The Life University: The Background of Learning Institute For Everyone (LIFE)

The Community: The Background of the Life University

These days it seems people all over the country are facing problems concerning debt, family, and their very own livelihood.

It is as though their community is about to fall apart; people are unable to solve the myriad of problems they are besieged with.

Despite the above situation, we have discovered that there exists a good number of people who have been able to solve their debt and other problems by themselves. We have also come across many communities that have not collapsed; on the contrary, they are strong and able to support themselves. More than just a few are outstanding to the point that many people from all over the country and from abroad have made an effort to pay them a study visit.

At a time when we are about to lose hope in our education system since it has failed to help mend the problems of poverty, debt, separation and violence, we have found that strong communities throughout the country are strong not because they are granted big budgets and many projects, but it is because they are ‘learning’ communities. These communities have efficiently managed their own learning processes in ways that can help solve their own problems and develop themselves.

LIFE has ‘sought knowledge’ from village philosophers, leaders, and from the strong communities we have visited. For the past 30 years, we have collaborated in ‘joint development’ of local communities all over the country. We have worked with community leaders, academics, then analyzed and synthesized the knowledge obtained from these communities and developed it into both short-term and long-term programs and those at a higher education level; these programs are then brought back to members of the communities all over the country so they can choose to study. It is hoped that upon graduation, they can take back their knowledge and manage to successfully deal with their own problems in the same way as those individuals and ‘prototype’ communities.

Life University: The Meaning

The ‘Life University’ is a phrase specifically coined to describe a learning process that comes from life experiences. Learning here is, therefore, based on real life, real problems in our life, community and society whereas one’s potential and that of his local community serve as a solid foundation and an investment capital. Learning at LIFE means learning to solve one’s own problems and to develop oneself rather than learning ‘from books’ in order to pass ‘exams’ and take the degree they receive after graduation to look for jobs elsewhere.

Life University is one ‘form’ of learning which uses life as the ‘content’ for learning. Emphasis is put on process-oriented learning and not on rote learning or knowledge transmitting. It is a process that helps learners learn how to think, and think systematically as well as be able to create new or ‘tacit’ knowledge. This kind of knowledge that they have created by themselves is considered the knowledge with maximum efficiency and force that can result in desired effects.
of the changes.

One’s life is likely to be improved while learning because learning at LIFE means change. Changes for the better should occur immediately because true learning will cause one’s inner potential to explode and not the learning that is crammed in from the outside. Old information and old knowledge found in textbooks or transmitted from teachers can merely equip learners with new tools to create some kind of new knowledge. It is in no way a ‘final’ or ‘ready-made’ answer.

To put it to use.

This method is known as linear learning which over-simplifies education like the ‘formula 2 x 2 = 4’. This type of formula cannot be applied in real life because life is not that simple and is not governed by any formula. Rather, life is complex and involves many chains of reasoning and many twists and turns that one needs to identify and untangle in order to survive. It is a patronizing form of education that is exerting control over one’s life. This kind of education involves no systematic. It is an approach to education which is aimed at producing obedient citizens under a patron-client system. We have not yet changed our attitude towards learning; instead, we just take it for granted that we are already in possession of that knowledge and have found it. Unfortunately, what we are doing is simply memorizing or learning that knowledge by rote, grab it and merely take it for granted that we are in possession of that knowledge.

The old style of education cannot, therefore, cope with social problems because each problem has its own complexities. In order to grasp an understanding of both the macro and micro views, knowledge and wisdom have to be applied. Since there is no set formula in this, we tend to resort to power and money as an easy way out of social problems. However, most of these social problems cannot be solved merely with ‘orders and budgets’. Only education can help one find the answers; and it has to be ‘good’ education and not the old form of education.

The old style of education relies on rote learning and does not teach one how to think, how to connect things or think systematically. It is an approach to education which is aimed at producing obedient citizens under a patron-client system. It is a patronizing form of education that is exerting control over one’s life. This kind of education involves no questioning, no arguing and no critiquing because students have never been taught to ask a question or how to create new knowledge. When faced with a problem, they are at their wit’s end. This is because they do not use neither reasoning nor knowledge nor wisdom, but resort to violence.

A New Approach to Learning: A New Paradigm for Education

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Learning that creates powerful dynamics for change comes from an education system that is equipped with a new paradigm which involves ways of thinking, practicing and giving values that is set on the premise of looking at the realities of the world from a different perspective. Details about this perspective have previously been elaborated in “A Paradigm for the Life University”.

The underlying principles or the philosophy of the Life University can be summed up as follows:

A people are not born ‘stupid, poor and vulnerable’. But they are instead ‘made to believe’ that they are totally and
ทุกคนมีศักยภาพที่จะเรียนรู้และพัฒนาตนเองและมีคุณค่าอย่างยิ่งต่อชุมชนท้องถิ่นและสังคม.

คนขาดโอกาสการเรียนรู้

เชื่อมโยงกับโลกในยุคโลกาภิวัตน์ที่ทุกอย่างสัมพันธ์กันหมด

การเรียนรู้เป็นกระบวนการสร้างความรู้ใหม่ที่เกิดมาจากมือหนึ่ง.

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Returning Education to the Community: The Local Duty

Section 29 of the National Education Act of 1999 states:

“Educational institutions in co-operation with individuals, families, communities, community organizations, local administration organizations, private persons, private organizations, professional bodies, religious institutions, enterprises and other social institutions shall contribute to strengthening the communities by encouraging learning in the communities themselves. Thus the communities will be capable of providing education and training: searching for knowledge, data and information; and able to benefit from local wisdom and other sources of learning for community development in keeping with their requirements and needs; and identification of ways of promoting exchanges of development experience among communities.”

The Life University provides the kind of education right in students’ local community so that learning can be based on real life situations, real environment and real life atmosphere. And, of utmost importance, it allows the local communities to play a part in managing higher education. Members of the community are not merely treated as members of a ‘school to be served’, but are now active participants and co-administrators. This is why the Life University does not build new classrooms but uses existing local venues such as a monastic school, an administration office, a centre for non-formal education, and so on. In some places, old schools (which have been closed due to lack of students) or old government offices (such as a district office of primary education) are being used as classrooms.

It is not necessary at this stage to construct new buildings to be used as classrooms. This is because there exist many different venues that can be found locally such as a monastery, a school, a local administration office, a municipality council office, a centre for non-formal education, and so on. In some places, old schools (which have been closed due to lack of students) or old government offices (such as a district office of primary education) are being used as classrooms. There is also an attempt at raising funds in the community so as to involve its members in the collaborative effort to establish its community learning centre.

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Life University students have a chance to learn in real life situations in their own community. Apart from the regular full-time teachers, there are also other teachers and knowledgeable people available in the local area who can serve as ‘mentors’ and/or ‘managers of the learning process’. These people help students learn in groups, or with knowledgeable local philosophers and experienced individuals from in the strong communities as well as work together with students in research and development projects. In relation to this, project-based learning plays a crucial role in various subjects at the Life University. It is a belief at LIFE that one’s life cannot be separated into parts, but it is a system in which all parts are connected. Learning then has to be all-round so that the various parts can be assembled like a jigsaw where every single piece must fit together in order to get a complete picture.

Lessons learned from individuals and strong communities show that problems related to poverty, debt, migration from homelands, and collapse of communities have occurred not because there is a shortage of resources, namely labor or even money; but it is because there is a severe lack of knowledge necessary in managing one’s life and local resources. A strong community is one that learns and uses the knowledge and wisdom to solve its problems and develop its potential as a strong community is one that learns and uses the knowledge and wisdom to solve its problems and develop its potential as a strong community.

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These days, there are very few knowledgeable people remaining in villages. The younger generations who seek to further their studies do not wish to return home because the mainstream education system neither prepares them to cope with life in the village nor to earn a living there. The only jobs available in the villages are working as teachers, officials, or staff members in local administration offices or municipalities; however, there are likely to be limited positions.

The Life University wants to offer these adult learners learning choices so that they can ‘live with dignity and secure livelihoods in their own community’. They actually have no need for a university degree to go and find work. This is because these people are going to become so-called “farmer graduates” or “organic intellectuals”. These graduates from the Life University are meant to be knowledgeable leaders who are capable of leading their community out of a dependency society into a knowledge-based society, from a society which relies on money and power to a society that uses knowledge and wisdom.

As a rule, members of a local community, both children and adults, these days are entitled to study up to the higher education level. However, the traditional education system does nothing to accommodate this. In fact, people are forced to learn about something which ‘alienates’ them from real life; they instead have to ‘study books’ in order to pass exams and receive a ‘diploma’ more than anything else. Besides, elderly people frequently remember and are likely to become discouraged despite their vast experiences.

The Life University aims to produce ‘a new breed of leaders’ that utilizes information, knowledge, principles and ethics of themselves. They are farmers, members of the TAO (Tambol Administrative Office), members of municipal councils, village headmen, government officials, and office workers. Some are vendors in the marketplace; others work in health stations and hospitals, and other places. These people have not only applied the knowledge they have obtained in their livelihoods but have also managed to create new knowledge and introduce changes in the areas in which they live by following the tips: “how to think, how to implement, and how to give value” as well as “how to learn”.

Almost all students of the Life University were adults aged between 20-80 years. After completing their studies, they usually chose to remain in the own areas. Up to today, approximately 5,000 people all over the country have completed their studies at the bachelor and master levels. These people are scattered in villages and cities throughout the country. They are farmers, members of the TAO (Tambol Administrative Office), members of municipal councils, village headmen, government officials, and office workers. Some are vendors in the marketplace; others work in health stations and hospitals, and other places. These people have not only applied the knowledge they have obtained in their livelihoods but have also managed to create new knowledge and introduce changes in the areas in which they live by following the tips: “how to think, how to implement, and how to give value” as well as “how to learn”.

Apart from programs at the bachelor’s level, there is also the master’s degree program which aims at enhancing local
leaders to become ‘strategic commanders’ who have the ability to develop strategic plans based on academic principles. These strategic plans are not merely work plans or budget request proposals but they are geared towards effective implementation.

The Life University is one way of reforming our education and ultimately our society; this is a path towards a democratic society. This democracy is not meant to be only in form (which involves voting, councils, political parties) but a true democracy which respects the rights and the dignity of the people and provides equal opportunity, as well as allows people and the community to participate in political processes, decision making and monitoring.

Educational and social reform can occur only when there is a synergy between the social force, the political force and the educational force. The attempt at creating new knowledge that is appropriate for the people of this country. The three forces mentioned above could be equated to the three forces of the mountain which is in a way similar to that very mountain elaborated in “The Mountain and the Path to the Buddhist Dharma” by the venerable Buddhaddhāsa Bhiṅkkhu who identified three things that prevent anyone from attaining Dharma. Accordingly, these can be compared to the 3 major obstacles blocking the passage of social transformation to a better society. These obstacles involve superficial attachments to only the ‘form’ and not ‘essence’ of the three major issues, namely development, education and democracy.

The Life University is learning to be free. It is the learning that integrates development, education and democracy into one unified force that can strengthen and sustain the foundation of our development.