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Review Article

Buddhist Inspired Universities and their Methods of Teaching and Learning

Tanya Storch*

Department of Religious Studies, University of the Pacific, California, USA

***Corresponding author:** Tanya Storch, Department of Religious Studies, University of the Pacific, California, USA. Tel: +12099462533;Email: tstorch@pacific.edu

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Abstract

This paper examines Buddhist inspired universities in the United States of America. A Buddhist inspired university is different from institutions specializing in teaching Buddhist philosophy and practice to Buddhist clergy and people generally interested in becoming Buddhists. A Buddhist inspired university is a state accredited institution of higher learning which offers degrees in professional fields and liberal arts and at the same time uses Buddhist pedagogical principles.

Introduction

Buddhism in the United States underwent many significant changes. One specific change involves successful merging of Buddhist inspired pedagogy with the Western institutions of higher learning. Currently, four Buddhist inspired universities exists in the United States: Naropa University (founded in 1974),Dharma Realm Buddhist University (founded in 1976),Soka University of America (founded in 1987), and University of the West (founded in 1991). These universities offer degrees in psychology, computer engineering, business, environmental protection, education, art therapy, and other professional fields. At the same time, educational pedagogy in a classroom, as well as life on campus are deeply steeped inprinciples of Buddhist philosophy, such as interconnectedness, equanimity, mindfulness, compassion, and respect for all life. The rate of graduation at the Buddhist inspired universities is higher than the national average. Students, faculty, staff, and administration interviewed for this research all have reported high levels of satisfaction with their teaching-learning experiences. In this paper, we examine practical applications of Buddhist pedagogy at the Naropa University, the Dharma Realm Buddhist University, the Soka University of America, and the University of the West.

Teaching and learning from a position of Inter connectedness of all life

One important methodological principle observed in all four Buddhist inspired universities is "Inter connectedness of All Life." In Sanskrit, it is referred to as the "Pratitya-samutpada," or the "Simultaneous rising of all phenomena." In English such words as Interconnectedness, Interdependence, and Oneness are often used to express the same notion. When "Pratitya-samutpada," or simultaneous rising of all phenomena, is clarified for the students, they understand that they are inter-dependent with other human beings and other life-forms for their very existence. The goal is to discard the illusion (enhanced by Western education) that we, as individuals, are separate and exist independently from each other and from our social and natural environment. Central to this is the realization that an individual cannot be happy on her/his own, for even our own identity is a result of a network of connections and exchanges. Often, when this concept is taught in class, students are invited to see trees, sunshine, rain, and hard-working people such as tree-loggers, truck-drivers, and machine-operators in every piece of paper that lies in front of them on the desk. Thich NhatHahn provided the exposition of this philosophy in TheHeart of Understanding (Thich 1978), and Sid Brown wrote: "Everything exists in a matrix of all other things, so everything affects other things, so nothing is somehow separate or exempt from anything else. Everything affects something else." [1].

When interconnectedness becomes the main method of education, teaching and learning in the classroom are interconnected with life that happens outside the classroom, making every moment of learning relevant to students' lives and keeping them intently involved in the process. Learning through interconnectedness does not stop after classes for students are guided to use what they have learned in class for their daily activities. It continues

in cafeterias and dining halls where students eat together with professors, administrators and staff. During the shared meals, students are invited to think about every piece of food they put into their mouths and reflect on where the ingredients have come from. Without plants, soil, water, and sun, without all people working together to grow, deliver, and serve their food, they will have no food. In quite a similar way, and on many other occasions, students are guided toward the ultimate understanding that their lives and achievements cannot be accomplished without the successes of the whole community.

A significant component of the interconnectedness methodology is daily practice of the "Anatman," or "No-Ego." Anatman, as a philosophical term, points to the absence of a permanent self. "One's own self, as an entity which is disconnected and independent from all other entities, is an illusion," Prof. Guruge from the University of the West explains in the beginning of his lectures. "It only appears that we are separate from everyone else and that our own selves have independent origination. This is definitely not so. Every thought I have is made out of the ingredients that have come from somewhere else. Every molecule in my body has, likewise, existed somewhere else before it became a part of my body."

Seeing one's self as a separate being is corrected with every piece of information learned in the classroom and every practice observed in daily life. It is from this position that administration, faculty, and staff in the Buddhist-inspired institutions of learning understand their obligations toward work, students, environment, and community as a whole. From the president to the maintenance worker, from the dean to the professor, Buddhist-based education is interconnected; it excludes no one. The difference in how students approach education on Buddhist campuses definitely rises from this sense of being interconnected. Students know that they really matter to everyone on campus. They know this is not just some game involving scores, GPAs, IDs, and dollars. They feel that everyone around them cares about them as real people, and this makes a huge difference in how they perceive their education and how they work toward it. Unfortunately, today, this does not happen at many colleges and universities. Richard Arum and JosikaRoksa described in AcademicallyAdrift a nationwide situation with our education which they call the "Academic ratchet." [2].

While in high school, students hold the idea of college and university in high regard. They believe they will learn things which will not only make them professionals, but help them become better people, that is, help them understand what is morally right, help them appreciate the arts, sports, languages and world history, and prepare them for more satisfying relationships with other people. But by the end of the first year in college, they realize that they are not treated like real people, that professors have no time to talk to them, and generally speaking, no one really cares whether they will become better people, or not. They realize that, ultimately, it is all about numbers which are calculated in a business-like fashion. When students realize this, cynicism sets in, and they learn how to beat professors and administrators at their own game. If the numbers is all they want, students will give them numbers by using all means available, such as regular cheating on tests and exams, copying articles from websites, stealing other students' projects, recycling the same paper in several classes, and getting into legal battles with their professors over each and every point of their grade. Quoting from Academically Adrift, "[Students develop] the art of college management, in which success is achieved primarily not through hard work but through controlling college by shaping schedules, taming professors, and limiting workload." (p. 4).

I am not idealistic about Buddhist-inspired universities and understand that they have their own problems. But the "Academic ratchet" I have just described does not exist on Buddhist campuses because students are treated like human beings and not like numbers. They are treated with full respect and dignity reaching far beyond what is required by the rules of political correctness. Professors, staff, and administrators, through their own study and practice of interconnectedness, know that if they want to be respected by the students, they must respect them first. This applies to all students regardless of how they study or behave. By comparison, at a regular college and university, a professor is not under moral obligation to practice this form of respect. If she/he does not violate the university's code, this is deemed sufficient in terms of the accountability to students.

True humanistic accountability on terms of Buddhist pedagogy involves treating others as one wishes to be treated and following the rules one sets for another person. Equanimity (or Upeka in Sanskrit) in behaving with other people is a direct result of seeing the world as interconnected. Classical example of equanimity is found at Soka University of America. It begins with the parking lot where one finds no signs which would designate parking reserved for people with special status. Try as hard as one may, one will not find parking A or B, or reserved for faculty vs. students vs. visitors. No parking is reserved for the president and provost either. Social equanimity is observed in all offices and buildings on this campus, as well. Not only do administrators have no parking privileges, they are not given special buildings on campus either. John Pulley noted in "Soka University Tries to Reinvent College" that the very absence of the administration buildings expresses a deeply Buddhist philosophical position that the university's decision-makers must stay interconnected with other people and there should be no hiding places for them (Pulley). The Soka University of America offices, from the deans' to the janitors,' are the same size and equipped with furniture comparable in terms of price and comfort. With no ranks or other official distinctions, all members of the university are acknowledged as equal in their responsibilities to each other and to the students.

Respect for others and all life in general is vividly present on

Buddhist campuses as it is displayed through the recognition that the environment is interconnected with, and thus affects human consciousness, and as a result -- human academic performance. I will never forget the first impression I had of the classroom I visited at the Dharma Realm Buddhist University. It had large bright windows on three sides of the classroom, letting in fresh air and natural light. It had a simple, but outstandingly elegant piece of calligraphy on the far wall, and a flower-arrangement (just prepared by a professor) sitting on a low table. Students were holding cups of fragrant green tea as they quietly talked to each other and looked through lecture notes. Fifteen minutes were left before the beginning of the class. I compared this to what I saw on other campuses. Most of the classrooms I remember were filled with a sense of dread, boredom, and even foreboding. For the most part, they did not have any natural light or fresh air, and I could not detect any presence of beauty. These classrooms, definitely, did not sport any flower-arrangements or elegant paintings, although such things were abundantly present in the administrative offices.

Classrooms on Buddhist-inspired campuses are inviting, to say the least. They are understood as being a part of the learning process because of the principle of interconnectedness. One just looks inside such a space and immediately wants to come in and be there. The sense of welcoming is not produced by luxurious furniture or expensive high-tech equipment. The happy vibe, so to speak, comes from the environment, as well as from mindfully placed objects of beauty by people who teach and learn there and truly care about the surroundings because they understand its effects on the human mind.

Beautiful flower and rock arrangements are made by students or faculty wishing to express their connection to the world outside the classroom and to show appreciation of nature's generous beauty. Students are also given the privilege (and a responsibility) to organize their individual places of learning. That is, they choose how and where to sit during the class-session. They can sit in regular chairs, on the floor, or meditation cushions. I interviewed students at Naropa University, asking them whether having a choice in the manner of sitting during the class makes any difference. They enthusiastically answered in the positive, explaining that choosing the right, most appropriate position for sitting during class, allows them to be more focused on the state of their mind and to better learn. Finding the exact configuration between physical body and consciousness maximizes the ability to learn and retain knowledge, for there is no longer a distraction caused by uncomfortable chairs and desks or by sitting too close to people or objects that can pull away your attention.

In a Buddhist-inspired classroom, a teacher does not usually stand in front of rows of students. Instead, students and the professor often sit in one big circle, indicating that they are connected to each other through the process of teaching and learning. But ultimately, what makes Buddhist-inspired classrooms so special is that students care about them. To them, these are not just some rooms they temporarily occupy, so that a market transaction of buying education at a very high price may happen. To them, these are places where they become mindful of themselves, of each other, and of the world around them; where the practice of interconnectedness happens each time, they step in.

It is not surprising therefore, that environment-protection programs are the heart and center of all Buddhist-inspired universities' programs. Although protection of the environment is now taught at most colleges and universities because growing pollution threatens all of us, there is a significant difference between how teaching it is approached in Buddhist-based education and all others. In a nutshell, on most campuses students learn about the environment in a classroom but this education ends the moment they step out. In Buddhist pedagogy, there can be no disparity between knowing and doing, and therefore, learning the importance of the environment becomes daily practice involving all aspects of students' life and the university campus, as well.

Zigzagging in front of the Lincoln Building at the Naropa University, there runs the oldest irrigation ditch in Boulder known as Smith-Goss Ditch which was dug in 1859. Approximately a mile long, it watered fields at Boulder High School and the University of Colorado before it became Naropa University's property. It is no longer functional, and there have been proposals to eliminate the ditch and turn its one-mile long green space into something "more useful." Yet, every time urbanization of the ditch was proposed, students vehemently opposed the idea of destroying this small piece of natural life on the edge of their campus. To them, this is not a useless space. To them, it is home to frogs and lizards and butterflies. They nicknamed it the Zen-ditch because a person can sit there, "at the end of all things," and listen to the sounds of nature, feeling great tranquility in the heart.

Naropa students are also proud of, and give special protection to, sycamore trees which grow around campus, one of which is believed to be the tallest at 115 feet, and the oldest in Boulder. After the tenth student told me about the sycamores in just one day, I began to wonder -- how many students on other campuses care about trees growing on their campuses? How many of them can even tell what kinds of tress grow there?

Protecting natural life daily through daily action is a hallmark of Buddhist-based environmental education. I was pleasantly surprised when I discovered on each of the Buddhist campuses that animal life is protected. Peacocks are protected on the Dharma Realm Buddhist University campus; squirrels -- at UWest; and ground-hogs on the Paramita campus of Naropa University in addition to frogs and butterflies cared for on the Lincoln campus. This brings me to a sad reflection on how green spaces and the wild life with them are being destroyed on my own campus. Just six years ago, I regularly saw jays, ducks, hawks, owls, and finches

on and around campus, but not anymore. The habitat has been destroyed by what I must call the "Greedy construction process," dictating that every piece of green grass must be turned into a building or parking space to justify its usefulness! Understanding the usefulness of green spaces and deep commitment to protecting natural life around us do not always happen naturally with our students even though the millennials are better at this than other generations. These things must be taught and practiced daily and become an essential part of our education, andby destroying beautiful oases of nature on and around campuses, we cannot teach our students how to protect it. (Buddhist Translation Society vol. 2: 44-45).

Respect for all life and recognition of the importance of all life-forms are constant themes in the Buddhist-inspired curricula. No matter what the subject, no matter who teaches it, this is one lesson all students will learn. It is present in Business Departments, Writing and Poetics programs, Psychology, Computer Engineering, English, Math, etc. By taking classes at a Buddhist-inspired university, students inevitably learn how to see the world from a position of the sanctity of all life, where every form of energy depends on all other forms of energy, and where short-term cultural, economic, and social gains are recognized as the inefficient use of natural and human resources.

Students are educated to treasure and wisely use their talents, as well. An outstanding example of this is at the Naropa University. Near the cafeteria, there is a big bulletin board where students post announcements. Many of them read like this: "I would like to exchange a gift of picking up eatable mushrooms for a gift of knowing how to keep my room clean and organized (50 karmic points)." And, "I will exchange lessons in French (20 karmic points) for help with Biology." In 2010, during my visit to campus, I counted 50 announcements of this sort.

Students are encouraged to avoid waste of any kind. So, students have designed a storage unit (open for everyone) where they store good things they no longer need. They bring desk-lamps, blankets, frying pans, forks, cups, etc., and place them on the shelves inside the storage room in a neat and orderly manner. People who have need of such things (students, faculty, staff, administration, and the local community) come and take them home. When they no longer need them, they return them, and the cycle continues. Everyone who has seen gigantic trash containers filled with students' possessions at the end of the semester will understand my strong sentiment of appreciating the wisdom of this simple solution to the problem. Actually -- two problems. One is helping new students to get things they need after they settle on campus. (This is especially serious for those students who may not have extra money for buying even simple necessities for their life on campus). The second is the cost of cleaning dormitories after students have moved out.

Nowhere is the principle of interconnectedness as evident as in the teachings and practices of vegetarianism. A report produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations pointed out that livestock production is a key source of carbon emissions, responsible for discharging 7.5 billion pounds of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year. That figure represents 18% of global green-house gas emissions. That revelation, as bad as it seems, might be in fact a gross understatement, according to Robert Woodland and Jeff Anhang. In "Livestock and Climate Change," they attributed 51% of global green-house gas emission, or 32.6 billion pounds of carbon released into the atmosphere, to the raising of livestock and the production of meat, milk, and related products [3,4].

Buddhist universities teach philosophy of vegetarianism and strongly encourage its practices even if it is only a few days a week, or as little as one meal a day [5]. Not surprisingly, many students and professors at Naropa, UWest and SUA are vegetarian, although they do not impose their views on others. At Dharma Realm Buddhist University, no meat products are allowed in its cafeteria and campus as a whole. The University of the West used to serve only vegetarian meals, but recently, out of compassion for those who cannot practice vegetarianism and suffer from the lack of meat in their diet, one dish of meat has been added to the vegetarian kitchen. Naropa and Soka universities are not strict in their vegetarian practices and allow meat consumption, because this is consistent with the practices of those forms of Buddhism upon which these two universities have been respectively founded. But at the same time, students are actively educated about the benefits of vegetarianism for health, environment, and spiritual progress (Kaza).Buddhist pedagogy encourages the practice of mindful eating, and this definitely invites a reflection on the source of the meat, that is, the death of the animal. Thus, mindful eating becomes a reason for many students to switch to vegetarian diet.

The principle of interconnectedness serves Buddhist-inspired universities particularly well when it comes to managing their financial resources. We know that American universities spend a good portion of their budgets on building, repairing and expanding parking spaces. Buddhist universities have devised a creative solution to the endless extension of parking around the university's parameters. At Naropa, students receive a bicycle and an annual bus-pass. At UWest, communally shared cars are available for travelling between the Hsi Lai Temple and the university's campus. Communally shared cars are also used at NU, SUA, and DRBU. Another way of saving money while practicing interconnectedness is to grow food on campus rather than to buy it from an outside supplier. At DRBU, gardens and orchards are tended to by all members of the university's community. The harvested produce is used in the dining hall and distributed to willing participants. Seventy percent of all food consumed at DRBU is grown in its vegetable patches and gardens. This saves the university nearly

15% of its overall budget. At DRBU and UWest, students are involved in preparing ingredients for cooking and cleaning dining halls. This translates into yet another significant per cent of budget savings. The practice of growing and preparing food and cleaning after eating is transformational for the students just as much as it is beneficial for the budget.

Buddhist campuses save on the cost of some work usually performed by the physical plant -- cleaning of classrooms, offices, and dormitories, and taking care of indoor and outdoor plants. In this way, money is saved and everyone learns real-life lessons in interconnectedness. "Littering in the classrooms and dormitories is practically absent because students take responsibility for their environment," the director of student life at DRBU told me. Finally, the interconnectedness taught through Buddhist pedagogy allows for a more positive outlook on life. Quoting from Soka University's article, "Interconnectedness," posted on its website: "If, as individuals we can embrace the view that 'because of that, this exists,' or in other words, because of that person, I can develop, then we never need to experience pointless conflicts in human relations….On a deeper level, we are connected and related not just to those physically close to us, but to every living being. If we can realize this, feelings of loneliness and isolation, which cause so much suffering, begin to vanish, as we realize that we a part of a dynamic, mutually interconnected whole."

Teaching and learning from a position of compassion

Michael Sandel pointed out in What Money Can't Buy that we Americans have dangerously crossed over the moral limitations of markets. He specifically indicated that making our educational system "For sale" has become one of the more dangerous traits of America's recent social transformation. He writes, "…Some of the good things in life are corrupted or degraded if turned into commodities. … We have to decide how to value the goods in question -- health, education, family life, nature, art, and civic duties." According to him, the danger of not doing so will result in that, "Without quite realizing it, without ever deciding to do so, we drift from having a market economy to being a market society."[6]

"Paying kids for good grades" chapter of his book provides disturbing examples of how seriously our education has been already perverted by market-ideology. His examples include New York City paying fourth-graders $25 to score well on standardized tests, Washington DC paying middle school students cash-rewards for attendance, good behavior, and turning in their homework (children can make up to $100 every two weeks), and Chicago schools offering their ninth graders cash for getting good grades -- $50 for an A, $35 for a B, and $20 for a C[6]. A market-driven approach to education does not stop at schools. It permeates colleges and universities, as well. College and university students, to be precise, are not given money for doing well on their tests, but their financial support dwindles, or disappears entirely if they fall below the required GPA even by one tenth of a point. Corners are cut and new rules invented regularly to force students to graduate as soon as possible and not allow them work on their education longer than is required for obtaining a degree. The degree itself is understood by most people working in the system of higher education, as nothing more than a license to obtain a job and make money, while the entire motivation for studying and graduation is based entirely on that.The result is that "Increasingly, educators within the system have begun to raise their voices questioning whether organizational changes to colleges and universities in recent decades have undermined the core educational functions of these institutions"[2].

Because it is in human nature to care about human values and not money alone, the promise of a good salary in the distant future just does not provide a strong enough motivation to graduate. Consequently, slightly more than 50% of American students who enter college leave with a BA degree (Selingo: IX). Because of that, the US ranks twelve among developed nations in the attainment of higher-education by its young people. Research conducted from different angles of this problem [2,7,8] indicates that the cost of education is not the main reason for the massive drop-out of students from national colleges and universities. More and more it appears the younger generations lack motivation for pursuing their degrees. A growing majority feel that they have been drifting through education and their life on campus without any purpose and without any result.

Significant difference exists in the minds of students studying at Buddhist-inspired universities vs. those at other institutions. The difference is in personal attitudes towards learning and in the firm realization of what is the ultimate goal of education. When I asked students at non-Buddhist universities, "Why is it important for you to graduate on time and with a full degree?" many students could not answer. But when they did, the typical answers were that they wanted to be able to support themselves financially, travel around the world, or take care of their family, especially, if they were children of former immigrants without sufficient financial status. When I asked the same question at Buddhist-inspired universities, students (without exception) told me they want to become better people, protect the environment, create real communities, and help others; in sum, their reasons for studying well and graduating on time involved compassion for human life and for the natural surroundings of our planet. Compassion involves understanding the suffering of others and finding the best ways to minimize or alleviate it. It is possible to say that compassion has become the main motivation for giving and receiving education at Buddhist-based universities.

From my own experience, I know that it is the biggest life-

changing surprise to my students that they can be better motivated to work hard when feeling compassion for people who suffer and need their help, than by dreams of earning lots of money in a distant future. After many conversations and exercises, students understand it completely. As one of them phrased it - "It is much more difficult to force yourself out of a comfortable bed at six in the morning for the sake of big money in ten years than by knowing that you can help others with knowledge and kindness you create though your education every day of your life!" After students "Get it," they never go back to the exclusively money-and-career driven approach to their studies. Pre-pharm students stop "hating" chemistry because they realize that they do not learn it for a career and money, but because chemical formulas they prescribe will destroy or save people's lives. Students in engineering become excited about language requirements, instead of being grumpy about it, because they realize this is not just another hoop to jump through to receive social permission to make money -- sophisticated machinery they like to build must be built for real people with whom they must be able to properly communicate.

Being motivated by compassion for other people (and other living beings such as animals and plants) rather than by merely the prospect of a good job does not only make students work harder, but it brings real joy and satisfaction to their study and their whole life. People who practice compassion feel happier, their immune system and health improves, and their desire to study and to work increases, at the same time, their outlook on the future becomes more positive[9,10,11]. The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE) at Stanford University is looking at many areas of teaching where practicing compassion can be successfully applied. The Center's website and regularly updated blog prove through dozens of research articles that having compassionate thoughts and engaging in compassionate activities affect development of the human brain in a positive way as no other type of activity can.

When we motivate our students by personal career and material gains only, we underestimate their humanity. We actually prove how poorly we relate to our younger generation because the millennials no longer see success in life in the same way previous generations have (Strauss and Howe). Material prosperity has been a crucial factor and powerful stimulus for personal and social progress in the decades after World War II, but people born in the 80s and 90s grew up surrounded by it, and therefore, it no longer has the same value. If we offer our students opportunities to create humanistic values alongside the material ones, they will surprise us.

From the position of Buddhist pedagogy, compassion needs to be taught at all levels and for all ages for, as the Dalai Lama pointed in his recent speech at the University of California, San Jose, "All technological accomplishments and social improvements will be lost because of an individual's lack of moral values, specifically, lack of compassion for his fellow human beings."Kathleen McDonald summarized methods for teaching compassion in Awakening the Kind Heart: How to Meditate on Compassion, and methodology she describes can be taught in all types of education. A set of simple, regularly practiced exercises which awaken empathy for others and beget a more compassionate view of humanity starts with developing compassion toward one's own existence. Compassion toward oneself is different from pitying oneself or being self-centered. (Mackenzie). It is based on understanding that human nature is imperfect and prone to suffering, but also capable of minimizing suffering by letting go of attachments, judgments, and expectations. Having compassion toward oneself, first of all, involves treating one's physical body in a respectful way by giving it healthy food, necessary amount of rest and exercise, and also by nurturing one's emotions through wholesome friendships and harmonious relationships. Once this attitude is established, caring for human wellbeing is extended to the nearest groups of people, such as a circle of friends and the family; eventually, it is extended to all humanity[12,13].

There is a specific form of meditation, typologically called the Metta-meditation [14,15]. Students are first guided to become calm in their mind through breathing, then, asked to remember feelings of loving kindness they experienced in the past as a result of someone doing something nice for them, or as a result of their doing something nice for another person. Then, they are guided to develop and hold the sense of loving kindness toward other people. Based on interviews with students who practiced this, experiencing loving kindness toward others (instead of feeling frustration, annoyance, and competition) makes them feel very happy and more inspired toward their academic work.

After the Metta-meditation is practiced in class, the next step is to ask students to conduct simple actions of kindness outside the class while holding this sense of compassion toward others. Actions include holding a door for another person, greeting a visitor who is new to campus, asking friends if they need help with something, or assisting an elder person in crossing a busy and potentially dangerous intersection. Many of my students did these exercises as a part of their homework in a class on Buddhist ethics I teach at my university. All of them reported that they have felt so good, so happy during the entire time they kept this state of compassion toward other people.

Developing loving kindness toward all living beings and serving them with compassion in all situations, especially in a chosen professional capacity, must be considered the most important motivation for students at Buddhist universities. Closely related to this is a motivation to create a better human community. Sid Brown described in length the process of building a community in the classroom (Brown: 31-50). In "Viewing Each Other with Kindly Eyes: Community in the Classroom," she writes, "I emphasize the

integrity of our community when I recognize repeated absences of a student as losses to all of us, not just to the missing student. If I know a student is sick, I invite members of the class to check on her and ask if they can help. During one semester, when a student's sibling died and he left to be with his family, I brought a card to class and each of his classmates and I signed the card for him. That student's loss was our loss - out of compassion and honesty, we recognized that in a community action: the signing of a card[1].

Another specialist in Buddhist education, John Miller, writes: "Holistic education seeks to develop community within classrooms …and also connects students to the community that surrounds the schools…the teacher attempts to create an atmosphere of trust that supports the development of community. This is done through conveying respect for students, listening attentively, and being genuine in conveying one's feelings [14]. The sense of community in the classroom can be created by following three simple principles:

- Emotional honesty. If I feel upset by the lack of students' enthusiasm in completing assignments, I do not hide my emotions, but I do not randomly display them either. The whole class does a five-minute meditation, and then I ask my students' permission to honestly share my feelings about their failure on the assignment. They understand me very well because I am honest, but not angry, and provide no judgment. I simply share with them how it makes me feel as their teacher. I ask them not to feel guilty, but instead, be honest with themselves and understand why they have not completed the assignment. I sit with them in a big circle and ask a random student to start explaining reasons for not completing an assignment. After that, I give students 15-20 minutes to finish and revise the reading. This is usually followed by one of the best discussions I have in class. I always admit to my mistakes and apologize to students, and they do the same to me. In this way, mutual respect is established and the sense of being a community (rather than random gathering of individuals) always helps us to do our work.
- Connecting to my students' humanness. Students are more than their social function in the institution of higher learning. They are people. They are humans, individuals, with their own personalities, emotions, worries, and needs, and they want and must be recognized as human beings, not just students. During our first meeting, I ask students in my class to introduce themselves by giving us the name they want me and other students to call them, by telling us about their favorite things in life, and by describing what has attracted them to the majors and minors they pursue. At the end of the first meeting, I ask them to send me a file containing their favorite self-image and the things shared in class. These files are for my private use only and will never be shared with anyone else. I spend two weeks at the beginning of each semester remembering my students' names and faces and what they love to do and what they want to study as their future professions. When I teach, I address their humanness, not only their studentship.
- Making connections between what is taught and what has been learned. At some point in my lecture, I ask students to close their eyes, go deep into their mind, and recollect everything they have learned from the beginning of the lecture to the present moment. I give five to seven minutes to this exercise; then, I gently ring the bell and they open their eyes. Every student shares what he/she has learned. After this, I ask them to think of real-life situations in which they will be able to use what they have learned. And we make a practice of it. For two to three weeks after we learn a new topic, they consciously apply to real life what they have learned in class, and then write a report to summarize the practice.

Through applications of Buddhist pedagogy, the sense of community built in the classroom is extended to other people in a local and global sense. A community-based approach to education has its foundation in the philosophy of no-ego, described in "Teaching from a position of interconnectedness." Unlike the Western view of selfhood, Buddhists underscore that nothing can exist without the other. In Western paradigm, students are told they must learn so they can provide for themselves, become well-positioned in society, and then (when they have enough for themselves), engage in charitable activity. From a Buddhist perspective, one's wellbeing can never be accomplished if one does not realize that one's wellbeing is connected to that of the rest of the society.

Teaching and learning from a position of Mindfulness

In the last few decades, mindfulness has become an important topic of investigation. It has been studied from multiple perspectives, including its proper Buddhist context and the history of its adaptation in the West [16]; its applications for health, especially, as"Mindfulness-based stress reduction" technique [7,15,17-19]; and its usefulness in completing daily tasks while coping with many challenges of our modern life [19,20-23].

Described in the simplest way, mindfulness is an inner awareness of the things a person is doing in the moment she/he is doing them, and of the reasons for doing them. It involves being fully present, emotionally and intellectually, in what the person does and concentrating entirely on that. The state of mindfulness has been described in English by such terms as awareness, contemplation, being grounded, being present in the moment, and so forth.

As a professor, I teach regularly and I realize that mindfulness is absolutely required in the classroom, for it brings the most efficient results in teaching and learning, no matter what

the subject area. I also realize that my students lack mindfulness to a greater extent that the students I taught just ten years ago. When I look into the eyes of my students today, it is apparent that their minds have wandered. They have entirely forgotten they are in the middle of the lecture; they do not even remember they are sitting in the classroom. They think of the latest news a friend just texted to them, or about what they are going to do later that day, or what they are going to eat for lunch. Many students keep frantically texting, with their hands hidden in a pocket or under a desk, even after the lecture has begun. Some pretend to be typing notes from the lecture, but in actuality, search for something else, protected from my eyes by opened laptops. Today's students are so absent-minded that a simple question must be repeated several times until they comprehend what is required of them.

Against this background, nearly ideal levels of attention and comprehension in the classroom have been observed in the universities which apply Buddhist pedagogy. This can be explained by nothing other that practices of mindfulness are built into the teaching-learning methodologies. Mindfulness can be taught under different names and practiced through a variety of methods. What matters is that it becomes an important integral component of all programs.

Mindfulness and contemplative modalities of learning are not unique to Buddhism. Judith Simmer-Brown suggests that by pursuing contemplative and mindful modalities in education, we return to the very roots of liberal education in the West [24]. But because our universities have adopted a market-model for our curricula and extra-curriculum activities, where the practice of mindfulness has been assigned low market value, mindfulness is no longer present in the classrooms. Students can learn most of the course-contents online and be graded online. Why would they value being mindful in the classroom? Even when professors make class-attendance a significant factor in grading they are helpless when it comes to turning attendance into mindfulness. In order to accomplish this, mindfulness must become one of the core values in our whole education.

So, it happens that on Buddhist campuses (unlike in the rest of our society), mindfulness, meditation, contemplation, introspection, and other forms of cultivated focused attention are viewed as being of high value and as necessary for high quality education. Because they are valued so highly, students take up this approach in their learning and to life itself. Since the fourth century, the time when the famous Nalanda University was created in India, Buddhism has been in the practice of merging meditation with all sorts of activities; this allows meditation and mindfulness to become a part of professional training in technology, sciences, and social leadership. Contemplative and meditative modalities easily become an integral part of a Buddhist-inspired curriculum, from Liberal Arts to Business Management, and from Computer Engineering to Environmental Sciences.

Students are involved in mindfulness in and outside the classroom, as well as in and outside the university itself. When practice of mindfulness is part of a course and part of a grade, course-descriptions and syllabi specify that this is the case. Students have a choice of the type of meditation/contemplation practices they pursue throughout courses with such requirements. At Naropa University, students choose from several wisdom-traditions -- Yoga, Jewish Meditation, Taich'i, Centering Prayer, Aikido, Contemplative Brush-calligraphy, or Ikebana. The most widely taught form of mindfulness is the Shamatha-vipashyana, and Richard Brown, Professor of Contemplative Education, explains that the Shamatha meditation is taught not as a religious practice but as a "First-person" method for self-discovery and learning[24].

At Naropa, each classroom building has a room whose exclusive purpose is the practice of meditation. Such rooms are simply decorated; they have cushions for traditional sitting, and chairs (or wooden benches) at the back of the room for those who have a problem sitting cross-legged. There is a shoe-stand to the side of the entrance, so that participants can remove their shoes before the practice. A sign posted on the door indicates that this is a meditation room and asks people to be quite when walking around. Meditation can be practiced at any time and for any duration. When tired or in stress, faculty, students, and stuff go inside a meditation room and restore their inner balance, bringing back their loving-kindness attitude toward people and the work they do.

Learning meditation is not required in the majority of UWest programs. At the same time, studying meditation is offered to all students. The entire curriculum combines contemplative/reflective/meditative approaches to the subject of study and the "third-person" Western-scientific approach. Moments of meditation and self-reflection are organically woven into lectures, discussions, and guidelines for preparing written and oral assignments. Additionally, according to Raymond MacDonald's "Second Overnight Sit Builds Diverse Sangha at UWest," students themselves play a leading role in conducting meditation exercises.

During a Business Management class, students' report on developing mindfulness-techniques in their specific professional areas, so that they can help with: 1) stress-release at a work-place, 2) sharpening co-workers' mental and psychological focus, and 3) providing mental and physical rest to people spending too much time in front of a computer.

The UWest campus, like Naropa, has rooms solely dedicated to meditation practices. Usually, these are very simple room with one Buddhist image placed by the central wall and wooden benches and meditation cushions on the other three walls. Students and faculty come during the designated hours to learn how to meditate.

Levels of practice vary significantly among the monastics and students (At UWest, monastics study alongside regular students). Yet, beginners (regular students) do not feel intimidated because the same guidelines are given before a meditation session, no matter who participates. At the University of the West students, administrators, and faculty engage in a regular practice of meditation and mindfulness both on the main campus and at the Hsi Lai Temple which is historically associated with the UWest. This helps them carry on with their daily activities, stay calm and treat others with patience and compassion. "Mindfulness motivates for better performance in the classroom and in the office," I was told.

At the Dharma Realm Buddhist University, practices of mindfulness and meditation are primarily performed at the Temple of Ten Thousand Buddhas, located in the middle of the campus. Practice of meditation is required for specific tracks, such as Buddhist Study and Practice. In addition, many beautiful gardens for sitting and walking meditations are spread around campus where one can practice any time. A regular three-week retreat which concludes the spring semester is offered for free to all members of the DRBU community.

At Soka University of America, mindfulness is not taught through what we consider traditional meditation. SUA is founded by the Soka Gakkai International which focuses on creation of human values, such as peace, happiness, and compassion toward all living beings. To accomplish this, SUA uses arts and mindful-social activities which guide students toward achieving these goals. What is practiced here may be better referred to as the awareness of human conditions aimed to alleviate human suffering. Students participate in on-campus activities that develop their sense of compassion toward all living beings, including plants and animals. They also sing and chant together, and chanting and singing in unison are scientifically proven to have a similar effect on human brain as meditation (Horn).

In a nutshell, a Buddhist-inspired view on education is that it is a process of mutual growth so that ultimately there is neither student nor teacher. Someone may at one moment be the teacher, but at another moment, will be the student. Faculty does not presume to reveal hidden wisdom to students; rather, they seek truth together. Education is also the exercise of mutual respect grounded in the teachings of the absence of any permanent self, or ego. Mutual respect is the acknowledgment of the innate integrity of all sentient beings, therefore, teaching and learning flourish only when student and teacher accept each other as they are and respect each other for what they aspire and strive to become.

In the environment created through the application of the Buddhist-inspired pedagogy, education becomes a reformation of one's character which advances only when changes come about in one's behavior and attitudes. This is why education has been always viewed as a long process -- it brings people from the state of suffering, anguish, and frustration to the state of being awakened from selfishness and to a firm realization that we are in this together.

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