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Design for Sustainability



report

4 September – 30 November, 2016

Buddhist Leadership Training Programme

Towards A New Paradigm of Spiritual Growth
For Ecology Sustainability and Social justice

Wongsanit Ashram, Thailand



EDE

ECOVILLAGE
DESIGN
EDUCATION



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Wing/EDE Programme Overview

Buddhist Leadership Training Programme Overview:

The collaborative INEB and ETA Ecovillage Design Education training took place from 4 September to 30 November, 2016. The EDE was integrated into a larger programme, a six month Buddhist Leadership Training (BLT) course which also includes expanded modules of learning mostly focusing on inner transformation. Overall the BLT course focuses on 6 key areas of learning:

- Learning how to unlearn, relearn & building a learning community
- Inner growth for awakening and leadership from within
- Buddhist roots: our common ground
- Present Global Context: A Challenge to Contemporary Buddhists & Change Workers
- Interpersonal dynamics: leadership with compassion and participation
- Shambala Warriors in Action

The four components of EDE were woven through the first semester of the course, which included nine modules:

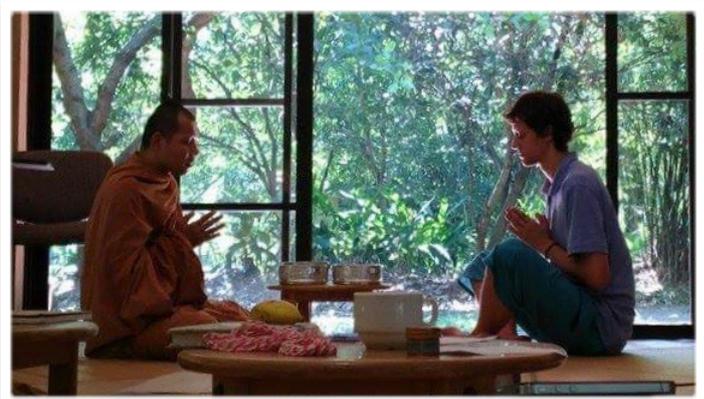
Modules	Topics	Dates
Module 1:	The Art of Education for Change	4-14 Sept 2016
Module 2:	Mindfulness, Inner Growth and Leadership from Within	16-22 Sept 2016
Module 3:	Neuroscience & The Path for Inner Transformation	24-30 Sept 2016
Module 4:	Interpersonal Dynamics and Conflict Transformation	2-12 Oct 2016
Module 5:	Cultivating Compassion through Bearing Witness & Service	15-20 Oct 2016
Module 6:	Global Challenge (I): Paradigm Shift and the Emerging Culture	22-30 Oct 2016
Module 7:	Global Challenge (II): Ecology-Unprecedented Crises of Our Home	1-5 Nov 2016
Module 8:	Global Challenge (III): Political Economy-Structural Violence and its Alternatives	7-12 Nov 2016
Module 9:	Vision Quest	14-21 Nov, 2016
	Design Week and Wrap Up	24-30 Nov, 2016

Details of the complete learning journey are available at blt.nurturenature.earth.



Participants:

Those who completed all modules of the EDE came from eight countries, (Thailand, Laos, South Korea, Slovenia, Myanmar, England, Netherlands, Hong Kong), and included 9 people (2 monks; 1m; 6f).



Other participants who joined in some of the EDE modules included from China, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines and Taiwan. A total of 35 participants (19m/16f) joined these, making for a diverse learning community with a wide range of experiences and perspectives to share.



Two Theravadan monks joined all modules, providing a unique experience for participants (both buddhist and non-buddhist) to learn, observe and participate in their daily practices. Other participants represented different age groups and backgrounds, but all with a common aim to understand themselves better and to serve their societies in positive ways.



Course rhythms:

“

Education needs to be re-envisioned to include the cultivation of wisdom, as well as learning to live in society and overcoming oppression and exploitation. For education to be more effective, it has to be dialogical, inclusive, and compassionate, and needs to heal the rift between body and mind... Buddhist education begins with humanity's ultimate questions: What is the meaning of life? What is our own deepest nature? What is our responsibility to others? Buddhism does not separate life from education.

”

Sulak Sivaraksa (The Wisdom of Sustainability); Taken from BLT brochure, 2016

The course was designed to be participative, contemplative, reflective, and creative. This was introduced throughout the course with a focus on diverse learning processes. Through these learning approaches, students were encouraged to participate actively in building a body of knowledge together, within a trusting learning community. Critical and systems thinking was integrated in order to explore from wider perspectives, to clearly articulate issues through understanding their interconnections and relationships.

To balance intellectual and spiritual exploration, hands on work at the training venue, Wongsanit Ashram, was also included, adding a dimension practical skills for sustainability. Mindfulness was also woven throughout the course, bringing attention and purpose. Other forms of spiritual practice were given space to provide a holistic and grounded learning experience, and build an engaged spiritual learning journey for the participants, especially as this first semester of BLT was focused on the grounding of social engagement through inner growth.



Daily meditation and connection practices



Daily recap of learning



Social Dimension

This was integrated into the first module of the BLT, bringing together diverse participants and exploring how to build a learning community. Other aspects of social week were integrated in other learning modules, including NVC and Process Work, both as ways to work beyond the self and explore social relationships. Building of the learning community was a continual process as new participants came in and out of the course. There was potential for cleavages that could disturb the learning process - which relies greatly on group cohesion, common values and agreements. Two large groups joined the core group at different times. Fifteen local government and NGO workers from China joined for modules 6, 7 and 8. Language was a barrier that reduced interactions outside of class time, but very able continuous translation during class time helped to create dialogue between participants as much as possible. A second group of 15 monks from Myanmar also joined for Deep Ecology workshop for 3 days. This was also a high potential to create divisions or challenges to the learning, but again, direct translation helped as much as possible to overcome this. The experiential nature of the Deep Ecology workshop also reduced challenges in language as it relies on felt experience as the primary mode of learning. Community building exercises were also integrated, and the continual rhythm of the daily learning schedule – which included morning meditation, daily wrap-up's of key learning, 'heart keeping', and caring for the learning space. The social module also provided tools for framing learning, including qualitative research and systems thinking.



Regular community building exercises to integrate new participants into the learning community – here with 15 monks and nuns from Myanmar joining Paradigm Shift and Emerging Culture module

HIGHLIGHTS:

“Good introduction to teamwork, collaboration, emerging leadership; to games as tools for learning and unlearning; good facilitators, good recaps and final synthesis”.

“A very nice selection of community building exercises and a great introduction into the course”.

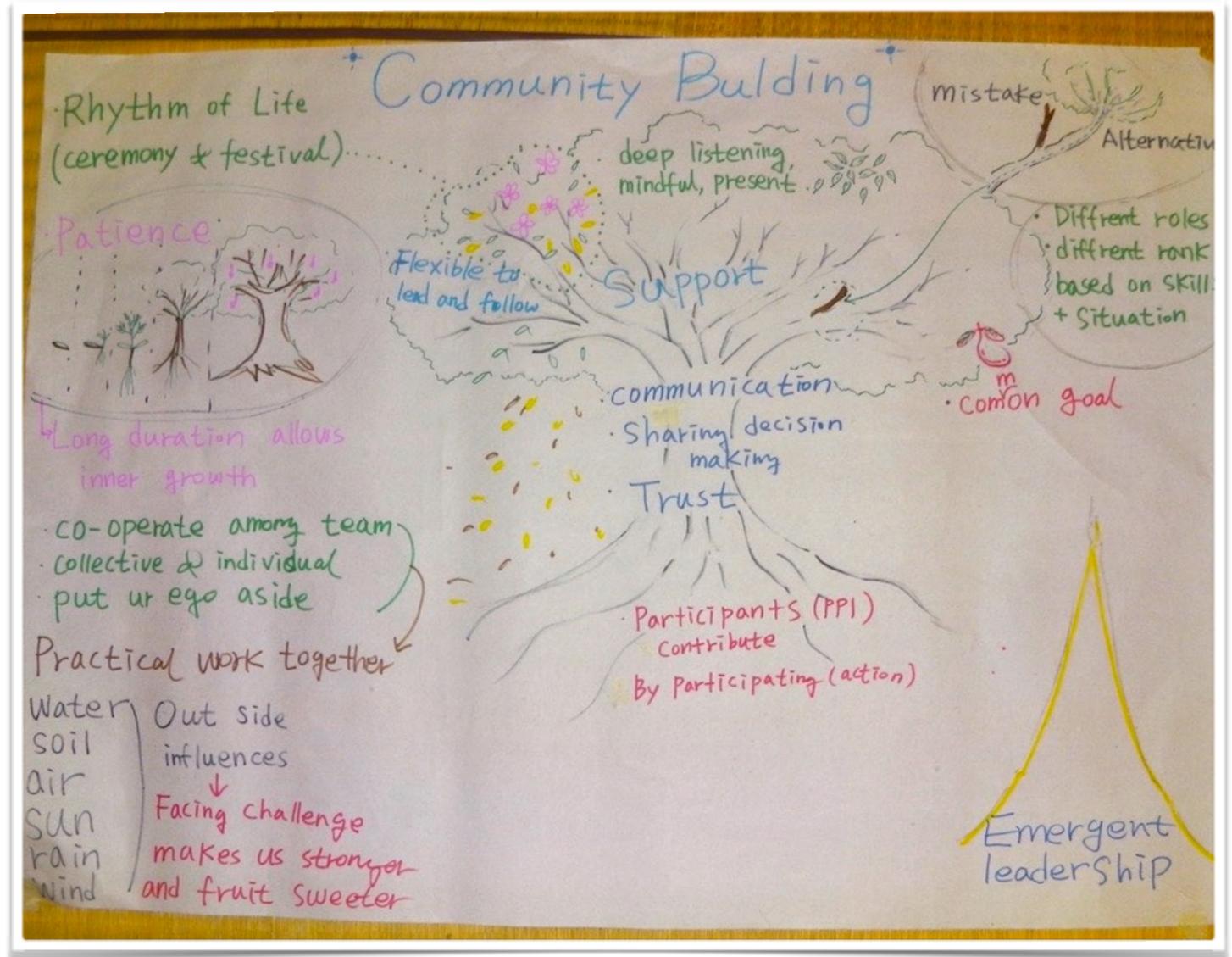
“Among the participants who started together from the beginning till the end of the semester, the community building process has been very good and has gradually become a very caring, nurturing and safe environment within 3 months”.



CHALLENGES:

Many experiential activities were predicated on an expected openness of participants – to each other and the way of learning. For some, this module did not have enough focus on building a gradual process of trust building and getting to know each other.

“It was good at the beginning to try the ice breaker exercises, but some exercises were a bit too much, especially the physical aspect with other participants who were still basically strangers”.



Overview of community building module – how to effectively build and sustain community



Economic Dimension

This was integrated into a political economy module, which included sessions on political philosophies, structural violence, and Buddhist economics. This was more lecture-based with less space for drawing learnings and building knowledge from the participants themselves (although space was given for some participants to present political economy case studies from their own country). Focus was on exploring and understanding the hidden discourses underlying structures, and looking into emerging alternatives to contemporary crises.

HIGHLIGHTS:

A range of political philosophies were presented, a sort of Politics 101, which has not been available for many of the participants, including those from Myanmar, Laos and China. Therefore it was of great benefit to introduce key concepts on political economy and the philosophical underpinnings.

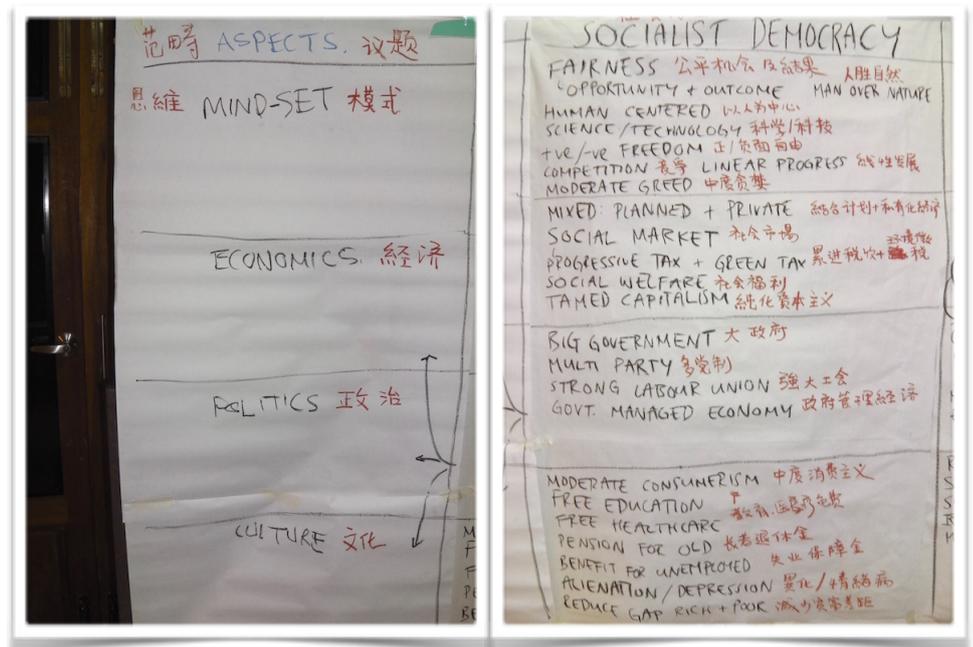
"I enjoyed the wide theoretical portrayal of different political systems, their origins and differences"

CHALLENGES:

Many political concepts were difficult for non-english speakers to grasp, even with translation. It was also a module that relied primarily on lecture-format, which made it difficult to digest all of the teachings over the week. As there was a large group from China attending this module (and the ecology module), the module could have benefited from drawing on the diverse experiences of the participants for lively discussion based on lived experiences, rather than mostly from theory. There was also little time to look in-depth at alternative models that could be practically applied.

"We need more approaches, more cases, and more comparisons to look at, to make more in depth analysis to these political ideologies"

Exploring different aspects of four types of political economies: social democracy, Enterprise capitalism, alternatives, and communism





Ecological Dimension

This was led by anthropologist, Keibo Oiwa from Japan and was considered one of the most inspiring modules for participants. Mainly in lecture form, he shared over five days an holistic approach, bringing together ecology and spirituality as the core theme of his teachings. These were supplemented by evening documentaries with inspiring Asian thinkers and practitioners in alternatives to development. The overall theme also introduced the concepts of Small, Simple, Slow (and Smile – added by participants), which were part of a solution to the disturbances of modern life.

His workshop covered the themes of 1) Concepts of slow and small, 2) Excess, 3) Anthropology of Weakness and Love, 4) Ecology and Spirituality, and 5) From global to local. Different thinkers such as David Suzuki, Karl Polyani, Ashoka, Vandana Shiva, E.F. Schumacher, Satish Kumar, among others, were introduced, as well as thoughtful reflections by Keibo Oiwa also. Interspersed with Haiku's, documentary watching and a meditative Tea Ceremony, this module was both contemplative and intellectual in format, and deeply enjoyed by the participants.

Ecology was also included during the 3 day Deep Ecology workshop. Participants were initially introduced through exploring Peak energy use, and 4 different scenarios for the future (business as usual, green tech, creative descent, collapse). Then the Work that Reconnects was introduced, including a Council of All Beings



*Deep Ecology workshop with Jane Rasbash –
Council of All Beings*



HIGHLIGHTS:

The contemplative content of the work presented, which included the showing of interviews with important Asian thinkers, writing haiku's, and a Japanese Tea Ceremony.

"Very interesting. I like the use of arts, stories and poems to illustrate the points made".

"The facilitators brought and shared experiences from their personal lives, which brought a beautiful richness to the course".



Participating in Japanese Tea Ceremony as part of contemplative learning on the theme of slow, small and simple

CHALLENGES:

The only suggestions (out of mostly positive feedback) was that it was too lecture-based, and could have benefited from drawing the experiences of the participants.

"Many participants are busy-minded in daily life and can only spend limited time here to learn and reflect. So it is difficult for them to get the message into their soul. This may have only been an intellectual refreshment for them".



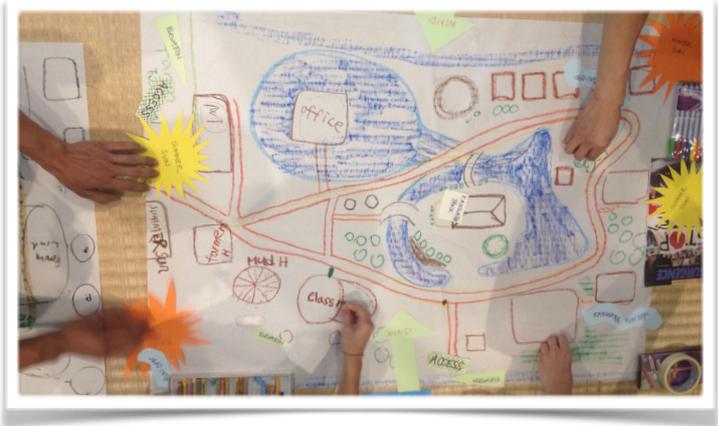
Learning points on slow, small, simple (and smile) life



Worldview Dimension

Paradigm Shift was introduced mid-way through the BLT semester, and included sessions on Systems Thinking, East and West philosophical thought, transformation of consciousness, and a 3-day Deep Ecology workshop - including a Council of All Beings and further activities from Joanna Macy's Work that Reconnects (also see Ecology Week). Other modules contributed to exploration on worldview, especially on Mindfulness, Inner Growth and Leadership Within, and The Path of Inner Transformation (Internal Family System, NVC, Process Work). These modules had a deep practical aspect of challenging participants to work within themselves and on group dynamics to explore the process of change within ourselves.

Other integrated activities included contemplative haiku writing, painting, a Japanese tea ceremony (see above). All these activities contributed to opening up different ways of viewing the world, especially contemplation on nature and spirituality. An important activity in this domain was a seven-day Vision Quest, which included three days solo fasting in the forest. This form of experiential learning is placed as a central approach to exploring worldview, as it not only supported the participants to have a practical experience of what worldview is, it also helped them to gain a meaningful perspective to their lives.



Permaculture theory and design as example of new paradigm thinking

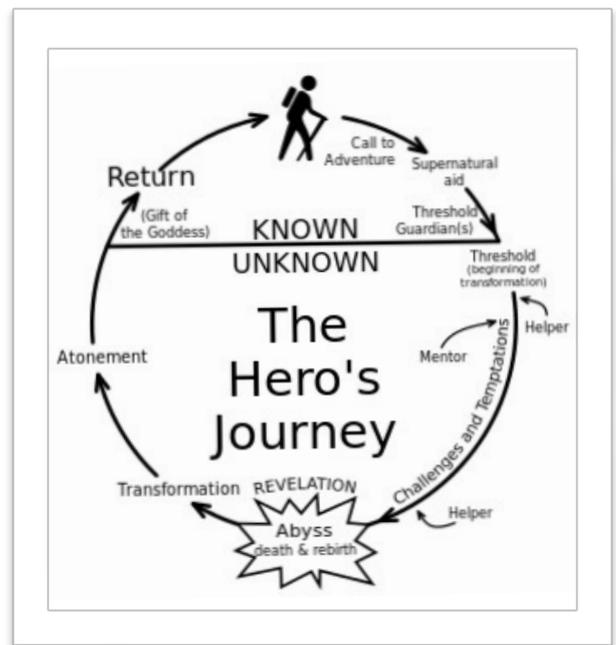
VISION QUEST TESTIMONIAL

It was my first Quest and first time fasting. A very good experience, to surrender to nature, have no expectation, no question, doing nothing but receiving such a meaningful message.

What I've learned from the Vision Quest is to be here and now – connected to my true nature while accessing the nature outside freely.

Through the whole process of the Quest led by a guide with rich experience, our group have learned and got to know each other more.

Thank you very much, bless you.



Vision Quest framework – opening up to new ways of experiencing the world



HIGHLIGHTS:

The opportunities for transforming consciousness through a variety of approaches.

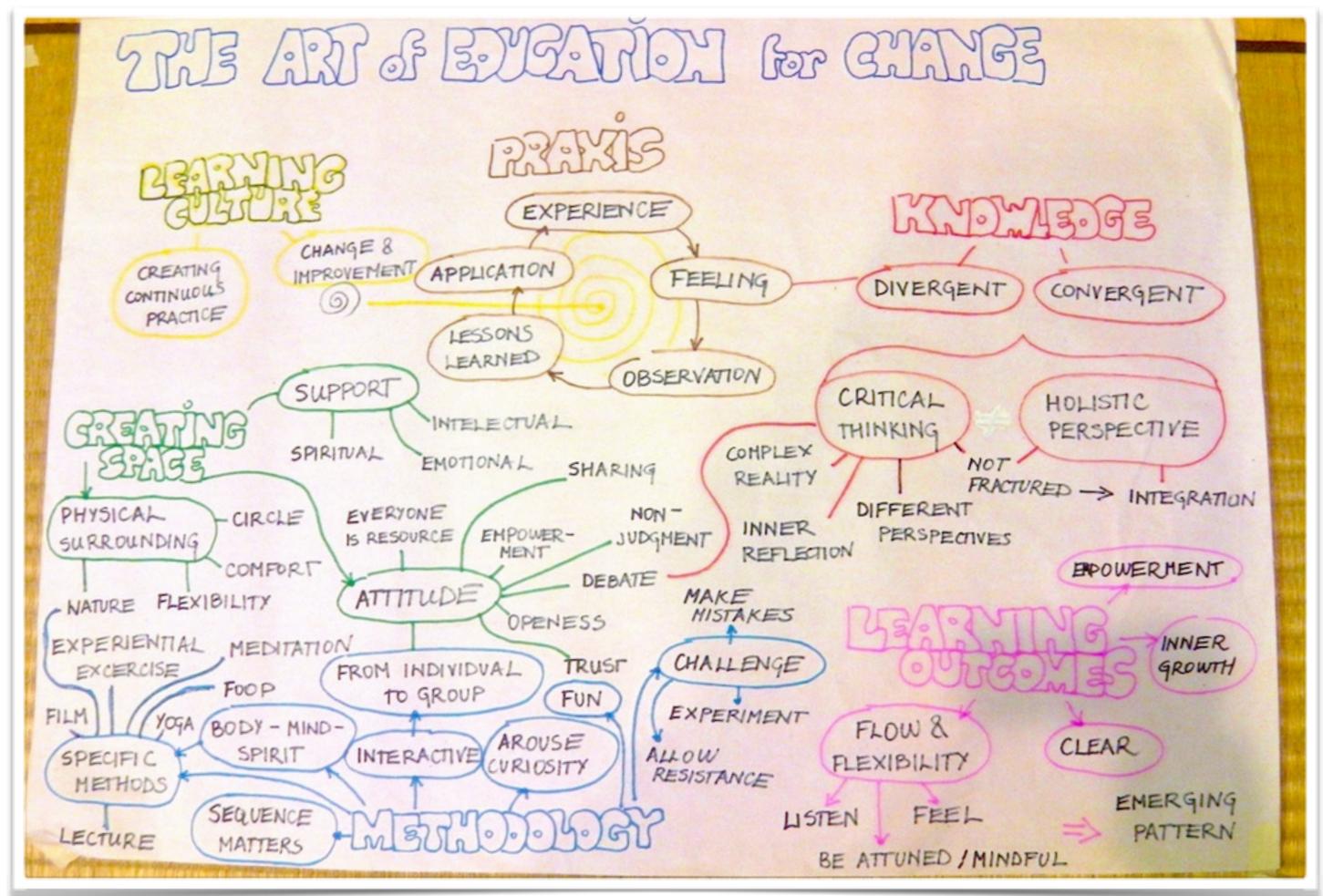
“Getting to know about myself at a deeper level was unforgettable”.

“Designing an ideal society using the iceberg model (Systems Thinking) was great”.

CHALLENGES:

Despite very good experiential sessions to facilitate shifts in worldview across the training, there was a lack of a common thread to bring together the different aspects of worldview that were presented during the module on Paradigm Shift. Some modules were also very theoretical, which created a lack of coherence across the different sessions presented.

“Too much theory and too specific terminology”.





Design Week

Two processes were used in the design week. The first process was 'Co-creation with Nature', a specific module on utilizing permaculture and design guidelines in the practical design of chosen sites. This was led by a professor and a community architect, Ti and Ajarn Jeerasak. Three actual sites were chosen from the participants (Hong Kong, England, Myanmar) and were designed with specific goals of sites, including an existing small-scale working farm, a learning centre, and a larger-scale non-working farm. Not all EDE dimensions were included in the designs, with the focus more on exploring ecological and economic aspects, although the 'softer' aspects of the social and worldview dimensions were naturally integral in the overall designs.



Design time through 'co-creation with nature'



Sketch-ups before modelling of real sites



*Creating design into models –
Kitching Wong's farm in Hong Kong*



*Three stages of design through integration
of nature principles – Daniel Sheinwald's
family farm in rural Dorset*



Although the semester was 3 months duration, there was limited time for specialisation, so most of the EDE dimensions were generalised. Students mentioned their desire to have a chance to deepen the learning process, by providing ways to continue either through self study or group learning.

There were comments from long-term students that introducing new participants into the learning community brought new energy to the group, but on the downside, they felt that students only joining for a module or two would miss the inner linkage between modules, that helped to support a flow of connected learning rather than a separation of topics. Students also felt that the connection between modules should have been more explicitly emphasised through wrap ups and reflections, to make the most of the learning.

Hands on work was weakly executed. There should be more time allocated to implement this aspect seriously into the learning process so that students can learn and the venue can benefit as well. Mindfulness practice could be stressed also during these sessions, as well as reflection on the activity. Beyond the hands-on work, self governance of the learning community could have been strengthened, by providing space for students to make greater decisions relating not only to their learning journey, but how to live as a community within Wongsanit Ashram.

Many students had skills, knowledge, ideas and work that could have contributed to the learning process. It would be a great opportunity to have space for sharing these among the group for mutual learning.

Overall Outcomes

Embedding the EDE course into a wider and more holistic learning experience with the Buddhist Leadership Training, gave participants an opportunity to deepen their understanding of themselves and the world around them, and as a result, their commitment to action for change has become stronger and more clearly defined.

The learning that came from a range of reflective processes during this first semester of the BLT – an inner learning journey – was unique. It offered very deep learning for students through different methods such as NVC, meditation, Process Work, Vision Quest, etc. Each method had its own uniqueness, yet integrated easily into the overall learning and exploration of self that the students undertook. This process was life enhancing for some participants, providing space and trust to go deeply within themselves, to understand and heal. This level of inner work is so important for building a foundation from which Right Action can spring, with compassion, wisdom and critical understanding.

Plan for set-up of an alternative learning space and organic garden for community and artists - in rural Myanmar (Khin Sandar Nyunt)





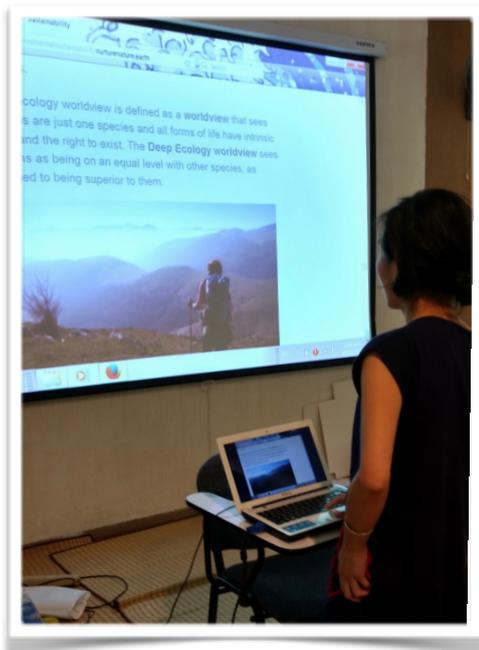
From this foundation, the integration of the EDE four dimensions across many modules of learning (rather than one module per dimension) helped to draw out interconnections, between the ecological crisis and the current political economy, cultural issues and paradigm shift, learning from alternatives and efforts for reform. An experiential module which entailed living with a slum-dwelling family for 3 days was a great example of drawing all threads of the EDE together into a lived and engaging experience.

Wongsanit Ashram as a venue for many EDE's, continues to be recognised by the students as a major contributor to their learning experience. The contemplative atmosphere, encouraged by the natural environment, earthen training room, simple accommodation and healthy local food are all a great support to the development of the minds and hearts of the students.

Evaluations

The surveymonkey was underused during the first 4 modules. From then on we used hard copy and gave time at the end of every module for students to fill in.

Using a 1-5 barometer, we were able to track the quality of the module, quality of instruction, balance of free and structured time, and relaxation/meditation. Consistently, quality of module and instruction were between 4-5. Balance of free time varied according to modules and their schedules. Some modules such as the longer political economy modules were low ranking due to the length of training (more than 6 days). This was also true for the paradigm shift module. Despite rare evening sessions, long and intensive days in the classroom took their toll on energy levels. Also contributing was a lack of diversity of learning approaches during those two stated modules.



Relaxation/meditation generally ranked around 4, with daily one hour meditation and deep relaxation, and optional yoga/body movement practices in the early morning.

Quality of facilitation also received consistently positive feedback. Despite a wide variety of guest facilitators, the majority were favourably received.

The learning venue was also consistently highly rated. Some requests were made in this part of the evaluation regarding logistics, as well as an irregular feedback space for students to share any concerns about the class and living space.

In general, the 3 month course was received very positively. There were very few negative comments in the evaluations relating to any of the modules. All constructive feedback has been integrated into the lessons learned to be utilised for planning the next course.

Holistic learning curriculum developed with the aim to partner with 3 target schools for implementation in England (Daniel Sheinwald)



Summary of projects/activities (design week)

Not all students were able to attend the second part of the design week due to visa issues. Seven of the nine students took part in a final reflective step to draw together key learnings from the course, and develop their own projects. While the projects developed are up to the participants in terms of implementation, the enthusiasm and commitment inspired by the length, breadth and depth of the course was evident.

Participants sought to draw the lessons learned throughout the course into a personal project. This was framed in terms of impacts into a personal, community and global level. Everyone was given space to reflect, contemplate, and draw from their own personal learnings in order to create a project with a determination to implement it. The end results included:

- An holistic-based ecological curriculum which is planned to be offered in collaboration with 3 schools in England. See <http://environmentalsustainability.nurturenature.earth/>
- A small learning centre near Yangon, Myanmar, for artists and local youth to come together in a simple and organic landscape
- A project for songwriting on ecological-themed songs
- Three projects that integrate inner growth and reflective practices into behaviours and practices at personal and social levels.



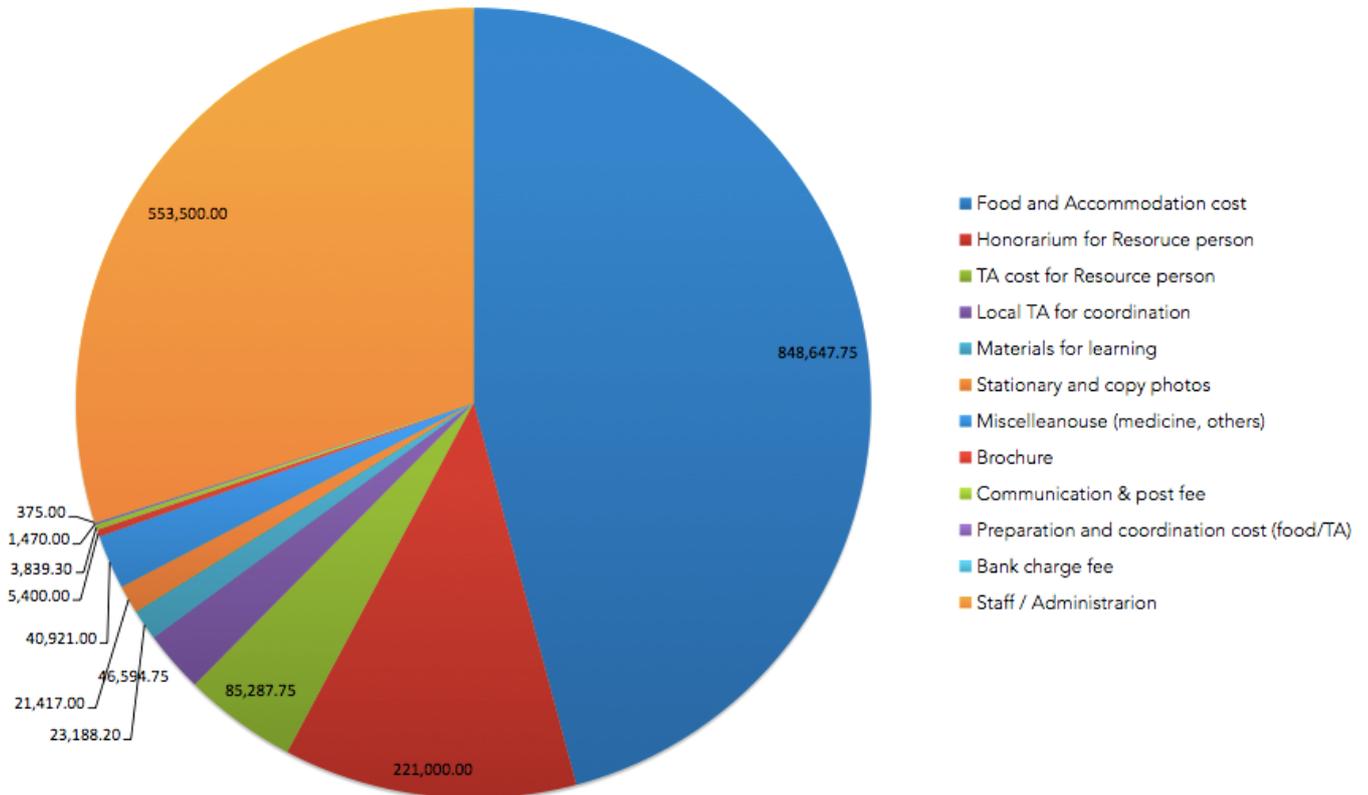
Creating a gallery for presenting personal projects



Tea and calligraphy as part of presentation of personal Project: Living with Presence (Natha Dannonthadharm)



Finance



Participant Quotes

I DON'T HAVE STUDENTS PERMISSION FOR THIS, HENCE NO PHOTO AND UNNAMED

I was greatly benefited from the personal healing sessions. It was more than a training but life healing for me. I felt healed and re-energized to face the world again. I have also learned to find happiness from process but not just from results. (Female, Myanmar)

BLT program is a great example of education focusing both on personal as well as social development. A wide selection of different facilitators from different areas of specialization provide a diverse, and applicable learning experience. Even the participants themselves are a rich source of new knowledge, information and experience. An overall worthwhile training to attend! (Female, Slovenia)

Exploring alternative development ways have become one of my learning priorities in this year in order to move myself forward. At the same time, trying to understand myself is also major need for my future. I got a chance to explore these two key points during the BLT. At the end of the first semester, I realized that I have gained a clearer picture of my work plan and myself. Moreover, learning from BLT has clarified my assumptions and values of society, nature and life, giving me more assurance that they are from right view, and I feel that I am finding my way to my own path very soon. (Female, Myanmar)