



The Educational Philosophy of the Buddha

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ABSTRACT

The research investigates the Buddha's educational approach which utilized ERR as the mechanism to present his Four Noble Truths. A study using early Buddhist texts investigates how the Buddha adjusted his teaching based on the readiness of learners such as Pañcavaggiyā, Bhaddavaggiyā and two other followers Kisā Gotamī and Uruvela Kassapa. The Buddha utilized discussions together with intellectual exchanges and culturally appropriate teaching methods that matched modern instructional design and adaptive teaching methods. An educational model adopted in Buddha's discourse with the Bhaddavaggiyā princes offers valuable insight into modern educational techniques by following a structured six-step process.

Keywords: Buddha, Four Noble Truths, teaching methodology, ERR model, Pañcavaggiyā, Bhaddavaggiyā, Kisā Gotamī, dialogue, Indian pedagogy, adaptive learning

During his Four Noble Truths instruction the Buddha taught using unique methods to both the Group of Five Ascetics (Pañcavaggiyā) and the Princes of the Bhaddavaggiyā (Vinaya Mahāvagga I.6; Majjhima Nikāya I.173).

Uruvela Kassapa received a different instructional method from the teaching the Buddha delivered to Kisā Gotamī. The teaching approach the Buddha applied toward the Brahmin Bāradvāja varied distinctively from what the Buddha taught Āḷavaka (Suttanipāta, Sn 1.11, Sn 1.12; Therīgāthā, Thig 213–223).

The Four Noble Truths received different instructional methods from the Buddha which he tailored to fit the understanding level of his listeners. As recorded in early Buddhist texts, the Buddha's ability to adapt was central to his success as a teacher (Majjhima Nikāya I.380).

The Four Noble Truths became understandable through logical presentation because the Buddha applied a teaching approach specifically designed for Brahmanical societies. The Buddha had to introduce revolutionary teachings to an extremely traditional Indian population which maintained religious prejudices together with racial and cultural beliefs (Gombrich 2009, 67–68).

The process of gaining acceptance through deep-rooted traditions of the past proved extremely difficult (Ñānamoli & Bodhi 2005, introduction to MN).

The Buddha mainly employed dialogue when teaching because it promoted two-way discussions which helped students learn actively. His education model consists of an active educational cycle which puts dialog as its core element (Analayo 2012, 58).

The *Therīgāthā* records nun Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesā using public debates against rival practitioners so demonstrating the acceptability of dialogue and argument in Indian social settings at that time (Therīgāthā, Thig 107). The practice of structured debate (argument) represented an accepted technique for sharing knowledge between intellectuals (Bronkhorst 2007, 119–120).

Marketplaces along with crossroads served as effective forums which drew crowds and stimulated intellectual discussions. The practice spread throughout India before Greek philosopher Socrates adopted it from the Indian tradition of debate (McEvilley 2002, 37–38).

The Buddha dedicated five days of his teaching to the Pañcavaggiyā by conducting conceptual discussions that explained the Four Noble Truths. At the start of his teaching the Buddha did not conduct individual lessons on charity or morality before combining them under the framework of the Noble Eightfold Path (Vinaya Mahāvagga I.6.19–21).

Teaching the Bhaddavaggiyā required a six-step method of discourse as the Buddha introduced his lessons such as Dānakathā – Talk on charity; Sīlakathā – Talk on ethical discipline; Saggakathā – Talk about heavenly rewards; Kāmādinavakathā – Talk about the dangers of sensual pleasures; Nekkhamma-ānisaṃsakathā – Talk on the advantages of renunciation; and Maggakathā – Talk on the path to the liberation (Vinaya Mahāvagga I.20.13–20).

This method gradually developed their knowledge before he taught them the Four Noble Truths.

Education requires a strong foundation. The Buddha based his teaching strategies on appropriate conditions found in time and location along with specific requirements of his listeners (Rahula 1974, 46–47). The background stories of Bhaddavaggiyā and Pañcavaggiyā groups differed alongside their repeated readiness to accept truth.

Understood understanding becomes impossible when people have amassed many defilements (*kilesa*). The Buddha taught his followers regular steps of psychological purification by starting with generosity followed by morality and ending with wisdom (Dīgha Nikāya II.216; Majjhima Nikāya I.34). Training in education consists of methodically removing mistaken ideas as well as misinterpretations and prejudice.

People who carry heavy contamination do not quickly understand the Four Noble Truths. People need to remove their misconceptions through successive stages of learning. The instructional process which unfolded in several steps proved ideal for Indian educational needs (Gethin 1998, 70–71).

According to the Buddha each person has a distinct ability to receive intellectual teachings. The teaching of the Four Noble Truths demanded students to develop wisdom capabilities through questioning methods while strengthening their personal self-knowledge (Majjhima Nikāya I.111–112).

While addressing Bhaddavaggiyā royal princes the Buddha presented the question "What is more honorable than discovering truth by oneself or by helping others?" Their critical thinking became active because this interrogative query evoked profound reflective thoughts within them. This approach proved deeper than conducting simple brainstorming activities.

A six-step discourse by the Buddha represented a realization pattern which helped people understand first and then think about the ideas later. A thorough contemplation constitutes the Four Noble Truths (Rahula 1974, 50–51).

The Buddha designed his teaching approach through three sequential phases:

1. Through experience the method draws out thinking known as evocation.
2. Realization – Facilitating understanding
3. Reflectio – Encouraging contemplation

His methodology known as ERR (Evocation-Realization-Reflection) provided the basic structure through which he could teach different types of people across various circumstances (Analayo 2012, 62–64).

The Case of Kisā Gotamī

The Buddha gave Kisā Gotamī a lesson in the *Therīgāthā* by instructing her to collect mustard seeds from homes without any deaths since she lamented her lost baby. This was an educational strategy (Therīgāthā, Thig 213–223).

Her immense sadness drove her to plead with the Buddha for resurrection of her infant child. To avoid denying the situation outright and to bypass teaching the Four Noble Truths which she would not have accepted he assigned a quest to Kisā Gotamī.

Her seed-hunting mission directed her mind (initial task) which decreased the intensity of her mourning temporarily. She finally understood that death exists everywhere after discovering there was no family without death thus gaining twin perspectives of the truth (Rahula 1974, 46; Gombrich 2009, 76).

The relative intelligence theory shows that this experience activated four different types of human intellect:

1. The process of mentally drawing her search path falls under the category of visual-spatial intelligence.
2. Verbal-linguistic intelligence (communicating with households)
3. Logical-mathematical intelligence (reasoning the impossibility)
4. Intrapersonal intelligence (internalizing the truth)

When she arrived back she was prepared to think about what she had experienced.

Conclusion

Through the method of Evocation, Realization, and Reflection (ERR) the Buddha introduced wisdom development by implementing a flexible structured teaching program of the Four Noble Truths. The teaching technique represents an exceptional model of flexible yet successful educational practice.

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