

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THE ETHICS OF CARE AND EXAMINING THE VALUE OF THIS EXPERIENCE IN THE SEARCH FOR TRUE MEANINGS IN THEIR LIVES

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted by engaging one hundred American Degree Program (ADP) students of SEGi University College (UC) to visit the Selangor Cheshire Old Folks' Home and two orphanages, namely, the Rumah Amal Tuanku Ampuan Rahimah and Precious Childrens' Home. A post-mortem was then held after the visit, which was done as a program in Business Ethics (BE), to observe the practical learning outcomes. It was concluded that the experience, besides being UC's corporate social responsibility (CSR), had other benefits for the students which included learning to being caring and responsible towards others, being more grateful, building teamwork and also developing characters and values as future leaders of Malaysia.

1.0 Introduction

Lately, we have heard of a lot about socio-medical problems involving students such as drug dependency, depression, suicidal tendency, abortion, absenteeism from classes, fights, prostitution and violence. This paper examines the importance of learning Ethics to improve oneself and to self-realize the importance of being a useful individual and citizen. Students majoring in Management, Marketing or Finance in UC's ADP are required to take BE among several other subjects in their business core subjects.

It is useful to introduce the ethics of care or principle of caring. The care perspective builds on the work of Gilligan (1982). She found that women often spoke in "a different voice" that was based more on responsibility to others and on the continuity of interdependent relationships. The care perspective maintains that traditional ethics like the principles of utilitarianism and rights focus heavily on the individual self and on cognitive thought processes. In the traditional view, "others" may be seen as threats, so rights become important. Resulting moral theories then tend to be legalistic or contractual.

The caring theory is founded on wholly different assumptions. Proponents who advocate this perspective, for example, view the individual person as essentially relational, not individualistic. These persons do not deny the existence of the self but hold that the self has relationships that cannot be separated from the self's existence. This view emphasizes the relationships' moral worth and, by extension, the responsibilities inherent in those relationships, rather than in rights, as in traditional ethics.

Several writers have argued that the caring theory is consistent with the stakeholder theory, or the stakeholder approach, in that the focus is on a more cooperative, caring type of relationship. In this view, firms should seek to make decisions that satisfy stakeholders, leading to situations in which all parties in the relationship gain. Derry (1997) elaborates

that “In the corporate environment, there is an increasing demand for business to be attentive to its many stakeholders, particularly customers and employees, in caring ways”. As organizations attempt to build such relationships, they must define the responsibilities of initiating and maintaining care. The ethics of care may be able to facilitate an understanding of these responsibilities.

Liedtka (1996), on the other hand, questions whether organizations can care in the sense in which caring theory proposes. She contends that to care in this sense, an organization would have to care in a way that is focused entirely on people, not quality, profits or other such ideas that today use “care talk”

- Undertaken with caring as an end , not merely as a means to an end (such as quality or profits)
- Essentially personal, in that the caring reflects caring for other individuals
- Growth enhancing for the cared-for, in that the caring moves the cared-for toward the development and use of their capacities.

Liedtka (1996) takes the position that caring people could lead to a caring organization that offers new possibilities for simultaneously enhancing the effectiveness and the moral quality of organizations. The principle of caring offers a different perspective to guide ethical decision making, a perspective that clearly is thought provoking and valuable.

2.0 Literature Review

For many years, there was a debate as to whether BE training should be conducted. One school of thought argued that ethics is personal, already embedded within the employee or manager and hence not alterable or teachable. A growing school of thought, on the other hand, argues that instruction in BE should be made a part of management training, executive development programs and business school education. Today, it is accepted that BE training is an essential component of ethics programs.

In 1976, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the accrediting body for business schools now known as the Association of Advanced Collegiate Schools of Business International, formally recognizes the importance of ethics in business education by insisting that business educators incorporate ethics into business curricula (AACSB, 1990-1992; David *et al*, 1990). Since 1979, business schools accredited by AACSB have been required to include some coverage of ethical issues in their course work (Shannon and Berl, 1997), which, by 1988 resulted in 91 percent of AACSB member institutions having at least one course with 10 percent of the class time devoted to such teaching (Schoenfeldt *et al.*, 1991). Today, “virtually all undergraduate and graduate business programs in the United States teach business ethics in some form” (Kennedy and Lawton, 1998).

Studies examining the influence of ethics instruction on business students’ ethical attitudes, in particular, are not unequivocal (Arlow, 1991; Glenn, 1992). On balance, however the literature favors the conclusion that ethics instruction does sensitize business students to ethical issues (Green and Weber, 1997) and correlates to development in moral and ethical perspectives (Green and Weber, 1997; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Other studies

suggest that students' ethical attitudes are influenced more by exposure to the large socio-cultural norms than by education in specific disciplines (Arlow, 1991).

The paper by Allen *et. al.* (2010) of the Department of Management, University of Massachusetts examined the impact of ethics training on business students' values. Although there is support for the contention that exposure to ethical education in business curricula has had a positive and salient impact on business students between the late 1970s and mid-1990s, this assertion is not evident from the results of the present study. These results may be construed as consonant with a recent Aspen Institute study of some 2,000 graduates from 13 top business schools where it was found that a business education not only fails to improve the moral character of the students but also actually weakens it.

Although these findings are troubling, there maybe several reasons that ethics training is not strengthening students' perceptions toward the importance of these instrumental values which can be classified as head values, reflecting the thinking aspect of managers' value system (qualities related to conceptualizations); the other heart values, reflecting the feeling aspects (qualities related to consciousness).

The head values identified were self-confidence, open-mindedness, cooperativeness, ability to take the initiative, flexibility, pride in performance, coolness under stress, pleasure in learning something new and satisfaction in creating something new. The heart values identified were honesty, friendliness, loyalty, openness/spontaneity, sense of humor, independence, compassion, generosity, idealism and a critical and questioning attitude toward authority.

What are the reasons? First, although ethics has found a place in the curriculum of AACSB accredited business schools, we may be teaching it incorrectly or not at all. As for Business Faculty members, the focus is on teaching skills, concepts and theory. As they struggle to fit the entire contents into the courses, ethics may be the area that gets cut when time is running short. By not explicitly discussing these instrumental values in the classroom, it may be implied that they are unimportant. Also, it is possible that teaching ethics as a small component of several courses may not have as powerful an impact as doing so through a business ethics course where we devote an entire semester to the subject.

3.0 Objectives of this Study

1. To describe the teaching of business ethics specifically the ethics of care by engaging students in the sophomore year of the ADP in community welfare projects like organizing a community project, donating to charities, helping in kind, visiting old folks' homes, visiting the sick in hospitals, orphanages, etc.

2. To participate in CSR activities of the organization. Such activities might include corporate giving, product and service donations, employee volunteerism, partnerships with local government and other organizations and any other kind of voluntary involvement of the organization and its employees with the community or other stakeholders.

3. To link the value of this experience to the students specifically in the search of a true meaning in their life. Human beings can attain better health and greater quality of life by actually doing things that are personally meaningful and purposeful.

4.0 Methodology

The author continually makes the subject more interesting for students. Thus, for the last two terms after reading the text “Business and Society” by Buchholtz and Carrol (2008) which is an excellent and comprehensive book particularly Chapter 7 which discusses the ethics of care, the author decided to engage the students in community welfare projects for their first group assignment.

During the second week of the term, the students selected the class leader and divided themselves into relevant teams like the Main Committee, Sponsorship and Finance Committee, Food and Beverage Committee and Activities Committee so that each individual would participate fully in the project. Before the visit to the old folks’ home and the orphanages, there were donation campaigns and also some food and souvenir sales to raise funds. The fund collected was used to purchase foods, mineral waters, fruits, hampers and other necessities such as stockings, towels, books, stationery and gift packs.

The visit was during the fourth week of the term. The students did their final packing and eagerly waited for the campus bus to depart. The students from other classes were invited to join in the community welfare project. The activities held were distributing the food, coordinating the games and entertainment at the home and orphanages. All participants enjoyed the very memorable day talking and mingling with the old folks and orphans.

The author then conducted a post-mortem of the visit on the fifth week of the term. The students were asked of their post-visit experiences and feelings. The author was of the opinion that there were many lessons learnt from the community welfare project. It fulfilled the objectives set.

5.0 Findings

1. The students learned to work in teams since they had to work in a limited time to make the event a success. Everyone participated in the donation drive, games activities, packing, sponsorship and finance, buying the items, selling and carrying them. These included solving any problem collectively.
2. Brainstorming each idea and getting to a consensus were important. Election of the leader for the class was necessary in selecting the best idea and coordinating the nitty-gritty of the various activities. Thus, generating ideas collectively had certainly allowed opportunities for learning.
3. The involvement of the students in a practical experience taught the students about the CSR of UC. The concepts were taught in class and they understood them well. But the community welfare projects made a lasting impact about CSR on the students. What does CSR really mean? An early view of CSR stated: “CSR is seriously considering the impact of the company’s actions on society”.

4. The students learned about the ethics of care or principle of caring. At the home and orphanages, they fed the disabled, served the food and most importantly made time for the old folks and orphans. The stories shared just by having conversations, listening and sharing thoughts were all enlightening experiences indeed. This community welfare project helped in their character development too, teaching them to be responsible citizens of the country. They have acquired effective listening skills, developed patience and tolerance and inculcated the sense of care and concern for others. The exposure had also reinforced mutual respect, developed good attitudes and a positive outlook of life itself.
5. The heart to heart session that the students had with the old folks and orphans was really a fulfilling one. Two of the oldest occupants had been in the Home for about 40 years and some were disabled and on wheelchairs. So after hearing and seeing all these, the students felt that they should be very grateful since most of them come from good families and have a good life with their parents, siblings and friends. This experience taught the students to build rapport and have stable relationships with peers, friends and especially to value their own families more.
6. The visit also made the students aware that although the people and children are in the old folks' homes or orphanages, they still looked pleasantly happy and cheerful. It made them realize that although many of them have problems, there are others who still managed to survive well despite being left abandoned in homes or orphanages. So again, what does this teach us in terms of the meaning of your life?
"The Meaning of Your Life is to Give Life Meaning"- Ken Hudgins.

6.0 Discussions and Conclusions

Though having to endure hardship and personal tragedy, one still has the opportunity to invest one's life with meaning through choosing to respond to suffering: to let it defeat oneself or to rise above it triumphantly. The freedom to freely choose responses to life's situations defines oneself and determines the meaningfulness of one's existence.

Clearly, the ultimate meaning of life can never be fully realized within the confines of one's own self. Meaning is encountered and created through efforts to go beyond self. In the same way that "happiness" and "success" are the outgrowths of purposeful and productive living rather than ends in themselves, so life's meaning is a natural by-product of reaching beyond self to touch the lives of others. This self-transcendence may take the form of a creative work or a heroic action displayed to the human community. It may also be expressed through loving and intimate relationships with other people and contribution to individual members of the human community.

The Dalai Lama once said, "If you want others to be happy, practise compassion. If you want to be happy, practise compassion."

What is the meaning of life? It is the truth to be discovered through striving with daily choices in order to create an authentic individual, committed to enhancing the lives of others, fulfilling one's own unique potential and attuning oneself to spiritual nature and the mysteries of the universe. It is the reality to be found in responses to both blessings and

sufferings with courage and dignity. Joy and suffering, fulfillment and despair, birth and death are the raw materials that life provides. The challenge and responsibility are to shape these experiences into a meaningful and wholly-guided philosophy of life constructed with one's abilities to think critically, think creatively and choose freely. This is the path to take in order to live a life that is rich with meaning, lived by a person who is noble and heroic; a life led as an enlightened thinker.

Finding Meaning in Life

As mentioned above, the community welfare project given to the students for their BE group assignment certainly benefited them in terms of exposure to CSR, ethics of care and the reality of life itself. The author certainly hoped that the experience, though short as it might be, will be a starting point for students to realize how lucky they are and how much they can contribute to their family, community and country.

Albert Einstein once said, "Only a life lived for others is the life worthwhile". Another famous quote is from Martin Luther King "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity".

For the author, educating the students in the subject of BE has been very fulfilling indeed. The most interesting part was that both the author and the students learnt new things; that learning is a lifelong experience and is very worthwhile that knowledge is always about sharing with others, be it with one's own family or with one's circle of friends. In this particular community welfare project, Experience is always the Best Teacher! Quite often what is learnt outside the classroom is more than what is learnt inside the formal classroom. "The two basic processes of education are knowing and valuing"-Robert J. Havighurst.

Many different ways of living a life would meet with one's basic moral obligations. The type of life each seeks to live reflects individual values; whether following a profession, community service, raising a family, seeking solitude, pursuing scientific truths, striving for athletic excellence, amassing political power, cultivating glamorous people as friends, or some combination of these are some possible ways of living.

The decisions an individual makes in a chosen career and in shaping his working life will depend on his moral code and on an understanding of certain roles and relationships. Most important of all, be a good corporate citizen. Give back. Make corporate contributions. Provide programs supporting community-education, health/human services, culture and arts, civic. Provide for community betterment. Engage in volunteerism.

The ethics of care is built on empathy, a critical-thinking commitment to view issues and situations from multiple perspectives. According to an empathetic point of view, achieving happiness and fulfillment in life does not mean pursuing narrow desires; it involves pursuing aspirations in a context of genuine understanding of other people. It certainly makes sense to promote the happiness of others through words and actions. Being friendly, generous, supportive, understanding, sympathetic, helpful; these and other similar traits

enhance the quality of others' lives, usually at a minimal cost to oneself. This is not to suggest selfless devotion to promoting the interests of others to the exclusion of one's own. In fact, if own interests are not taken care of, it would be difficult to sustain one's inner resources needed to help others. Pursuing self-interest is ethically appropriate and necessary for one's own physical and emotional health. But if devoted exclusively to pursuing one's interests, then such a life is morally empty.

In summary, these BE class assignments in the form of engaging the students in ethics of care by visiting the Orphanage at Rumah Amal Tuanku Ampuan Rahimah in Subang Jaya and the Precious Children's Home in Petaling Jaya and also visiting the Selangor Cheshire Old Folks' Home in Selayang have certainly have added good values and rich experiences to the students involved. Besides participating in the CSR of UC, the students gained other beneficial attributes which included being caring and responsible towards others, for example, the community, being grateful to God, their parents, family and teachers, being a good team player and also developing good character and being always positive in life. As future leaders in their respective fields, it is also hoped that they will find a real meaning for their lives and continue to become good corporate citizens of Malaysia.

As such, the engagement of ADP students of UC in community welfare projects should be continued and perhaps expanded to other faculties so as to get maximum participation from all students for the mutual benefit of UC and the community.

The author certainly agrees with the quotation by Nelson Mandela which says "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

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