

PANEL

From Rote Instruction to Radical Learning

Convener

Dan Wessner

Panel Description

This panel presents and critiques seven Parami University student educational initiatives within and beyond the borders of Myanmar. Whether serving majority, minority, displaced, refugee, urban, or rural learners, this panel argues that Myanmar's education system can change via a youth-led movement that celebrates its own "pedagogy of place" in ASEAN and the world. Diverse populations across this country share a cascade of challenges: war, conscription, inter-ethnic enmity, natural disasters, poverty, social inequality, failing infrastructure, post-COVID inaccess to schooling, technological disruption, and epistemic injustice in a world demanding practical action. Yet most perniciously, Myanmar is threatened by a long-standing educational culture of rote memorization, exam-centered cramming, and fear-based discipline. These barriers to learning stunt human development and deprive the country's citizenry of imagination, inclusivity, thought, pragmatism, and hope. This crisis is as dire as any struggle. Although formidable, all of these challenges also spawn opportunity. Here Parami students make a compelling case for a movement of student-teacher co-creation, experiential learning, and educational transformation.

This panel, first, argues how prosaic models of education have failed generations of post-independence Myanmar. Second, it situates and critiques seven Parami University student alternative approaches to education. Collectively, these projects emphasize community strength, artisanal skills, indigenous knowledge, world-encircling and Burmese literature, interdisciplinarity, translanguaging space, positive civic freedom, digital and AI literacy, investigative research skills, trauma-informed emotional support, storytelling, sensitized mentorship, advanced educational tools, and future-oriented learning. Third, they rely on data from their ongoing experimentation to hone student-centered and writing-based approaches to vexing wicked problems. Now these students are examining their teaching and learning effectiveness. Critical input from conference participants may help refine such transformational learning for Myanmar's rebirth.

In the wake of the Sagaing Earthquake, a number of Parami University students affirmed that "no student should be left behind." Included in that "student body" were, of course, classmates. Students, moreover, reached out to neighbors whose lives were shaken and homes destroyed. Not just by the 7.7 quake, but by the legacy of pandemic disruption and ongoing war. The challenge was far greater than the provision of relief aid or the removal of rubble. The quake was a wake-up call. Now is the time to address the learning needs of anyone whose development has been stymied by past and present oppression through the country's educational system. Whose reality counts? Those on the front lines of armed struggle, others whose poverty inhibits their pursuit of secondary and tertiary education, still

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others whose indigenous knowledge is undervalued by modernity, and vast numbers for whom vo-tech training and teahouse venues for learning are critical.

This Parami student undertaking is not a short-term salve. It continues to expand student experience, discourse, and perspective. It is the basis for a radical reshaping of education for youth, their society, their state, and their region. It can mature into a youth-led movement that opens vistas for reimagining national identity, coherence, and hope.