

Dharma in the West: How are our Youth Learning?

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The Buddha's teachings are considered to be a very well-crafted combination of knowledge and experiential realizations (awareness) on the path to liberation (realization). Buddhist scholars agree that the Buddha taught many teachings according to various different predispositions (for lack of a better English word). The Buddha taught that fundamentally everyone has a unique set of causes and conditions (karma) therefore he gave suitable teachings for appropriate causes and conditions.

Consequently as the Buddhadharma moves to Western secular Christian countries, questions arise about changes in the style of teaching our youth to successfully build a long-term foundation for our Buddhist communities. Should particular attention be paid to ethnic youth¹ in Western countries for them to continue and grow Buddhist traditions in their new country?

It has been long understood and well researched that ethnic young people in contemporary Western environments struggle with cultural and religious expectations from their parents and peer pressure/mainstream culture. They often feel they live in two worlds, where the realities and expectations between school and home/temple are very different.

First of all, one needs to establish if there is in fact a problem with our young Buddhists in New Zealand. Straightforward observation at many Buddhist festivals celebrated at temples reveals very few young people present. Many large temples do not provide formal religious education. For example, in Wellington, out of five main temples only two provides formal Dharma classes and another offers language classes. Auckland has a similar ratio of formalized Dharma classes.

The goal of this paper is to investigate the issue of how ethnic youth in Western countries learn Dharma. Much of the research from Western countries is focused on cultural or religious identity. Only one research has been found that specifically focuses on ethnic youth learning Dharma in Western countries.²

Other, revealing research from Canada³ regarding religious identification studied young people (1.5 generation) from Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist countries.⁴ Subjects were selected from random secular places like universities and the research found that the Buddhist youth were the least religiously practicing of the three religions. In fact, researchers had to change the category of 'Most Observant' to 'Religio-culturally based religious seekers'.

The following is how the youth from Buddhist countries responded when asked about their religious participation.

¹ For the purpose of this paper ethnic youth is referring to children and young people with Buddhist parents raised in a non-western country.

² Please let me know if there is any I have missed through journal searches and discussions with scholars in the area

³ Beyer, Peter. 2011. **Error! Main Document Only.**Differential Reconstruction of Religions among Second Generation Immigrant Youth In Canada, Annual Review of Sociology of Religion 2009

⁴ 'Religion among Immigrant Youth in Canada': A research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Orientation to Religious and Cultural Identity among Buddhist Participants by Gender:

	Women	Men	Totals
Religio-culturally based religious seekers	15 (54.5%)	7 (37%)	22 (47%)
‘A little bit Buddhist’	8 (28.5%)	12 (63%)	20 (43%)
Imitative Traditionalists	3 (11%)	0 (0%)	3 (6%)
Christians with Buddhist background	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)
Totals	28	19	47

Orientation to Religious and Cultural Identity among Hindu Participants by Gender:

	Women	Men	Totals
Highly Practicing	6 (15%)	2 (11%)	8 (14%)
Ethno-cultural Hindus	25 (64%)	5 (28%)	30 (53%)
Non-religious	8 (21%)	11 (61%)	19 (33%)
Totals	39	18	57

Religious Involvement of Muslims according to Gender:

	Women	Men	Total
<i>Highly Involved</i>	28 (48%)	15 (43%)	43 (46.2%)
<i>Moderately to Somewhat Involved</i>	22 (38%)	9 (26%)	33 (33.3%)
<i>Non-religious</i>	8 (14%)	11 (31%)	19 (20.4%)
Totals	58	35	93

(Source: “Religion among Immigrant Youth in Canada”)

It is interesting that in comparing Buddhist to Hindu and Muslim youth, Beyer finds “Overall, the Buddhist sub-sample shows a rather high correlation between religious orientation and ethno-cultural origin.” In other words, Buddhist youth more consistently identify as Buddhist regardless of which country they come from. He further comments that:

Another important common feature that applies to all the Buddhist subgroups ... the participants were exposed to Buddhism as they grew up. In most cases, their parents enjoined them to participate in what the family considered Buddhist practice – temple visits, commemorating the ancestors, etc. – but did not place much emphasis on explaining the reason of these practices. Nor, when it came to it, did the parents in most cases insist that the children keep up these practices except often in the family context. Buddhist explanation was minimal; Buddhist practice was desirable but ultimately optional. Leading a morally good life and making a success of oneself, those were much more important. This combined with the attitude expressed by many interviewees, that, in effect, Buddhism is not a religion and should not be pushy or aggressively trying to assert itself, but rather act as a background good, a source of morals and good life practice.’

From this research in Canada one can see that while the young people identify as Buddhist culturally, they are not religiously practicing to the same degree as similar Hindu and Muslim youth. Beyers also points out that learning can come in many

different forms, not just formal classes at a temple and that religious expression can take on different adaptations for Western contexts.

Relevant research

An excellent dissertation called “Dhamma Education: The Transmission and Reconfiguration of the Sri Lankan Buddhist Tradition in Toronto” (Canada) by Venerable Deba Mitra Bhikkhu (2011) is the only research that could be found that directly relates to this topic. While he delves into one particular Dhamma community his original inspiration for his research was noticing the difference in Dhamma education between the Sri Lankan and the Lao’s community in Kitchener, Ontario. He explores the Sri Lankan’s challenge to preserve their inherited cultural values while accommodating their current situation. Exploring in depth Bhanti, illuminates the intergenerational negotiation of what has been retained, altered, left out and added to the Buddhist tradition. As an ordained Monk he is well placed to compare how Dhamma education occurs in Sri Lanka and in the West as the organizational structures are very different. Not often is the changing role of laypeople in Western countries discussed yet he discusses it with a high level of objectivity, including how being a Sangha effected his research.

He draws parallels and differences to the introduction and establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and that of Buddhism in the West. He speculates that “in the long Buddhist history, this discourse has, perhaps, not met a culture as individualistic as that in North America”. He found that the second generation on the second generation’s religiosity often carry an individualistic judgement on collective religious expression.

Learning versus teaching

Over the last 30 years in Western countries a lot of attention has been paid to learning styles students may have or employ. This fundamentally challenges the approach of focusing on the teacher and ‘what’ is being taught refocuses attention to how the student learns. When education is compulsory and delivered to a large number of students there is a perpetual tension between what the teacher is teaching and whether the student is learning. Many educational reformers argue that focusing on how the student is learning is most important. The traditionalists will focus on the importance of content and overall outcomes of a class. It is commonly accepted today that a teacher should actively employ a variety of teaching styles to accommodate a variety of learning styles. When one explores the learning style aspect of education many branches and sub-sectors become apparent. It is clear that much of the intention is designed to shift the focus away from what the teacher is trying to teach and focus on the student themselves; ie. are they understanding, assimilating or integrating what is being taught? One style doesn’t fit all students and so the question arises whether an increase of understanding will arise in more students if a variety of teaching styles is used.

Over the years a plethora of learning style tests have been designed to evaluate (at a cost for the testing process) students’ individual learning styles. For example, learning style tests can determine anything from how a student acquires information (e.g. visually or auditory) through to how the learner processes or integrates/assimilates information (e.g. reflects, thinks etc.) or the personality traits that motivate learning (introvert, extrovert, thinker, perceiver etc.).

Most of the learning style research relevant to this paper relates to acquiring English as a second language and minority ethnic communities in a mainstream educational system. Furthermore most of the religious education research focuses on the importance of spiritual and moral education for children and young people; it is Christian based, and not specifically focused on the acquisition of a particular religion in a Western

country. There appears therefore to be no explicitly specific research on Buddhist religious education for young people in Western countries.

As for learning styles, the best and most comprehensive study that appears to have been published is called “Learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning: A systematic and critical review”⁵ (Coffield, Moseley, Hall, Ecclestone 2004). This publication was overseen by the top academics in the world. They systematically reviewed thousands of research publications of these 13 learning style leaders and tried to draw conclusions. While this research paper creates significant frameworks for the field of learning style theories and tests it did concluded further research was required and provide a structure approach to how that research could happen.

Research methodology

A review of numerous papers and research documents, most notably, “Learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning: A systematic and critical review”⁶, suggested no clear and defensible guidance for which learning style testing system to use. In fact, in a personal conversation with the author of this paper, Dr Frank Coffield, Emeritus Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, London University, recommended not using a test but running instead small group interviews with each youth grouping. His main reasoning is that tests are expensive and not always as reliable as one might think and he feels labeling students has unintended consequences. As he is an internationally renowned academic, researcher and educational expert his advice was taken for this research.⁷

This research studied one Muslim and three Buddhist communities during September/October 2011 in Auckland and Wellington. The main interest of the research was to shed light on young people’s religious learning in a Western secular context. Since this is the first of its kind in New Zealand, and possibly internationally, it is important to point out this is exploratory research and further enquiry is very much encouraged.

All group interviews were conducted without adults, teachers, or Sangha present so that the participants could feel free to speak openly. The interviews were recorded with the express permission of the youths. As the voice recorder was small and not very obvious it is unlikely it inhibited the interviewees. The following are the four communities studied.

1. Fo Guang Shan Temple (Auckland)
2. Sri Lankaramaya (New Zealand Sri Lanka Buddhist Trust – Auckland)
3. Wat Buddhachaimahanat Cambodian Temple (Wellington)
4. Kilbirnie Mosque (Wellington)

The three Buddhist communities were chosen because they represented both Theravada and Mahayana traditions and had different migration histories to New Zealand. Each community was asked if they would allow a half hour to forty-five minute interview with 5-10 young people of secondary school age. While I requested to speak to the

⁵ Coffield F, Moseley D, Hall E and Ecclestone K (2004a). *Learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning: a systematic and critical review*. London: Learning and Skills Research Centre, Learning and Skills Development Agency.

⁶ Frank Coffield, Institute of Education University of London, David Moseley University of Newcastle, Elaine Hall University of Newcastle, Kathryn Ecclestone, University of Exeter

⁷ In the next stage of research, testing learning styles will be considered again as it still may be helpful for Dharma teachers to fully understand how different the students’ learning styles are or are not.

Dharma students, I did not realize that the Cambodian class is a language class until I arrived to do the interview. Given that the students were in a learning environment, I decided to continue with the interviews after slightly modifying the questions.

A similar group of Muslim youth were interviewed for overall comparison because as members of a minority religious community they have comparable issues and concerns. A notable difference, though, is the multi-cultural make-up of the mosque. In New Zealand many religious communities establish one central place which initially accommodates different ethnic communities. Over time the ethnic communities often devolve when individually able to support their Sangha. This has been the pattern with the Buddha Theravada communities and is also applicable to the Muslim community. In Wellington one central mosque still remains the focus for 42 different ethnic cultures. In total 26 young people participated in this preliminary research.

The following is a brief summary of the groups studied and the temples they are associated with:

Temple Name:	Fo Guang Shan Temple (Auckland)
Number interviewed:	8
Ages:	1 - 11 yrs, 2 - 15 yrs, 1 - 16 yrs, 3 - 18 yrs, 1 - 21 yrs old
Length of time in NZ:	1 for 2 years, 6 for 7-10 years in NZ, and 1 was born in NZ
Cultural backgrounds:	6 Malaysian, 1 Hong Konger, 1 Taiwanese
Languages:	All could speak Mandarin and English, one also spoke Cantonese
Formal Dharma training:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the guidance of the abbess, the youth spend a month during summer holidays living at the temple participating in the life of the temple • Other activities are organized throughout the year, however during school exam time they are encouraged to focus on school. • Language classes for 200-300 students are run at the temple but are separately organized by the Chinese community. Teachers have started to provide a very minimal Dharma talk at the beginning of some of the classes

Temple Name:	Sri Lankaramaya (New Zealand Sri Lanka Buddhist Trust – Auckland)
Number interviewed:	7
Ages:	2 – 13 yrs, 2 – 14 yrs, 1 – 15 yrs, 1 – 16 yrs, 1 – 17 yrs old
Length of time in NZ:	3 – 6-10 yrs, 4 – 12-13 yrs
Cultural backgrounds:	All were Sri Lankan
Languages:	Singhalese and English
Formal Dharma training:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dharma school is run every Sunday morning for approximately 60 children and young people • Organized by a junior monk but taught by lay people. Senior monks participate from time to time. • Classes are developed on an achievement basis and students are advanced from one level to the next • Language classes follow in the second half of the morning

Temple Name:	Wat Buddhachaimahanat (Wellington)
Number interviewed:	4
Ages:	1 – 12 yrs, 1 – 14 yrs, 1 – 16yrs, 1 – 28yrs
Length of time in NZ:	All were born in NZ, 3 were second generation Cambodian
Cultural backgrounds:	1 Chinese/Cambodian, 2 Cambodian and the European NZ born was marrying a Cambodian woman.
Languages:	English and learning Cambodian
Formal Dharma training:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main form of teaching is language based, and was taught by a junior resident monk. The class takes place while the older adults are at Dharma classes. • Language is seen as important for culture and religious transmission • The junior monk said the attendance was very low because of the Rugby World Cup • One young woman said she had spoken Cambodian as a child but when her family moved to NZ they only spoke English to attain competency in the language. She lost her Cambodian as a result.

Name	Kilbirnie Mosque (Wellington)
Number interviewed:	7 (girls)
Ages:	2 – 13 yrs, 4 – 14 yrs, 1 – 15 yrs old
Length of time in NZ:	4 born in NZ, 3 moved within the last 4 years
Cultural backgrounds included:	Egyptian, Palestinian, Somalian, Indian and NZ
Languages:	NB 42 cultures attend the mosque
Formal Islamic training:	4 had English as a second language
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes based on achievement not age are organized and taught by lay people every Sunday morning. • Classes have been running for many years and developed by a lay NZ trained teacher. • The program is distinctive in that it accommodates 42 cultures, with Arabic as the common religious language. It is also segregated by gender.

The group interview questions acted as a guide with spontaneous probing for further elaboration or exploration. While not originally intended, questions probing the understanding of basic Buddhist topics were asked of interviewees following the formal interview.⁸

The following are the questions and overall indicative comments made by the youth during the group interviews. It is important to realize that the questions were designed as a general preliminary enquiry into this topic. Note that when students were asked about how they learn or what makes it difficult for them to learn, their answers were likely not directly related to the teaching at the relevant religious institution.

⁸ The questions were consistently asked of the three Buddhist groups, but were not designed to determine whether interviewees were 'good' Buddhists. The questions were intended to be indicative only.

How is the temple class different from school classes?			
Chinese Mahayana	Sri Lankan	Cambodian	Muslim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go against your desires • Friends are different • School is more technical • School teaches, temple guides • School has a set plan • Supported by the abbess who guides us • No distractions • More focused and better concentration • • Tailored to the way we understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No real curriculum • Laid back • Shorter • How much you know not based on age • Nice teachers • Spoon fed – repetitive • Go slowly • Focused step by step • With my friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot smaller here • More interactions • More laid back 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfort zone – no discrimination • Can practice my religion • Learning the science behind my religion • Sisterly relationships • Feel closer to God • (to be blunt) it's more disorganized, casual and flexible • No punishment for being late • You come here for yourself • Teachers are like aunts: they watch you grow up • You don't feel self-conscious about being Muslim

What makes it easy for you to learn? For example, if you were to learn to swim / do something new.			
Chinese Mahayana	Sri Lankan	Cambodian	Muslim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need friends away • Doing it yourself • No pressure • Practice • Need it step by step • Watch it first • Determination – not giving up • Linking ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking it down • Like it on paper • With friends • Like to write things down (x2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start simple then work into more complex • Have to want to learn, be patient and motivated • Good teacher • Be with others • Good environment • Comfortable • Learn one thing over and over then move on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to everyone in the conversation • Watching TV and movies • Reading • Do practical things

What makes learning difficult for you? Examples?			
Chinese Mahayana	Sri Lankan	Cambodian	Muslim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No support • Incorrect environment • Don't like discouraging comments • Intimidating style • Too many things at once • Bad habits (sleeping in) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When its noisy • Learning a religion you have to be committed • Friends can be a distraction • Lack of time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rushing • Learning to read is really hard • Rude teachers who interrupt, ignore me • Don't like teachers who favor certain people – only smart people • Impatient teachers are not good at all • Doesn't include everyone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being disrespected • Being embarrassed • Rushed

How useful is what you learn here (temple/mosque) to the rest of your life?			
Chinese Mahayana	Sri Lankan	Cambodian	Muslim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooking • Gardening • General knowledge • Habits of living • Doing chores • Taking every chance you get 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take on for our kids • Moral foundation • 5 precepts are important • You learn how to relate • Behave properly in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the rest of my life • My grandmother doesn't know English • My fiancé is Cambodian • Family reasons • Cool to know another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how it's going to help • Passing on the knowledge (children) • Listen to everyone's conversation • Boundaries – living in

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>More optimistic</i> • <i>Small things in life – more awareness</i> • <i>Openings and closings</i> • <i>Eating – how you eat reflects your mind – more elegant</i> 	<p><i>the world</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Be a better person</i> • <i>What to share and not share – when</i> • <i>Helps us at parties to see the benefit of the precepts</i> 	<p><i>language</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I taught my family English and they dropped Cambodian</i> • <i>Visiting Cambodia</i> • <i>Help to get a job with 2 languages</i> 	<p><i>a non-Muslim country</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Respect</i> • <i>You appreciate why things are the way they are</i> • <i>Why to be careful of what you eat</i> • <i>Aware of what you do because you will be judged</i> • <i>Faith in you is strong</i>
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What makes a good teacher?			
Chinese Mahayana	Sri Lankan	Cambodian	Muslim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive • Understands • Changes with the changes of the student • Able to adapt • Good habits i.e. eating and speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When they are clear • Go slowly • Revise a lot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calm • Inclusive (doesn't just like some people) • Willing to be patient until you understand • Open to opinions and new ways • Compromise (do class outside) • Know their subject and what they are doing • Good teaching methods • "Act like a rock" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and doesn't yell • Doesn't embarrass you • Explains clearly • Respects • Helps • Listens • Likes a teacher to be a bit bossy so you know your limits • Lots of discussion
What do you like most about these classes?			
Chinese Mahayana	Sri Lankan	Cambodian	Muslim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teaching on the after-life (x3) • Practical tree trimming • Learning the way trees grow and metamorphosis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More dialogue here – able to question more • No set curriculum so we can go over again and again • Classes are structured by knowledge • Not as intense • Really like when the monks come • Games and stuff • Theatre performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free time • Humor • Near the end we have a small whiteboard quiz in pairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being with my friends who I have known all my life • Very supportive • Can be who I am
How could these classes be improved?			
Chinese Mahayana	Sri Lankan	Cambodian	Muslim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Buddhism to learn break dancing • More classes – weekend, holiday for a few hours • More time to think • Decision making • Don't like waking up early 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More consistent teachers • Parents are good • For the younger kids it should be more serious • More games • Newsletter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't need improving • Some can speak already so it's a bit fast • Food • Prizes • Revise previous lessons • Comfortable • Stress free • Need more clarity on why each person is here (I only want to learn to speak Cambodian) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More fun • More twists e.g. taking the class outside • Translate a bit more • Learn more what and why • Power points and other IT • The cultural teachers just want you to recite • A Muslim high school

All of the groups appeared to have a good grasp of what they liked and didn't like when it came to learning. They all enjoyed their religious classes for what appeared typical teenager reasons – their friends were there.

It was interesting to find that the Fo Guang Shan Temple in Auckland provided a month-long program over the summer holidays. While not many temples in the West can accommodate this, it provides an interesting alternative or complement to a weekly program. Not only does it provide an opportunity for youth to study but also practice Buddhism without making a large commitment, such as taking temporary robes as might be expected in South East Asia. Both the Fo Guang Shan Temple and Sri Lankaramaya put significant effort into supporting the mainstream educational achievements of their

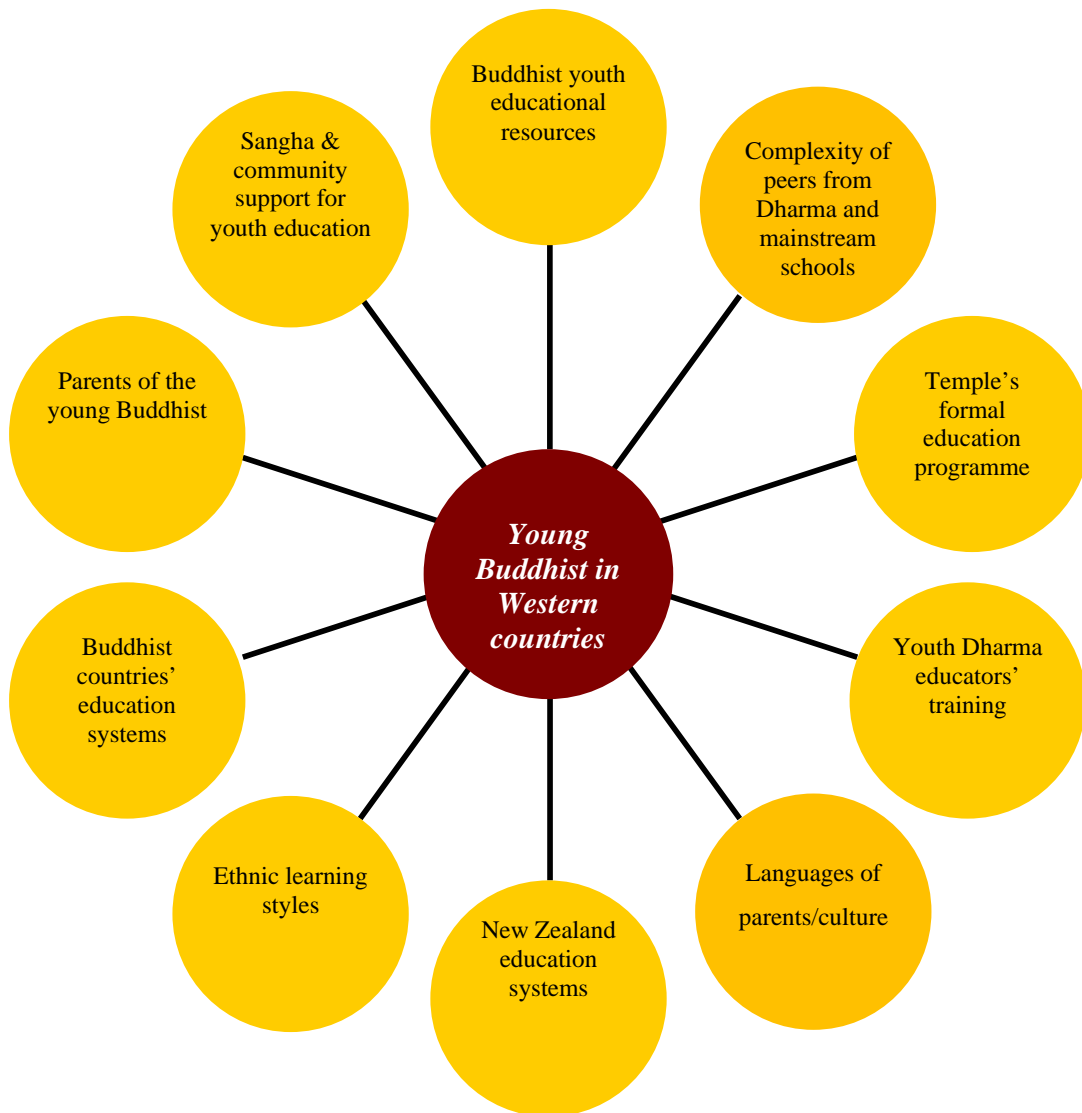
youth. It is in fact an explicit priority above and beyond the Dharma education at the temple. As this research timing was nearing the end of the school year, attendance was down for both temples.

Most noticeably, the Muslim young women repeatedly spoke about how they were treated at school. On three occasions I had to redirect their attention away from the discrimination they were experiencing from fellow students, teachers, and administrators in their mainstream schools. All but one young woman wore a hijab (head covering) at school. The feeling of discrimination most likely contributed to how comfortable they felt at the mosque. Buddhists, of course, unlike Muslim girls or Sikh boys, do not wear very visible forms of religious expression. In retrospect and given the discrimination the young women reported, the added complexity of the Islamophobia these young people endure, it might be better in the future to compare young Buddhists with Hindu youth. The two different Buddhist traditions had different subtleties, as one might expect. Mahayana youth referred to mindfulness, awareness and repressing desires while the Theravada youth referred to moral guidance, precepts and right conduct.

Random basic questions about Buddhism were informally asked to gauge responses (only Buddhist groups were questioned because I am not qualified to ask Muslims appropriate indicative questions). While the questions were not comprehensive, examples were: name one of the Triple Gem/Three Refuges; what's the First Noble Truth? Second Noble Truth? Tell me your favorite story of the Buddha. The Sri Lankan and Chinese Mahayana students were very quick to answer and appeared to have a grasp of Buddhism that was appropriate for their age.⁹ The Cambodian language class could only answer that the Buddha was born in India. Appreciating that assessment, especially across Buddhist traditions, could be fraught with debate; there may be a need for a benchmarking system that can contribute information about how well teaching efforts are succeeding. This is done by the Sri Lankan community. Between the way the youth conducted themselves in the interviews and their answers to the simple Buddhist questions, they appear to be on the way to being knowledgeable and behaving as one might hope a young Buddhist would. This would be the same, albeit limited, observation of the young Muslim women. The bigger question becomes who is not attending these classes and why?

The following is a diagram showing various influences a young Buddhist in the West experiences.

⁹ In fact, I was impressed and pleasantly surprised.



This endeavors to scope the issues surrounding this topic and put the young person in the center of the discussion without undermining the fact that many communities in NZ and other Western countries are still in the initial stages of resettlement and may have other more pressing issues facing them.

As this research is only a preliminary scoping of some of the issues related to our youth Dhamma education, many further research topics remain, including:

1. The young people who are not attending classes regularly need immediate attention to determine why they are not attending. Such an investigation might include:
 - a. Starting with success – interviewing the current students again as they will know about their friends who could attend but aren't or are not regularly attending;
 - b. Interviewing those young people whose parents/grandparents are connected to the temple yet never attend Dharma classes; and
 - c. Then finding out from young people who have never attended why not.

2. Prioritized attention to determine why temples are not providing formal classes.
 - a. Have they run programs in the past? What was the program's strength? Why did the program stop?
 - b. Does the temple see it as important or a priority?
 - c. Are there enough young people to warrant running a program?
 - d. How has the temple tried to find or attract young people? Does it have parents' support, community leadership's support?
 - e. Does the temple have qualified Sangha or parents to run such a program?
 - f. Would the temple consider liaising with another temple to provide formal classes for their youth?
3. The actual education program at temples who do offer formal Dharma classes needs review to determine whether any further opportunities could be explored, for example, whether:
 - a. Timing fits the young person's (and their parents) rhythm and school demands
 - b. Programs can be extended. For example, if regular weekly classes work, could bi-monthly weekend programs work? Other such options might provide a continuum of opportunity for young people to learn more Buddhism.
4. The teachers of the programs may or may not be open to further professional development particularly with regard to how to incorporate various styles of teaching. Testing the youth learning styles could provide valuable feedback for teachers.
5. Developing a benchmarking system for monitoring a young person's progress without being too much like school exams. For example, the Sri Lankan temple in Auckland has a system that they feel appropriately evaluates a young person's progress.
6. What do parents think of the children Dharma education? What do they want for their children? Could anything be done to support them?
7. Investigate a regular feedback loop that gives teachers constructive advice from students.
8. There are many very successful Dharma education program in other Western countries.
 - a. What successful program could provide assistance and inspiration for others?
9. From enquiries in NZ there appears to be no national or international opportunities for youth Dharma educators to come together to share expertise, resources, and experiences. Therefore further exploration is required to determine:
 - a. Whether there a need or interest for this form of gathering. Would it be enough of a priority to pursue?
 - b. If communities would share within and across traditions, recognizing ethnic culture plays a role in the motivation for providing these classes
 - c. The possibility of sharing Dharma resources within and across traditions
 - d. The possibility of a national or international opportunity to facilitate the sharing of educational resources on a website which respected ethnic and traditional differences.

Conclusion:

The topic of how our young ethnic Buddhists learn the Buddhadharma in a Western context is both important and complex. This paper probed the topic with young Buddhists from three communities and one Muslim community in New Zealand. The research has scoped many of the issues related to how we may approach questions about our young learning the Buddhadharma in the West.

When one compares the Muslim community generally and the numbers of youth participating in religious study specifically, neither appears to be much different from Buddhist communities. Both communities appear to have committed, knowledgeable and fulfilled young people. The bigger question is who is not attending and why. An additional question for the Buddhist communities is why are some temples offering Dharma classes and other are not? The Buddha has provided us with the teaching styles for all forms of predispositions; are we utilizing them sufficiently for our youth in Western countries?

May all beings be soothed by the cool blessings of enlightenment!

Om ah hum! Om ah hum! Om ah hum!

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