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An Education in Awareness: Recovering the heart of learning through contemplation

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An Education in Awareness: Recovering the heart of learning through contemplation

Abstract

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Contemplative education is learning infused with the experience of awareness, insight and compassion for oneself and others, honed through the practice of meditation and other contemplative disciplines. The rigor of these disciplined practices prepares the mind to process information in new and perhaps unexpected ways. Contemplative education as a set of pedagogical practices designed to cultivate conscious awareness in an ethical-relational context in which the values of personal growth, learning, moral living and caring for others are nurtured. It has been found that the contemplative education can be used in real life situations. The research studied students' physical, mental, and social development, which affected their degree of personal virtue, academic proficiency, and physical capability. Therefore, the Facilitator realized the importance of the contemplative education in developing the potential of students as complete and well-rounded human beings.

Keywords: Contemplative Education, pedagogical practices designed, complete human being, well-rounded.

Introduction

The Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007-2011) indicates there is a need to modify the theory of human development of Thai society to focus on virtue, knowledge, health, spirit, emotion, and morals. Therefore, people will have the ability to constantly monitor and improve their intelligence and social awareness. This development plan aims to prepare juveniles to be active and critical thinkers, be publicly minded, and acquire basic knowledge of self-sufficiency, which will cause permanent development growth for the country. This issue corresponds to the principle of the Ministry of Education in the aspect of juvenile development for living in the 21st century. The principle encourages learners to have virtue, nationalism, creativity, cooperation, analytical skills, and technology skills to live in social harmony (Ministry of Education, 2008: 1). Basic Education Curriculum aims to develop

learners to obtain desired attributes such as respect for the nation, religion, and royalty. It also aims to encourage students to have honesty, discipline, a desire to learn, self-sufficiency, work ethic, reverence Thai Tradition, and be publicly minded to happily coexistence as a dual citizen of Thailand and the world (Ministry of Education, 2008: 5).

Increasing the quality and standard of undergraduate education is important and needed in order to achieve the previously mentioned goals in both the short and long term. Undergraduate educational institutions play an important role in human development as a way to direct Thai society. According to societal expectations, as undergraduate educational institutes work to accomplish these endeavors they must also remain mindful of the ideals the society hopes to preserve (Department of Educational Standard and Appraisal, 2006: 7).

According to *The Survey of The Demand in Developing Capability*, it indicated that 41.7 million fifteen years old out of 50.2 million or 83.05% did not want to develop their potential. There were only 8.5 million or 16.95% who wanted to develop their potential. Hence, there should be further research and an extended results campaign to change the attitudes of teenagers about learning. This desired change would be studied for the attributes of reading appreciating, learning inquisition, and interest in learning to self development (Ministry of Education, 2007: 97-98). While contemplative practices have been foundational to wisdom traditions throughout recorded history, it is only recently that these practices have been examined in different contexts of learning, particularly in higher education. In the past decade, several academic conferences and a growing educational literature have focused on contemplative approaches to teaching, learning and knowledge. (Gunnlaugson, 2009).

Contemplative Education is learning infused with the experiences of awareness, insight and compassion for oneself and others. It is honed through the practice of sitting meditation and other contemplative disciplines. The rigor of these disciplined practices prepares the mind to process information in new and perhaps unexpected ways. Contemplative practices unlock the power of deep inward observation, enabling the learner to tap into a wellspring of knowledge about the nature of mind, self and others that has been largely overlooked by traditional Western-oriented liberal education. This approach to learning fuses the approaches of East and West; it's the meeting of two of the greatest learning philosophies in the history of higher education. (Naropa University, 2008).

Founded in a variety of contemplative wisdom traditions, Contemplative Education involves the integration of contemplative practices into the curriculum of traditional higher education for the purposes of fostering intuitive, non-conceptual and experiential forms of knowledge along paths of learning focused on the moral aspects of wholeness, unity and integration.

During puberty, teenagers typically experience an extraordinary great interest in the world around them, they encounter an awakening. For university students they need to be guided during this period of life to look at the world around them in an attempt to comprehend the values of concepts such as law and government, and the causes and effects of such institutions, as well as into the consequences of their own intentions and goals. Contemplative oriented transformative facilitation is based on the two meta-goals of contemplative education: fundamental self-transformation and social consciousness. The underlying philosophy or concepts guiding this kind of transformative facilitation are rooted in the belief in human potential and a holistic worldview. The essential principles of contemplative oriented transformative facilitation are contained in the 7 Cs principles: Contemplation, Compassion, Connectedness, Confronting Reality, Continuation, Commitment and Community of Practice. The techniques of running contemplative oriented transformative facilitative process are guided by the core concept of balance between three centers of learning: body, heart and head. Risk versus comfort zone, de-centering versus centering, group learning versus solitary reflection, suitable size versus ways of group learning, and flexibility and improvisation versus process structure and goals.

Concepts

- Directed experiences
- deep listening
- non bias , respect for learning potentials
- contemplation
- meditation
- here and now
- Local wisdom

Activity were

1. Stillness practices
2. Movement practices
3. Creation practices
4. Activist practices
5. Relational practices
6. Ritual practices
7. Generative practices

Aims

The purpose of contemplative training is to achieve personal and social transformation.

Method

Qualitative frameworks with an inductive, descriptive, phenomenological method were employed. The purposes of the Study were to explore applications of pedagogical practices designed through Contemplative Education to cultivate conscious awareness in an ethical-relational context in which the values of personal growth, learning, moral living and caring for others are nurtured.

The subjects of the study were 28 pre-service teachers in the Faculty of Education. They were Special Education majors studying in the *Seminar on Special Education* course, enrolled in the second semester, academic year 2010. The course consisted of 42 clock hours of instruction. To apply Contemplative practice. Course description is as follows: Discussion on case studies related to ethics and morals, study of up dated information and research in relation to children with special needs, investigating guidelines of problem solving conclusion together and holding educational tour for experience.

Results

The techniques of running a contemplative oriented transformative facilitative process are guided by the balance of three centers of learning: body, heart and head. Risk versus comfort zone, de-centering versus centering, group learning versus solitary reflection, suitable size and ways of group learning group and flexibility and improvising versus process structure and goals. Finally the paper describes the transformation experienced by participants in an intensive program of contemplative oriented transformative facilitation in Thailand.

This course helped most of the pre-service teachers to be able to change themselves and be happier. The most methods used to collect data consisted of self-observation, journal writing and sharing of experiences in the

classroom. Developing classroom happiness has 3 components i.e. self development via Buddhist meditation and mindful working generalizing to team work during working together progressing to sharing vision of becoming mindful classroom together with enlightening and happiness. From the case study the key factors for success are envisioned leader high intention team practical intervention for each working context atmosphere by classroom members. Forms of contemplative practice, such as prayer, meditation, and silent time in nature. Many practices remain rooted in their religions, and others have grown in secular settings.

Transforming your relationship with yourself

- Generating an overall sense of calm and well-being
- Managing your stress and its impact on your body
- Deepening your self-understanding
- Sharpening your focus, concentration, and insight
- Upholding your core values in your personal and professional life

Improving your relationships with others

- Enabling you to treat people with compassion and wisdom
- Helping you to see conflicts from different angles, opening up creative possibilities for problem-solving and resolving disagreement
- Improving your listening skills

Enriching your relationship with the world around you

- Increasing your global awareness and appreciation for the interconnection of all life
- Developing the ability to question, explore, adapt to rapid change, and deal with complexity

The result of evaluation for learning activity by student Finding:

1. Improve in knowledge 92.86 %
2. Happiness in learning 96.43 %
3. Relaxation for learning 89.28 %
4. Enhancing to critical thinking 85.71 %
5. Favorite to learn in this approach 96.43 %

Contemplative practices quiet the mind in order to cultivate a personal capacity for deep concentration and insight. Examples of contemplative practice include not only sitting in silence but also many forms of single-minded concentration including meditation, contemplative prayer, mindful walking, focused experiences in nature, yoga and other contemporary physical or artistic practices. We also consider various kinds of ritual and ceremony designed to create sacred space and increase insight and awareness to be forms of contemplative practice.

Contemplative practice has the potential to bring different aspects of one's self into focus, to help develop personal goodness and compassion, and to awaken an awareness of the interconnectedness of all life. They have helped pre-service teachers develop greater empathy and communication skills, improve focus and concentration, reduce stress, and enhance creativity. Over time, these practices cultivate insight, inspiration, and a loving and compassionate approach to life. They are practical, radical, and transformative.

Discussion

Contemplative education is not solely traditional education with a course in meditation thrown in; it is an approach that offers an entirely new way of understanding what it means to be educated in the modern western liberal art tradition. Students wholeheartedly engage in mindfulness awareness practices in order to cultivate being present in the moment and to deepen their academic study. Contemplative education emphasizes values, attainment of good, beauty and truth. It makes education about life, rather than compartmentalized learning that is not connected to the learner's life. This study answers the question of whether or not

contemplative practices can promote transformative learning. Teaching and learning processes should begin to incorporate contemplative practices into pedagogy and curricula (Bai et.al.,2009). It concerns students' awaking of learning and getting them engaged to learn congruence (Dickx,1998; Nelson,2006). Contemplative practice should be invited into classroom allowing new possibilities for the emergence of creativity and promotes depth of understanding and personal relationship with course content.

Conclusion

An application of pedagogical practices designed through Contemplative Education to cultivate conscious awareness in an ethical-relational context in which the values of personal growth, learning, moral living and caring for others are nurtured.

A contemplative approach to education is focused on understanding basic human goodness, how to be of service in the world, the importance of being who you are and a focused attention on being in the present moment. Regardless of the limitations, our study is the first to our knowledge, to demonstrate the interacting role of autonomy support and structure in relation to SRL. They give indications as to how one can create conditions that promote active learning. Teachers can help students to generate their own planning, self-monitoring, and evaluating the progress of their goals by providing differentiated help and clear expectations. However, it is critical that these structuring components are provided in an autonomy-supportive fashion to facilitate SRL, that is by being respectful to students' opinions and allowing students to participate in the decision making process, and by providing a rationale when giving guidelines.

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