Chapter 15

Encountering the *Unknown Knowns*: Cultivating Creative Inquiry in Undergraduate Economics Students through Contemplative Reading

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**ABSTRACT**

This chapter reviews a pedagogy scaffolding undergraduates’ contemplative reading of scholarly economics texts. Structuring contemplative reading through Lectio Divina and Bohmian Dialogue transforms learning spaces into sacred spaces inviting student investment in their spiritual as well as cognitive and intellectual capital. Educators should cultivate spaces for students to integrate the self with their studies to engage the postnormality of the 21st century’s contextual environment.

**READING SCHOLARLY TEXTS: A SACRED SPACE?**

*One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began,* (The Journey by Mary Oliver (1986))

In *Ten Poems to Change Your Life* Roger Housden asserts that “good poetry has the power to start a fire in your life” (2003, p. 1). *The Journey* “grabs [him] by the shoulders, shakes [him] hard, and demands [that he] look again at how honestly [he is] living [his] life” (2003, p.1). Reading poetry can be “a … dangerous practice; …because you may never be the same again” (Housden, 2003, p. 1). Housden’s encounters with poetry are a sacred space inviting contemplation and investment in his spiritual capital (Zohar & Marshall, 2004), nurturing self-awareness and self-actualization.

A critical resource in educators’ interaction with students is reading scholarly texts. A triptych question guiding this chapter is:

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Encountering the Unknown Knowns

Can, should and must educators cultivate scholarly reading encounters with a spiritual dimension?

A case study on the author’s course Reading Economists is presented. This course aims to embed an attitude to reading scholarly texts as integral to students’ creative inquiry. A rationale for this pedagogical experiment is offered considering both the contextual environment, what Robert Kegan calls the curriculum of life (1994) and the educator-student transactional environment, specifically learning spaces at the micro-environment level of a course. *Lectio Divina*, (supplemented with *Bohmian Dialogue*) are introduced as *technologies of the self* through which scared spaces can be cultivated within and amongst students vis-à-vis reading scholarly texts. These technologies are operationalized through student-centred performances of understanding (Blackshields & McCarthy, 2013; Blythe, 1998; Wiske, 1998). Students encounter scholarly texts contemplatively, using these experiences to meditate on their own *ways of thinking* and their relationships with economics. A vignette of the performances contemplating the creative inquiry dimensions of specific economists is presented. The emerging findings from the students’ reflections and the potential of contemplative reading to foster creative inquiry are considered. It is proposed that sacred spaces can be cultivated through the design of contemplative reading performances; should be cultivated for students to integrate the *self* with their studies and; must be cultivated for students to be prepared to cope with postnormality (Sardar, 2009).

**THE WAKES UPON THE SEA FOR REPRODUCTIVE EDUCATION**

*Wanderer, there is no path.*
The path is made by walking..

...Wanderer, there is no road—
*Only wakes upon the sea.* (Wanderer, *There Is No Path* by Antonio Machado (1912))

Famously U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld articulated the strategic relevance of environmental *unknown unknowns* - the things that we don’t know we don’t know. The 21st century’s complexity and uncertainty is testimony to Rumsfeld’s amateur philosophizing. This idiom should take seriously as a theory of knowledge underpinning pedagogical designs.

**The Unknown Unknowns: The Emerging 21st Century’s Postnormality**

As higher education institutions evolved in the 19th and 20th centuries “to learn” primarily came to mean the accumulation of discipline bounded knowledge with students expected to follow well-worn tracks laid down by experts. A consensus as to the role of educator as producer and disseminator and student as consumer of knowledge (Montuori, 2012) became embedded in the design of learning spaces (e.g. the primacy of the discipline, modularization, Semesterisation and (pre-dominantly) standardized, modularized assessment). This reproductive framing of higher education (Montuori, 2011) creates a compartmentalized and fragmentary learning experience. Students tend to be kept at arm’s length from the subjects they are studying (Parker, 2014) serving to support students’ existential development as secondhand people “… [whose] thinking becomes mechanical,…responses automatic… the result of all kinds of influences and there is nothing new in [them]…” (Krishnamurti, 2010 [1969], p. 2).
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