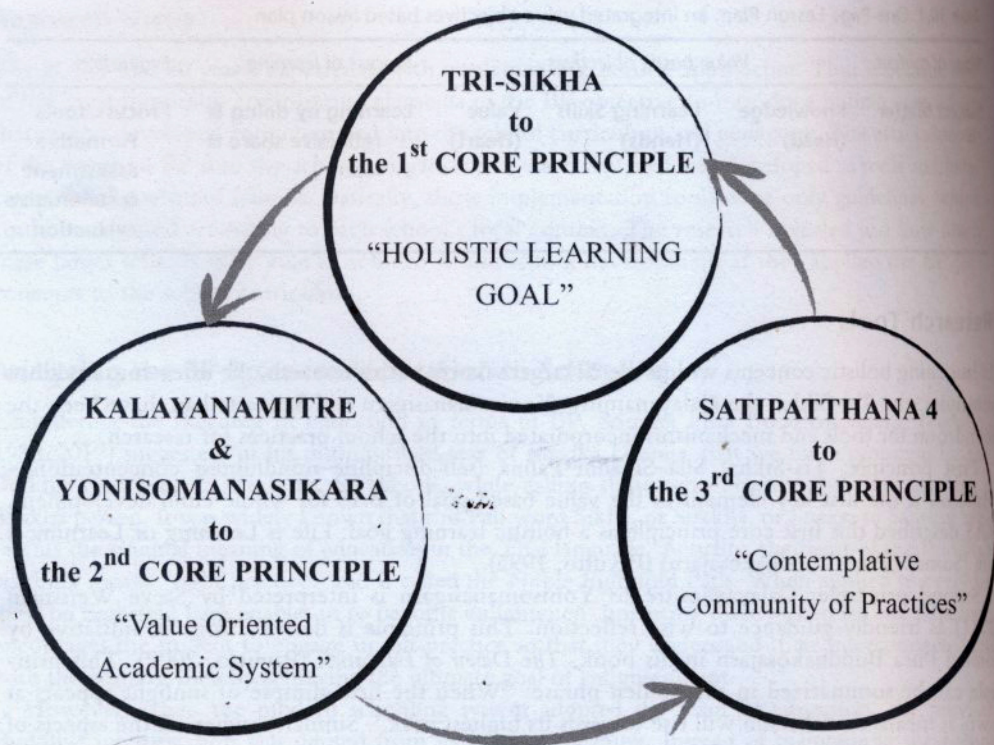


Figure 30.1 RAS's three core principles as a conceptual framework in applying Buddhism into the academic school system

Second Core Principle: Galayanamitre to Yonisomanasigarn

Criteria: Value oriented academic system.

Indicator: Four sub-indicators including being a mindful academic leader and a compassionate coach, nine sub-indicators for teachers being students' learning partners and creative value learning designers, and providing critical active learning opportunities in their classrooms.

Third Core Principle: Satipatthan 4

Criteria: Contemplative community of practices.

Indicator: Three sub-indicators for school leaders, teachers, students, and parents, including ongoing mindful meditation practice. Two sub-indicators of providing Buddhist voluntary activities for all, two sub-indicators for teachers and parents sharing and learning with the students.

The Research Process

The principles were designed to be a tangible operating system which the 27 target BAS could easily incorporate as regular ongoing practices in their planning, implementation and evaluation. The seven stages of action research for whole school development were launched with the following actions:

- (1) The implementation of shared vision workshops where school leaders and teachers worked together in the application of Tri-Sikha so that each school's goals for education could be reached.
- (2) The formulation of each school's goals and target achievements, including academic and student characteristics were used as guiding principles, instead of content-based curriculum.
- (3) Several single lesson plan designs were created by the school's director and teacher teams in accordance with BAS goals that concentrate on value-based learning objectives.
- (4) Coaching for active learning and formative assessment were introduced by applying Galayanamitre-Yonisomanasigarn practices that help teachers become more inspiring and connected with each student during classroom learning.
- (5) Micro teaching from a selected lesson plan is performed in a real classroom setting in each school, along with the observations by teacher teams to help participate in the following After Action Review (AAR) meeting.
- (6) A Professional Learning Community is established through researching conditions that support mindful reflection and dialogue. Before and After Action Review (BAR-AAR) involves regularly applying Galayanamitre-Yonisomanasigarn practices to provide the platform for friendly and constructive feedback and dialogue.
- (7) A school reflective report, which includes scenes of school life and classroom performances, was delivered as a short VDO clip and prepared by the research team to include classroom implementations, BAR-AAR meetings as well as interviews with students, teachers, and the school director.

After launching the first stage of sharing visions with those 27 school leaders and teachers, the interactions and responses were active and enthusiastic. They were eager to move to the next stage of whole school curriculum and pedagogy development. Unfortunately, after reviewing the existing infrastructure and the facilities of each school, some schools were overwhelmed by the other special innovation projects, which had been adopted by the Ministry of Education. These schools could not bridge the gap between their existing program and a value-oriented approach. However, these difficulties were considered an opportunity to find alternatives for transformative change and the research team started to develop more and more practical tools. Still, seven schools were omitted from the project as they were unable to adjust their curriculum and institutional practices to accommodate these processes.

The research team had to work closely with the 20 remaining target schools and focus more on the single lesson plan design, classroom implementation, and on the AAR platform for the whole school project. They also developed and adjusted the simpler indicators for evaluation. For example, finally, all agreed to accept the VDO clip reports from the real classroom micro teaching and the BAR-AAR platform activities. During the experimental stages, some schoolteacher teams arranged a study visit to RAS to see how the value attitude emerges in a real classroom situation. They became even more eager to participate in the BAR-AAR platform right after the study of classroom observation. Some schools asked our research team to coach them at their schools, which really inspired most of the school directors and teachers. Eventually, the schools began to experiment with the tools themselves and gradually developed a whole-school direction with a clearer view of value-oriented curriculum and pedagogy.

Developing and Implementing Holistic Core Practices

Once the existing practices following the 29 factors were accepted, the RAS research team extended the implementation to include more meaningful activities linking the research tools to the whole school teaching and learning system. All 20 schools that shared in this research agreed that an appropriate operating system should be created and constructively implemented within the school

timetable to transition to the crucial practices. After a few workshops of vision sharing and discussion among these schools and the RAS study visit, the "Value Oriented Curriculum and Learning" was selected as a tool for study and experimentation. The micro process of lesson plan design was undertaken and shared among the teacher teams. The lesson plan design process clarified how to articulate value achievement as one of the three main objectives (knowledge–skill–value) in each lesson plan.

Pilot micro teaching provided the opportunity to apply the designed lesson plan into the classroom. This was a tremendous opportunity for both the performing teacher and the observers to experience how the value oriented lesson plan could facilitate active learning. The students had more opportunity to play their roles as active learners. The observers were surprised that both teacher and students were more active and happy to learn; teachers were able to design lesson plans with their own objectives, instead of using the instant, ready-made ones. Accordingly, they could organize more active learning and let their students demonstrate their capability to not only understand the content, but also interpret the value of what they had learned. The result was a happier classroom of active learners, a significant improvement on the one-way, or transmission, teaching approach.

It was relevant to these 20 BAS that participated in the process of this action research that the BAS mission in education is to educate the students not only in the subject content (cognitive development), but also in the process of thinking and intellectual development. Some directors started the school change after bringing their teachers to observe the learning atmosphere in RAS. From their visit, they received a clear picture regarding how the teachers planned the lessons with three objectives; knowledge, skills, and values, and how all three were integrated into the classroom learning process. Observations also involved how the students connect the importance of the curriculum content to their day-to-day lives, which represents value learning.

For example, while visiting RAS, one of the BAS teams had an opportunity to join the field study of RAS students at a nearby village beside the mangrove area. The BAS team realized that in providing a learning activity between students and the villagers in their daily lives, the teachers can support the students in their understanding of the interconnectedness of people and nature. The students also learned gratitude and respect for the valuable contribution the villagers made to the community. This value aspect inspired the BAS team when they returned to their school, so they created the new integrated learning unit with a field study—a visit to a nearby fisherman's village. The whole school learning process contributed to the deeper appreciation of values from real life experiences. Moreover, the students mentioned how the villagers were also very happy and proud of themselves in guiding the students to understand their community's heritage.

In addition, the second tangible tool was the BAR–AAR (Before–After Reflection) platform of sharing values from the experimental value oriented classrooms. During the observation at RAS in the After Action Review (AAR) meeting, the BAS director and group of teachers noticed how the teachers and observing coaches reflected on the teaching and learning process, specifically in terms of how students met the objectives as well as how the teachers could improve their teaching in order to facilitate the students' knowledge and understanding. This compassionate feedback was inspiring for the teams in such a way that it focused more on the students' learning experiences rather than on the teachers' performance. Some directors returned to their schools with the idea that teachers should plan their lessons with three objectives, based on content, skills, and values. They also began to hold some AAR meetings. Incredibly, one school's director was able to help every teacher of every subject to design their own lesson plans.

The researchers visited each school twice to follow up by observing their classroom activities and participating in the AAR sessions. In the AAR, the researchers gave feedback based on the evidence of how much the students had achieved the learning objectives, which was related to their teaching. The teachers understood and accepted feedback that explained how to improve teaching approaches

that foster whole child development. The researchers also gave suggestions on how to change their teaching approaches so that the students would come to learn the fundamental value of their lives. Some of the teachers stated that they had never experienced this kind of constructive feedback before; they appreciated it and promised to try their best to continue to elicit the benefits behind connecting curriculum content to real life experience.

The Findings and Lessons Learned

Right after the seven schools left the project, the research team had a good opportunity to reconsider and closely investigate central issues in the project. The research tools were the ones directly affecting the active change process. Once they were simplified and focused on classroom activities, the schools then let go of the tensions associated with the previous value lesson plan design. After the school visits, both to and from RAS and their schools, the situation has since improved. The research team realized that the most crucial tools handed to the BAS were those of the Galayanamitre–Yonisomanasigarn through our own Galayanamitre coaching role (a good guidance team for teachers and the school director). This finding revealed the most important key factor, even more so than the role of the research tools: the partnership between the research team and target schools. The experimental process provided the potential to move beyond the limitations of BAS, while improving the learning community and moving forward to reach their ultimate objectives. On the other hand, this is also the platform of Galayanamitre and Yonisomanasigarn, to develop more awareness of Buddhist values in each teacher through real classroom situations. Teachers grew to be Galayanamitre to each other and themselves and created a nourishing and effective collaborative working environment. The effect of Galayanamitre and Yonisomanasigarn can arise within each teacher's mind, which affects the working environment and nurtures the teachers' souls.

It can be concluded that this research was using holistic sharing and learning experiences created from micro teaching within a whole school approach. Further findings from the project include three aspects. First, the design of a school-based curriculum was integrated into each lesson plan, which states the clear vision and ultimate goal of student achievement. Second, the important pair elements are the Galayanamitre and Yonisomanasigarn which develop a special skill for wise reflection and applies to group learning at every level, with students, teachers, and school leaders. The third element is the individual practice of mindfulness meditation to develop self-reflection and actualization. These practices were already established in the schools.

Notices and Expectations

In addition to school directors and teachers developing their programs and including learning activities that allow the value oriented curriculum and pedagogy to be established holistically, the students in the 20 schools also benefited immensely from this research. Since the research team had less involvement with the parents and community temples, the contemplative community of practice could not be fully evaluated. Last, in order to strengthen these schools to sustain and maintain their expertise, the research team planned to arrange a follow-up symposium for the 20 target schools to present and share their experiences, resulting from the research in the subsequent months. The researchers anticipate that the schools will possess the confidence to extend these experiences to coach the nearby schools or the schools in their networks.

Note

1 Prayudh Payutto is a well-known Thai Buddhist monk, an intellectual, and a prolific writer.

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Taylor & Francis Group

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ISBN 978-1-138-08265-6



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