An Educator as a Contemplative Practitioner in Business Education

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This article is to share my contemplative practices in business education and develop a body of knowledge and a skill-set to be used to educate graduate and undergraduate business students to become responsible decision makers. Contemplative practices lead students to know how to integrate their lives and actualize the ideals of business. The practices demand participants to be aware of the process of teaching and learning in the formation of conscience. The contemplative practices will become productive when they are accepted as important norms and values in business education.

INTRODUCTION

In my twenty years of teaching business subjects in Hong Kong and the U.S., I expect my students to value human dignity and seek higher common good in their professions. The expectation is reasoned on the idea of human beings as meaning-seeking and the parts of the unknown bigger picture in their lives (Frankl, 1984; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Wolterstorff, 2002). Students' sense of large purpose and meaning of life in their learning-oriented community are advocated to be the key factors relating to their perseverance and resilience of life in the face of difficulties (Sullivan, 2012: 148). Business students not only learn "how" but also learn "why" before they judge what actions need to be taken in a particular business context. In the midst of so many crises and business scandals in the current global world business, we may ponder at least five major questions: What are the key values of business? What is wrong with our current business education? Why are these business professionals lost? Can business educators teach students to develop habits of examining their consciences? Can business educators get some insights from some traditional practices? All these questions lead me to be more aware of my pedagogy and the values I pass along to my students. I want to deepen my inner being along with the students' inner being through spending more time with student exercising contemplation pedagogy which is defined for my purposes as seeing thoughtfully and steadily over a period of time in order to understand its power. In this paper, I would like to share my contemplative practices in business education and develop a body of knowledge and a skill-set to be used to educate students to become responsible decision makers and consumers in the global market economy. The paper is organized in four sections. The first is about the values of business and problems of current business education. The second is about the effectiveness of contemplative practices. The third is about my personal contemplative pedagogy and classroom practices. The fourth is about the challenges of implementing contemplative practices in business education.

VALUES OF BUSINESS AND CURRENT BUSINESS EDUCATION

Business is meant to accomplish things collectively. "In the project of self-government, business is without a doubt the single largest institution of civil society. The moral health of society, therefore, depends to a great extent on the moral character of business leaders" (Novak, 1996:53). Business is to serve and honor the sacredness and interconnectedness of human life before wealth is created. When these business leaders use their endowed gifts to increase prosperity to their stakeholders, including their employees, customers, community, and even future generations, the human conditions of human life are improved. The basic principles for business are to respect human dignity and seek common good. Business leaders need to be mindful of the needs of the world, their employees, community, and resources when they create, organize, and distribute wealth (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2012). They must plan time for contemplation to "answer the quality of life questions implicit and explicit in our corporate decision making" (Haessly, 1995: 246). They also need the skills of reflection that once was used to be provided by liberal arts education (Schon, 1987). They reflect deep values and develop the capacity to actualize the potentialities of business through their examined lives (Stimpson, 2012:67).

Unfortunately, most current business education is not sufficiently developed for students to internalize the basic values of business and perform at least equal and hopefully above their callings in a business career when business instruction is "isolated" from other liberal arts offerings (Colby et al., 2011). MBA education is becoming a huge money-driven machine in the U.S. Students are trained to pursue narrow objectives without seeking deep meanings and values of being human. Many business educators have already realized the knowledge presented in the business school sometimes demoralizes students' character development as this knowledge is being objectified, trivialized, instrumentalized, rationalized and technologically oriented (Catterall, Maclaran, Stevens, 2002; Donaldson, 2002; Ehrensal, 1991, Lam, 2005; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Palmer, 1983, Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, Smith and Robins, 1991). It is an erroneous assumption that, when students have more objective knowledge, they are becoming better professionals when educators are not mindful of the knowledge that has already been stripped away from students' subjective beings and some universal values of being human (Ghosal, 2005; Goodpaster, 2007; Jensen, 2012; MacIntyre, 1984). Business educators are called to help students to discern their values through narratives of their experiences (Haughey, 2009) and facilitate students to be aware of their becoming "professionals" in their learning (Vaill, 1989, 1996, 2007). The tragedy in our current business education is when they divide their lives and accept the common norms of doing business without spending more time to contemplate their own conscience and when they become more self-serving. Students are not challenged to have in-depth understanding about their values and meanings in their lives. Sadly, they are trained to rationalize their own immediate short-term interests without being mindful of their accountability and their callings.

I often have to lament my frustration and loss when my undergraduate and graduate students are accustomed to compartmentalizing their lives and actions. They do not perceive any violation of other peoples' rights as long as they can pay "fair wages" to these people in the sweatshop and follow the laws. They are deaf to the voices of the wounded or do not see the consequences of their actions. Many students are not aware that their attitude toward marketing activities has been socialized by the existing marketing practices. Many want to master the marketing techniques or skills quickly and even conform to the culture codes created by marketing activities. Business as business! They believe that they have made moral choices but are often unwilling to examine in depth the values behind their choices. They are skeptical about being ethical in the business world and even perceive that they will be less successful if they are ethical in their professional life. Unfortunately, students can easily rationalize their egotistic values when there is strong advocacy of enlightened selfishness as the essence of marketing management and an active glorification of greediness as a foundation of capitalism in teaching marketing ethics (Cooke, 2005).

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES

"Contemplation is an essential means for accessing moral values and, ultimately, making a reasoned, ethical decision" (Guina, et al. 2012:15). Contemplation pedagogy is the cultivation of inner awareness through first-person investigation and has proved to be effective in higher education and leadership development (Gunnlaugson and Moore, 2009). Contemplative practices are activities which quiet the mind and nourish the capacity for deepened awareness, concentration, and insights. "Contemplation includes meditation as well as spontaneous and unstructured moments where we experience a connection with the ground being" (Miller, 1994:57). Contemplation is a way for human beings to connect with their ground of being (i.e., Our Creator). It is a "careful attention and quiet wonder" (Buchman 1989:39). Thomas Merton, a well-known 20th century priest, described it well:

> Contemplation is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and of being. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible transcendent and infinitely abundant. (Merton, 1972:1)

Thus, contemplation practices enable people to be connected with the invisible transcendent and give participants the courage to affirm themselves in spite of the existence of anxieties in our lives (Tillich, 1952:162). Contemplation practices are related to mindfulness and meditation (Suzuki, 1956). Mindfulness invites the individual to bring awareness into the present moment and encourages the mind to focus on it but not dwell on it. Each individual can be open to moment-to-moment experiences without being judgmental and anxious about the future. Mindfulness increases our abilities to discern and be aware of unrecognized experiences and consequences (Hahn, 1976). We can be mindful of our intentions and extend kindnesses to ourselves and others (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Meditation practices enable us to calm and center our mind.

Indeed, contemplative practices can be practiced by any human being without following any religious doctrines. "Inviting contemplative study simply includes the natural human capacity of knowing through silence, pondering deeply, beholding, witnessing the contents of consciousness and so forth" (Hart, 2004). The operation of consciousness exists in our human being. To be mindful of the operation of our consciousness has been practiced in our civilization for thousands of years. The idea of contemplative practices has been discussed by many renowned thinkers and is universally accepted as a part of personal development in our civilization.

Contemplative practices are found to be effective in the utilization of technology, transformative leadership, collaborative team-building, and authentic communications (Benefiel, 2005; Eshelman et al., 2012; Senge and Wheatley, 2009). Some educators have introduced intuition awareness through classroom-based mindfulness and meditation practices to help students deal with workplace tasks (Sadler, Smith, and Shefy, 2007) and increase their passion for sustainability (Shrivastava, 2010). Gunnlaugson introduced sitting meditation and helped students to "cultivate the capacity for deepened attention and mindfulness in their conversations" in her on-line text-based dialogue course (Gunnlaugson and Moore, 2009:174). "The cultivation of mindfulness among college students is one progressive example of advances in higher education to cultivate student well-being and effect change at the individual level and community level" (Bergen-Cico and Bylander, 2012:98). The cultivation of the skills of mindfulness has found to increase self-awareness, self-compassion, and improve students' well-being (Gard et al., 2012; Neff & McGehee, 2010).

Contemplatives practices are good to develop students' moral capacities and creativity when they can access their moral values and make sound moral reasoning and decisions. They can cultivate attention, emotional balance, insights and creativity. They can develop their patience, empathy, non-judgmental awareness, emotional balance, capacity to listen deeply and see things clearly. Students become familiar with the practice of contemplation skill; they develop skills of reflecting their values when they describe their experiences and realize the importance of knowing the process of the events. They may experience

the joy of spontaneous wonder and learning when they can develop deeper meanings behind the events that are sometimes hopeless in a highly competitive business environment. They may learn how to narrate the on-going process in business activities and integrate them into their lives even though many events seem to be fragmented and meaningless to observers.

MY PERSONAL CONTEMPLATIVE PEDAGOGY AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Business Education is a calling to me. Business creates wealth and actualizes the moral dignity of human beings. My contemplative pedagogy is to facilitate students to cultivate inner awareness through first-person investigations. It passes along the moral aspects of business. These contemplative practices are based on the use of a Natural Law approach, the Ethics of Virtue approach, and Palmer's teaching (Aquinas, 1953; Budziszewski, 2003; Kreeft, 1994; Lewis, 1947; Palmer 1983, 1998, 2004). Natural Law approach is to be aware that the laws written on our hearts cannot be denied and to know our self-destructive behavior when we suppress our conscience. The ethics of virtue approach is to develop habits to achieve the fundamental goods that natural laws require a person to pursue. The basic idea of Natural Law has been universally accepted to guide our behavior in human civilization and is regarded as the foundation ethics for business leaders (Engelland and Eshell, 2007). Through this contemplative pedagogy, I need to cultivate a community of learners and guide students not to justify their immoral reasoning by relativistic values and organizational goals.

As I teach in a Christian school, I adopt Christian ways of contemplation. There are moments of silence, prayers, scripture reading and reflective writings in my classes. I explain to students about the objectives behind different activities and encourage them to narrate the process of learning through using intensive writing as a medium to construct their thoughts and feelings. Hopefully, they develop the habits of hearts for human dignity and common good. In the group discussion assignment, I ask students to listen deeply and write down their discernments. From my experience of teaching, students tend to cut the learning short and quickly give an answer to the professor. It is better to assign a person as a facilitator (i.e., keep the discussion on the right track), note-taker, summarizer, and divergent thinker (i.e., ask questions such as these: Are there other ways to solve these problems? Do we miss some things?). Through students' group work, they learn multiple perspectives and meanings behind some common phenomenon. When I weave the perspectives and meanings together, some students can see the evolving process and understand their activities are connected to the whole. Before students are asked to submit their reflective assignments, they must go through an intensive experiential learning experience. Their experience will be through literature review, service-learning projects, and role playing in group discussions. I also need to model being- presence in the classroom and avoid multi-tasking. I learn to affirm students' beings and practice the virtue of hospitality in the classroom. There are examples of current classroom practices in my basic marketing course.

Undergraduate students have to learn the process and flow of business before they learn marketing. They discover the process of the development of good corporations and good business practices through reading, field work, discussion, and presentations. Students are asked to compare the definitions of business before and after their numerous experiential exercises. They are asked to summarize the idea presented by these articles: "Vision 2050" (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2011); "Can there be good corporations?" (Kelly, 2012); "Marketing to the bottom of pyramid" (Johar, G, 2010); "Story of Stuff" (Leonard, 2007). They are also asked to report the observations of green marketing practices of a particular product category in a retail store. The practices facilitate students to know why their business professionals are essential for the future of humanity and choose better ways of creating, organizing, and distributing wealth. Their evolving understanding of business in a broader context guides them not to rush for short-term interest at the expense of the work of common good in business. They are also asked to interview for at least half an hour a successful business person and learn how a chosen mentor experiences happiness through an integrated life. Before they submit their final papers, they discuss their drafts with their peers and have opportunities to articulate their own insights to their peers. Students learn why these mentors like to help young people to be successful and have hope and faith in

them. These multigenerational interactions show them the meaning of sustainability in their lives. Furthermore, they research whether one company's marketing programs effectively create, communicate, and deliver values to customers and other stakeholders and present their analysis to the executive in this company. The face-to-face interactions between students and executives intensify their learning experience and facilitate them to internalize key values in business. When students gradually realize the initiatives of some business leaders who have benefited the students' lives, they learn to discern what goods and services should be created for our humanity. Their inner enrichment corresponds to the words of poet James Russell Lowell, "Thought that great hearts once broke for, we Breathe cheaply with common air." They learn how to be grateful for the good words of these leaders and are inspired to do well by doing good in their business professionals.

CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

Contemplative practices require business educators to plan time to reflect their teaching materials, their experiences, their students, and the connection with other disciplines and the invisible higher being. Being a finite creature, I have to affirm the meanings of life behind numbers or mechanical boxes presented in the business education in spite of my anxieties created from taking students' time away from tools presented in the textbook and self-doubt about the known in the future unknown business world. When I teach students to think of the meanings of relationships before I teach them the strategic tools used for effectively allocate resources, I have to draw students to experience life's complexities through their personal choices. I can see the subject I taught is related to many subjects when my concern is about students' wholistic development. It needs collaboration from other educators and personal humility. Sometimes, my self-bias and confirmation bias in my business discipline need to be exposed for the sake of knowing the connections between my discipline and the whole when I guide my students to contemplate the connections between their known and unknown. I and my students need to stop, look, and be open to our struggles and experiences in learning. I also need to change my assessment in the students' learning outcomes. Students not only demonstrate their choices of right tools in the right context but also articulate the values behind their choices. Students also need time to contemplate their learning and growth in a supportive learning environment. It is a challenge for business educators in many colleges to model contemplative practices when the financial numbers are becoming more important than the sacredness and interconnectedness of lives. To stop, look, and experience our beings can be easily regarded as unproductive and a waste of time in our busy action-oriented business professional lives.

With the rising tuition in higher education and the availability of technology to access education at a lower cost, I predict more and more students will take the standardized tests of business subjects and educate themselves through less expensive or free on-line materials. The formation process of moral character in higher education is not valued in the choices of students and even business educators. The use of technology in the business education is an elected tool to provide convenience. Will the easy way to access information be leading to the ignoring of virtues? The choices behind technology have already framed the reality of business education and lessened the importance of contemplative pedagogy.

Young people are educated in a fast-paced development model! It seems that we forget the element of time in students' growth path. Students are addicted to rushing and not listening to their inner voices (Jones, 2003). They have no time to contemplate nature, beauty, themselves, relationships with human beings or higher spiritual being. They are accustomed to multi-tasking and do not realize they become less able to "experience the subtlest, most distinctly human forms of empathy, compassion, and emotion" Carr (2008).They are hurried college students who become harassed managers! They even do not realize that they need slow-down meditation in offices or in the high-stressed business operating environment. They cannot see the moral values behind the business activities. Sometimes, they can easily follow the accepted social norm by seeking bottom line at the expense of employees, environment, and even the work of common good. Their mindsets are fixed on narrow, rationalized and detached numerical numbers in their decisions. They cannot contemplate their compulsive behavior when they are so obsessed with

narrowly defined pragmatic objectives. They cannot afford to take time to be away from their rigid mindset. They regard contemplation as non-productive and prevent investigation of their own values in their decisions. Goodpaster (2007) described these mindsets as teleopathy and are the main cause of unethical behavior in current organizations. There is no room for contemplation in teleopathy mindset. Paradoxically, a person is more productive when he or she takes time to stop, look, and think about the harmful effect of rigid goals upon his or her productivity. The art of contemplation needs to be practiced with self-awareness and humility.

Contemplative practices will become productive when they are accepted as important norms and values in business education. Students "are affected by many of life's experiences; no intervention, particularly over the course of a semester, can be expected to have a dramatic impact on student outcomes" (Eyler and Gilers, 1999: xvii). The culture of developing students' habits of contemplation need to be supported by the design of courses, architecture for quiet space, advice to students, coordination between liberal arts and business education, and support from the institution and community. The intensive and extensive deep honest dialogues for students' being and becoming in business education among different stakeholders demand much time and commitment from business educators!

CONCLUSION

I would like to invite you to consider how contemplative practices can be used to facilitate your students to be morally responsible leaders in your discipline. Whatever your discipline, are you responsible for teaching the abstract qualities of being leaders in your calling? The contemplative practices lead me to discern how to give more time and room for students' being and becoming in their business education. I value my students as learners and model students the contemplative practices in their learning. I will keep telling my students about the ministry with deep values behind business professionals and invite them to contemplate their existence through their creativity in the business profession. Hopefully, students will continue their habits of contemplation when they navigate in many complex and ambiguous organizational environment and develop deeper meanings of their choices and decision-making processes. Contemplative practices will not be panacea for all business problems. However, contemplative practices will guide business professionals to honor the sacredness and interconnectedness of human life. When business instructors and students are committed to put aside some time to aware of the operation of our consciousness of our teaching and learning, we can be mindful the norms and values behind our judgment and daily actions, and have more faith in seeking the common good in business activities rather than the bottom line. Hopefully, students experience happiness through their integrated life when they contemplate their choices in their personal and professional lives. The poem by Robert Frost illustrates my commitment in the contemplative practices: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less travelled by, And that has made all the difference."

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