

Learning Strategies Cultivating Contemplative Mind in Thai Teacher Education

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Abstract

The mediated learning strategies fostering the achievement of improving cognitive and academic performance while developing students' whole person is not only benefit for the student's self but for society. Thus the purposes of the study were to find out the methods and the techniques used to raise student's inner changes and the positive outer results of those changes. The new consciousness leading to 'Professional Qualified Teacher', the identity of Naresuan Teacher Education was also accordingly expected to be found in the study. Seventy-five students involved in the study. It was 15- week subject course taking 45 hours in class and double more hours outside class. Qualitative methods have been used for data collection. During the practices, the threefold namely; personal, academic and professional have been explored and thus a shift of consciousness in students has been found. A range of designed activities by the author with the modification of students; 5-minute mindfulness, personal journal writing, role-playing with ethical drama, story-telling with active listening, individual nature learning, class reflection, self-improved personality program social-media for learning, 25-minute group meditation practice, Live Game Show on stage, group-work service project, were presented in the study together with student excerpts from written reflection promoting student personal and professional growth. This implied the integrative design on contemplative practices based on natural human capacity of knowing in a subject course could enable students both learning content and professional spirit successfully.

Keywords: teacher education, qualified teacher, contemplative education, Thai educational context

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Introduction

In times past, education was primarily focused on learning the important content for each subject area, then assessed the content knowledge with quizzes and tests as learning result. But when exploring the prospects for future jobs and careers in the 21st century, learning for life provides much more sound insight into education. For this reason, shifting learning to a new balance of what we learn and how we learn is needed for the new generation.

This seems to be the responsibility for the teacher who is the key person in education to work with. In teacher education, student teachers are also expected to learn to know how student learns. This perhaps good to begin at the beginning, with the definition of 'learning' for their future students. To be a qualified professional teacher, student teachers need to be involved in the process of teacher profession preparation at most earliest possible in their education. While the institution itself has to be aware of taking this as its major role in producing qualified teacher to serve society. Thus students' self and society will be exercised on their way of learning lives since in their teacher education. With the blending of content knowledge for student major subject and the content of pedagogy, it would have to be arranged to promote student 's learning achieving their personal and professional growth. Apart from this, the practices in essential learning skills which are being claimed to help ensure everyone success, have to be considered to do since student's learning life (Trilling, 2005).

Coupled with the study of Hart (2005), he stated that contemplation of higher education is being explored as a new means of enhancing liberal education. Contemplative pedagogy facilitates the achievement of traditional educational goals improving cognitive and academic performance. In his study, contemplative practices also fostered the development of the whole person, increasing capacities such as creativity, empathy, compassion, interpersonal skills and self-awareness.

Accordingly, 'Professional Qualified Teacher' becomes the setup identity for Naresuan student-teacher in 2012. 'Contemplative Education' has therefore been adopted to use to develop students in the missions of student activities and of teaching and learning at undergraduate level at Faculty of Education Naresuan University.

Contemplative Pedagogy

Sarath (2003) confirmed that contemplative practices are systematic method of invoking heightened status of consciousness or awareness. This can be drawn contemplative practices in that way involved learning infused with the experiences of awareness insight and compassion.

Hart (2004) also mentioned in his Common Seminar entitled "Innerspace: Explorations of Meditation Practice for Self and Society " that the course explores the use of meditation for both personal and professional development which were led by professors in various professions. At the conclusion of that course , students would complete an individual project that reflected the learning they had gained during the semester about meditation 's implementations for self and society.

Mackler et al., (2008) confirmed that contemplative practices are essential tools in the process of education in terms of teacher preparation to become the best teacher, student and humanbeing that one can be. It is not just about the content of the subject

and the teaching methods and strategies, but also about people with whom we are working and the academic component.

Gilbert (2004) indicated that context-based learning is a pedagogical methodology that means both the social context of learning environment and the real, concrete context. Thus knowledge has to be meaningfully introduced and thoroughly learned and reflected based on learners' acquired process and experience. Therefore students should be taught with meaningful concepts and knowledge that they can apply to their daily life and experience. Educators believe that students need to be fully and genuinely engaged in learning by experience. An important element of context-based learning environment is active learning. The students are required to have a sense of ownership of the subject and are responsible for their own learning. The combination of self-directed learning and the use of contexts consistent with the constructivist view of learning is necessary for learning. Thus, students will learn best if they try to make sense of the content area on their own with the teacher as a guide to help them along the way. The teacher plays a facilitator to provide assistance to the students when they find the best ways to construct the meaning or knowledge on their own in the real context.

Jonassen (2008) noted that constructivism should be more beneficial for students relating context-based learning. The learning process at place when students are involved in the social interactions is required. The following three factors are expected to be used to achieve effective learning were; co-operative learning, communicative competences and motivation. Project-based learning with the method of self-directed learning would be able to lead the meaningful connection between the central concepts and principles of the topic. Practices will be recommended to be the best responding to that learning where students could define their own project with guidance of teacher.

Also in Wattanatorn's study (2012), the use of contemplative designed activities integrated in learning plan and learning process together with the use of self-directed learning method and teacher's role as facilitator, students became autonomous critical thinkers. A shift of consciousness; more self-aware, more self-learning and also more conscious of social conditions in Sufficiency-Economy Philosophy (SEP) had been found in that study. During the process of individual and in group learnings, main content of learning course was integrated in that learning and transmitted to students.

The all above-mentioned strongly supported for the intellectual change, learning with the value of students who are human beings. Inner change leading to a shift of consciousness to be a professional teacher will be definitely brought about while visible outer changes could be met during the learning course.

Methodology

Purpose of the study: To reveal the methods and the techniques used to raise student's inner changes and the positive outer changes together with its results.

Target group: The purposive sampling group had been selected based on the course enrollment to study. The number was 75 students studying in the first year at undergraduate level at Faculty of Education Naresuan University, Thailand who

enrolled in the subject course entitled, ‘ Being a Professional Teacher’ in the first semester of 2014 with the author.

Data Collection: Data was collected in the process of teaching and learning throughout the subject course during the first semester of 2014 in 2 separate classes; the ones were majoring in Physics and the other majoring in Thai Language. Each class was enrolled by approximately 35-40 students. The subject of ‘Being a Professional Teacher’ is 1 of 13 required subjects that all the students have to enroll for their bachelor degree in Education. It was 15- week subject course taking 45 hours at each 3-hour instruction class and double more hours outside class depending on the study work designed by students themselves.

The pre-existing course description was used to be the framework of learning content units. They were planned for teaching and learning within 15 weeks together with actual learning being truly present and time. Course-planning timeline together with learning material ,activities and experiences and also measurement and evaluation were presented in form of, “course syllabus”.

For meaningful learning, contemplative practices were allowed to be integrated with learning content units for enhancing students’ teacher potentiality. Ten major designed activities and experiences were scheduled for student’s learning practices both in-class learning with teacher and independent learning practices outside class. These contemplative activities for practicing were ; (1) 5-minute mindfulness, (2) personal journal writing, (3) role-playing with ethical drama, (4) story-telling with active listening, (5) individual nature learning, (6) class reflection, (7) self-improved personality program 8) social-media for learning,(9)Live Game Show on stage, (10)group-work service project.

The followings are the explanation of contemplative practices used for encouraging student’s learnings;

- (1) **5-minute mindfulness:** used as a check-in of class learning before getting into the main activities of the 3-hour instruction. There were various types of check- in such as sitting in silence, listening to alpha wave music, listening to article reading, religious praying etc.
- (2) **personal journal writing:** used for student’s reflection on teaching and learning involved on that day. Student can initiate his own design of presenting knowledge, feelings, learnings, thinking...etc or even what they want to feed back to the teacher on personal notebook.
- (3) **role-playing with ethical drama:** used for presenting some cases in (risk) ethical issues. Let students share and express comprehension on human value and way to do good at all levels.
- (4) **story-telling with active listening:** used for training to be a good listener. Not to interrupt when others tell the story and also attend closely to the presented detail of others presented. No criticism / no judgement has been made against the story.
- (5) **individual nature learning:** used as learning initiative to promote the importance of the natural environment in the daily experience or in the nearby surroundings. Trying to pick up and then construct the relevance of the discovered fresh knowledge.
- (6) **class reflection:** used for gaining student ’s feeling, thinking, learning or whatever students would like to present to the class when finishing activity. This is

an individual talk. A word (or a few words), a phrase or a sentence could be made at the end of the class.

(7) **self-improved personality program** ; the use of self-improvement program by individual student within in specific time. A schedule of activities has been set up and then work within 20-30- day program. It had to be written up as a operating plan.

(8) **social-media for learning**: used for self-learning with the video clip / the written song /radio program / the book and etc. any form of mass media. Students had to select any of these to propose in class to let friends learn more on teacher profession. How and why to select the issue have to be drawn out for others to learn.

(9) **Live Game Show on Stage**: used for training how to perform themselves in public. Students had to learn from media what were the process of what to organize to perform in public for edutainment. Assignment become more authentic and more meaningful and more fun to students

(10) **group-work service project**: used as group-work volunteer project. It's a outdoor project that students have freedom to select the partners, the topic, the place, how big or small project but work for the public not for self or group. Performance of task of the real –world situation.

Apart from those designed activities, '**teacher as facilitator**' was considered to be used as the main role of the teacher. As a facilitator, teacher put students to become the participant of their own learning. Thus more than 70% of what students learned both in class and outside class derived from the jobs and through students' experiences. Apart from this, teacher tried to bring out the collective experiences of the classroom and shared learning experiences. Discussion was associated to learning subject content which was indicated in course syllabus.

Two types of learning were arranged as follows;

In-class learning: Out of 10 activities, 7 were practiced in class with teacher ; (1) 5-minute mindfulness, (2) role-playing with ethical drama, (3) story-telling with active listening, (4) individual nature learning, (5) class reflection, (6) social-media for learning and (7) Live Game Show on stage. Instead of lecture, designed activities integrated with the subject content provided by the teacher passed through students both inside and outside class. Through learning objectives, learning process, learning method, learning materials, and evaluation, teacher transmitted meaningful and active learning in order to have students change learning behaviors.

Independent learning: 3 activities were conducted outside class; (1) personal journal writing, (2) self-improved personality program and (3) group-work service project. 'Self-directed learning' had been used for students' learning. Students initiated their own learning topics. With or without the supports of teacher, students would further search for learning needs and then conducted their own study accordingly to achieve learning goal. Learning resources from persons, materials and sites were selected and promoted for student appropriate learning strategies and evaluation.

Finding and Discussion

Based on the teaching and learning process focused not only on the subject content but also the understandings of students' selves and allow them to grow up with academic and professional change during learning with the teacher. These could raise them with the new consciousness during contemplative practices on expressing human value within self combined with the impact of others and society. Through a

range of activities and process, students' new perspectives of learning were presented in different way far from their former ones.

1. A range of 10 activities designed by the teacher with the modification of students

It's indicated in the study, there were; (1) 5-minute mindfulness, (2) role-playing with ethical drama, (3) story-telling with active listening, (4) individual nature learning, (5) class reflection, (6) social-media for learning and (7) Live Game Show on stage (8) personal journal writing, (9) self-improved personality program and (10) group-work service project

Together with these designed activities, 1) learning process and 2) learning plan had been used to achieve learning outcomes;

1) **learning process**, the author used both in class learning process and independent learning process outside the class.

1.1 In-class learning The three main steps of 3-hour instruction in class were arranged as follows;

Step 1 Check-in: (5-10 minutes) It's used for opening students' learning space. The activity of '5-minute mindfulness' in different types of learning usually had been used at this step for start a class.

Step 2 Learning subject content (120-180 minutes) Students have to be involved in learning with the 3 sub-steps; 1) analysis of the content knowledge with learning materials

2) individual reflection with words / map drawing / writing and 3) conclusion of learning content with mind mapping or paragraph writing with students' own thinking.

A range of activities like; role-playing with ethical drama, story-telling with active listening, individual nature learning, social-media for learning, Live Game Show on stage, class reflection, would be selected in association with the subject content and then be put in a learning process at this step. Normally this step closes up with randomly pick up students for individual reflection.

Step 3 Check out: (5-10 minutes): It's the time of class learning reflection on learning in that 3-hour class. Students use word(s), a phrase or a short sentence that they perceived. It might be feeling, thinking or belief from that learning class either related to the content or not. They were not allowed to judge those reflection right and wrong.

1.2. Independent learning outside classroom

Self-directed learning employed to be used with the three activities ; personal journal writing, self-improved personality program for individual study and group-work service project for group study. Time used for these three activities depending on what and how the students designed in their studying. These were types of action learning that students had to explore and conduct their own learning with or without consulting teacher. At the end of their study works, learning results had to be made and shared to the class both oral and written reports.

2) **Learning plan** for managing the achievement of class learning was composed of; lesson learning procedure, learning activities, learning materials and resources, and evaluation. Follows were the brief descriptions;

1. **Lesson learning procedure:** With the three steps of Check-in, Learning the Subject Content and Check-out which are already stated in learning process.

2. **Learning activities:** Ten designed activities both in and outside classroom as already stated.

3. **Learning material and resources:** These were provided by 1) teacher; e.g. TV Program, Youtube Clip video, Newspaper / Journal article, Music, Stories, Books and by 2) students ; e.g. personal journal, action learning plans.

4. **Evaluations:** both oral and paper evaluations by means of ; 1) Self-evaluation; AAR, reflection in action, 2) Peer – evaluation within working group observation, class observation 3) Teacher-evaluation ; Cognitive Knowledge Test , observation in learning participation, given assigned tasks.

2. Learning outcomes showing the positive perception about learning.

With contemplative practices, students' perspectives on learning had been transformed to be more positive in learning. Student's inner and outer changes had been found in three aspects; personal, academic and professional. The followings selected spoken and written excerpts from students' self reflection during participating in the course revealed what and how they learned.

Personal changes;

self-peace

- *I feel peaceful, leave out the disturbance, observe and correct things with my inner.*

self-realization

- *One thing that I could learn and think by my own is the importance of the 'breath'.*

- *Work slower than normal. Realized of what I'm doing. This makes me do more of progressive thinking. I learned that all things could be linked among themselves.*

- *Nature gives many things to us. We ourselves have to reflect them out to be our own life lessons.*

-

mindfulness / relaxed mind

- *I could perceive with my heart, the heart of mindfulness, thinking with mind.*

- *Listening to music and realizing of the breath I have. Sometimes I forgot myself but sometimes I possess the wonderful mindfulness. It's a type of alternatively occurrence. The meditation helps me to have a relaxed mind and mindful.*

self-effort

- *The success does not easily achieve. When I work with my intention attentively during the course. I'll then be successful.*

self-improved

- *I feel different from ever. I dare to express my thought and also am willing to learn from each of my friends ' thoughts.*

- *Under the respectfulness of one another, I improve my own learning from my surrounding friends who possess the observation and prediction skills.*

- *Have a chance to be trained to be more bright and smart and also assertiveness in face and postures when come out on the stage.*

self-inspired

- *Inspires me to change myself. From the one who ate a lot that day becomes eat less and today's get more exercises. I got rid of 4 kilograms within 20 days and feel I have good health.*

actively listen to others

- *I know how to listen to others, listen attentively with critical thinking, realize that listening gain more than speaking.*

respect others

- *Whatever good or bad I learned from friends, it could provide me with the good thought*

- *Some were excellent thoughts but I neither realized nor met the point. I want to be able to gain different new thoughts like friends.*

Academic Changes

- *Mind mapping drawings trains me to be more systematic thinking, be able to link among fractions into a whole.*

- *I choose to improve my sit and stand posture. Firstly, I have to find out how to solve the problem with myself in the website before the practice.*

- *Concentrate more on what I studied as after finishing class, I have to jot what I learned on my journal note. This is for my learning revision.*

- *I could select on what design I want to do in my journal writing with writing, drawing, mapping of what I gained from the class to make the learning content more understandable.*

- *This lets me able to plan and think more systematically. With the freedom of recording, I think I could memorize more of the learning content knowledge.*

Professional changes

- *Learning to share stories with friends in class. I also had a chance to tell my teacher's story too. It made me better love and respect in teacher profession.*

- *Though it seems a tiny thing teacher had done with his student e.g. trying to understand students, giving love and compassion to student, this could let him become a good teacher.*

- *The white flower could be compared with teacher who takes responsibility with his own body, verbal words and also mind. As being students's role model, teachers have to behave as a good model without any excuse.*

- *You can find anything outside the classroom linked to teaching and being a good teacher. Watching nature, walk into the nature and then use it to be learned.*

- *Communication with this song makes me gain creative and systematic thinking. It makes me feel proud of going to be a teacher.*

- *Though during working together we have got many problems, but when we finish the project we learned to be good friends. The project taught me to learn to know how to 'give' better than 'take'. Before I was always happy when I was a receiver but I found later when I was a give, I feel much happier.*

- *Even though we were volunteers to work for people in some area, I have to ask for a permission from the land owner before getting to work.*

From the findings, it was found that a range of activities which led students create

the new way of thinking, influenced their mind and brought them about the willing to create some room for their own growth. This let their new consciousness on learning been shifted. With the well-organized of activities infused in interactive learning plan and learning process, students felt satisfied with the learning in the subject course. The positive knowledge and experiences had been raised when students involved in and outside class learning. What and how students would gain from teaching and learning allowed them to develop their own potential in personal, academic and also professional perspectives. Contemplative practices from teaching and learning that provided students the chance of reflecting on what and how they learn in different sense perception. Meaningful learning with the value of human being had then been raised up. Thus the value of self and society had been gradually developed and strongly discovered by students themselves especially at the end of learning course.

How to organize and to arrange the subject course with contemplative practices appeared to be overloaded by teachers when comparing to lecturing in class with power points. Teacher had to spend lots of time and efforts on integration of contemplative practices into the course content indicated in course description. Through lesson planning, teacher arranged with the draft elements of lesson plan; overview, objectives, content, material and resources and evaluation. Thus, in teaching and learning not only subject content that teacher had to work with. The adoption of habits and practices in the line of contemplative learning approach focusing in real life situation in the actual time and place had also to be considered for the provided activities. Authentic learning and assessment had to be placed in that learning. Hence, the attempt to equip students with contemplative practices achieving contemplative mind had to be arranged with the strong efforts.

The presented learning outcomes revealed from the students' oral and individual written journal let us learn to know the shift of students' consciousness. Positive thinking when participating in course activities both in and outside class allow students learn not only course content but also learn to know their selves and how to do quality learning. The well-designed activities with contemplative approach became meaningful learning for a shift of consciousness.

It is important to acknowledge that effective teaching and learning for the 21st century had to provide students with 1) Free from the constraint of learning but create possibility for learning own production on constructing of knowledge 2) More control of own learning process 3) Leading them more self learning as an autonomous learner. In term of activity-based learning, student centered, real life setting, authentic assessment , compassion and love, ethics in life learning have been learnt by students themselves with the more control of their own learning process were the concept of effective teaching and learning needed in teacher education preparation.

Conclusion

The application of contemplative education in teacher education focusing on integrating students' own experience into subject content. Students are being taught in order to deepen their understanding subject content integrated with contemplative practice in order to raise their new consciousness of learning. Then, both what they need to learn and how they learn to be successful learners as a qualified teacher could be successfully achieved. Contemplative practices, the more innovative approach to learning are supposed to be more crucial for the learners to achieve learning and living lives. Thus positive attitude is required to expand and deepen the earlier teaching and learning could have been more suited and taught in most institutions of teachers today. The blending of content and pedagogy into the understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues need to be organized and adapted to interests and abilities of learners. Then the differentiation of teaching and learning tailored to individual and collective learner(s) will be managed. Through this process, assignments become more authentic and more meaningful to students.

Recommendation for adoption

1. The key success of arranging Contemplative Education in subject learning is to let students participate in teaching and learning independently. Then let them choose what and how to learn with the given activities themselves.
2. It's no need to do any orientation of the new method of teaching and learning using contemplative practices to the students. When students gradually learn from the given activities themselves, they will be motivated and participated in the activities with active learning.
3. Authentic tasks based on students' own life/experiences allowed them to involve and learn meaningfully.
4. The instructional design will make up to gain more efficient and effective learning when knowledge and procedures of that learning could master learning process to achieve contemplative learning goal.

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