Celebrating Interconnectedness as a Spiritual Paradigm for Teaching, Learning, and the Internationalization of Higher Education

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Abstract

Interconnectedness is presented as a paradigm, useful for decision and vision making in increasingly highly internationalized university environments. The chapter explores the concept of interconnectedness from a spiritual perspective, rooted in a number of traditions and with relevance to workplace spirituality. The potential of a paradigmatic approach to interconnectedness in higher education is illustrated by focusing on a number of contexts. Success in education, capitalizes, for example, upon the interconnectedness of stakeholders, preparing students for existing and future realities and the cultural, spiritual, and anagogical implications of internationalized learning environments. Interconnectedness can inform teaching as a vocation, gathering up personal and professional elements in that

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undertaking. As a spiritually inspired concept, it has nevertheless, practical applications, capable of generating insights and the enrichment of learning relationships. As a paradigm, it has the potential for transformative outcomes for individuals and communities, locally and globally.

Keywords

Workplace spirituality · Interconnectedness · Transformational learning · International education · Higher education

Introduction

The point of a celebration is to mark, to focus upon, an event, an accomplishment, a beneficial circumstance. It involves some reflection by individuals, groups, and communities. When we celebrate something, we value it. We honor it. So, what is there to celebrate, to mark, to reflect upon, in interconnectedness, particularly in the internationalized learning environments of higher education? The question is both pertinent and timely, responding to observations of Pavlovich and Krahnke (2012, p. 131) that while connectedness is identifiable as a defining attribute of twenty-first century research, it remains woefully underexplored.

Interconnectedness refers to a state of *being*, an experience, and at the same time is useful as a way of *seeing* the world, paradigmatically. Paradigms, influenced by belief systems, values, and actions are subject to social change and help individuals and communities to explain phenomena within their experience (Kuhn 1962; Vogel 2012). Arguably, as a paradigm, interconnectedness rests on spiritual values and traditions and is enriched by them. Spiritual insights have the potential to serve as a workable means to address a range of organizational and educational issues and activities including internationalization, and serve as an appropriate line of enquiry for a dedicated text concerned with workplace spirituality.

As I have argued elsewhere (Crossman 2015b), an array of definitions and perspectives of spirituality and religion exist within workplace spirituality literature. It is not appropriate here, to debate at length the meaning of these concepts. Doing so would likely fuel the concern of Fornaciari and Lund Dean (2009) that constant reiteration and revisiting of the task of defining spirituality only serves to overwhelm those working in the field of workplace spirituality. However, in what has now become, or so it seems to me, a somewhat simplistic explanation of spirituality as an individual experience, as opposed to religion, as a collective one, driven by ritual, tradition, and sacred texts (Crossman 2003), the distinction nevertheless serves as a ready tool to explain the use of these terms in this chapter. Yet, there is more beauty in viewing spirituality as a journey, in the pursuit of profound, authentic, and holistic understandings of the existential self and its interconnectedness with the sacred, the transcendent, the universe (Karakas 2010, p. 368; Karakas et al. 2015, p. 813).

It is assumed within the chapter that interconnectedness is synonymous with the term, connectedness, largely in an apparent absence of work that distinguishes the two, conceptually. The term, "interconnectedness," however, often conveys no

particular spiritual connotation at all in published material and, indeed, its meaning may be assumed rather than explicitly defined, even where it is embedded within the title of the work (see, for example, Bogdan 2012; Ployhart et al. 2011). A work itself, is not necessarily, diminished by assuming a shared understanding of terms at a basic level, but the potential for the concept of interconnectedness in workplace spirituality literature, to be appreciated and operationalized, cannot occur without engaging with the meanings and interpretations that lie more deeply within it.

Interconnectedness, as it has been described in workplace spirituality literature, tends to acknowledge an individual's connectedness with a workplace, inspired, in turn, by a connection with a spiritual being or values, or a higher purpose or meaning in life (see Crossman 2015a, p. 64; Haroutiounian et al. 2000; Karakas et al. 2015, p. 816). As Bohm (1980) pointed out, the terms, "health," "shalem," and "holy" all, also derive linguistically from the meaning of wholeness and suggest that human health spiritually and physically depend upon wholeness and integrity.

In essence, the basis of connectedness captures the discourse of collective spirituality in organizational settings and rests on the belief that everyone should be treated as a whole person, in mind, heart, and soul (Karakas et al. 2015, p. 816). However, in the work of Tackney et al. (2017) that will no doubt prove seminal in workplace spirituality literature, while connectedness appears in a figure depicting word frequencies from Management, Spirituality, and Religion (MSR) best papers, the concept does not appear among the top 50 words used in these contexts. This finding suggests that whil connectedness is linked to spirituality and religion, it may be under-explored in ways that call relevant associations to mind among scholars in the field.

Described as a movement, interest in workplace spirituality has been gaining ground since the 1990s, and the concept has been applied somewhat generically in Management, Spirituality, and Religion literature, at a number of levels and in a variety of contexts (Crossman 2015b). Many authors view the rise of workplace spirituality as a response to a call for a more holistic approach to issues, encompassing mind, body, and spirit, in ways that acknowledge and celebrate subjective perspectives, hitherto relegated by the dominance of so-called objective ways of understanding the world (see Fernando and Jackson 2006; Miller and Ewest 2013; Shrivastava 2010). While cultural and spiritual diversity comes under greater scrutiny, workplace spirituality takes on greater relevance (Miller and Ewest 2013) but the concept of interconnectedness within workplace spirituality literature seeks to address the forces that bring humanity together, rather than emphasizing those values and beliefs that distinguish one individual from another. This notion is illustrated in Love's (2008, p. 255) explanation of interconnectedness in that it

"...is intended to be one that unifies, rather than divides and is a mutual relationship and responsibility among all things. The essential characteristics of the concept reflect an integrated family of being [in] compassion" (Love 2008, p. 255).

Love's (2008) reference to compassion suggests that interconnectedness is based upon benign intentions. Benign intentions are intrinsic to interconnectedness

presented as an ideal process, but logically, not all outcomes of interconnectedness are necessarily benign. Thus, it is the context that determines interconnectedness as a concept defined by benign intention. As Faver (2011, p. 114) suggests, the mechanism of interconnectedness can work positively or negatively, where any harm inflicted in one context may ignite suffering in another – a notion reminiscent of the "butterfly effect" (Kalin 2011, p. 472). In the context of spiritual beliefs influencing working lives and relationships, interconnectedness may also be interpreted as involving a reciprocal action, rather than one that is linear and "one-way." To illustrate, interconnectedness as a spiritual notion can be constructed as a belief that personal action for good or ill will invite a corresponding reaction directed toward the original actor (Crossman 2015a, pp. 71–72) – a human and worldly version perhaps, of both Hindu and Buddhist spiritual belief in Karma, where individual action in this life will affect one's destiny in the next incarnation.

Disciplinary Applications of Interconnectedness

The conceptual flexibility of interconnectedness is apparent in its serviceability across varied contexts such as education (Luo 2014; Spiro 2014), social work (Faver 2011, p. 113), health and the interconnectedness of body and mind and spirit (Fosarelli 2002; Love 2008), international relations (Linklater 2010), environmentalism (Crossman 2011; Hoo and Friedman 2011), and linguistics (Danesi 2009). Porter, Bothne, and Jason (2009) also attribute rising interest in the relevance of interconnectedness to the emergence of community psychology and systems thinking literature.

Theories emanating from the fields of physics, quantum mechanics, and chemistry (Love 2008) have been tied to what is now known as "new" science, drawing attention to, "interconnected universal activity," representing a "departure from the atomised, fragmented, mechanistic theories of Descartes and Newton" (Crossman 2003, p. 506). Bohm's work makes a contribution to this line of argument. As a theoretical physicist and philosopher, he developed a model of wholeness and interconnectedness with respect to reality and consciousness (Curd 1981; Kaboli 2016). Bohm (1980) questioned disciplinary and social specialization into religious, political, and racial groups, for example, as a way of dealing with the overwhelming task of appreciating human experience as a whole. Such fragmentation, he argued, is based on illusory perceptions. In the text titled *Wholeness and the implicate order*, he maintained that separating process and content, observer and observed, for example, represented an atomistic perspective of what are, in fact, integrated relationships of one-ness. Confidence in scientific theories as truths, rather than evolving insights, as Bohm (1980) suggested, has tended to affirm a view of the world, based on "building blocks," rather than interconnected relationships. However, embedded in the religious and philosophical beliefs of Asia and particularly India is a resistance to the conceptual fragmentation of human experience, perpetuated largely in the rise of empiricism (Bohm 1980).

Interconnectedness is also brought to literature about globalization. Hartmann and Herb's (2015, p. 154) reference, for example, to an ". . .increasingly complex and *interconnected* world. . .." is characteristically one that precedes a discussion about globalization. Interconnectedness is clearly inherent within Warwick's (2014, p. 47) construction of globalization as an interrelationship among organizations, structures, and other attachments, whereby anything that occurs in one part of the world will have implications elsewhere, on an individual, local, national, and, indeed, global level. Although Stiglitz, (2007), in his text on globalization, largely takes an economic perspective of the subject in a discussion of the movement of goods, services, labor, and capital, he acknowledges broader interpretations in the free flow of ideas, pertaining to culture, education, and the environment, for example. The internationalization of education has its place here. Stiglitz (2007), however, concluded that the interconnectedness inherent in globalization represented a double-edged sword, its consequences with the potential for both good and ill. Thus, even in the analysis of global economies, the spiritual values inherent in interconnectedness can inform discussions about the ethical and spiritual consequences of actions in the way that Faver (2011, p. 119), for example, might envisage them.

In summary, the aim of, this section has been to suggest the timeliness and value of exploring the concept of interconnectedness and its serviceability as a paradigm. As a concept, it appears to have been employed to understand a variety of disciplines such as the social and pure sciences, environmentalism, globalization, and education. Interconnectedness has been constructed (rather than defined) through its associations and relevance to love, unity, intention, reciprocity, and consequence – all of which derive from spiritual and religious traditions.

Interconnectedness from a Spiritual Perspective

According to Faver (2011), spiritual interpretations of interconnectedness have been somewhat neglected. Such an oversight is surprising, given that it appears to be a central value in Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and the African concept of Ubuntu, for example.

Spiritual interpretations of interconnectedness draw upon themes of unity and love. Both Faver (2011, p. 113) and Love (2008) viewed interconnectedness as a spiritual concept pertaining to the unity of life, in a divine inspired form of love. Love is inclusive rather than discriminatory, and since it is characterized by the nature of our relations with others, it is inherently conducive to interconnectedness. The principle of unity in interconnectedness, identified in Faver's work (opp. cit.), emphasizes the capacity for interconnectedness to transcend values, ethical orientations, and religious beliefs. It suggests that we can be confident in overcoming the challenges of spiritual diversity, to work together for the common good of humanity, resisting forces, sometimes political ones that seem to capitalize upon any sign of spiritual and religious division.

References to love and unity suggest interconnectedness in biblical texts, but what distinguishes Christian beliefs from others (e.g., Buddhism) is that the themes

of love and unity are captured from the perspective that relations among humans are only relevant insofar as they contribute to God's will (see Bell and Metz 2011). This said, the following biblical quotations are illustrative,

> I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one: I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me (John 17, 22–24).

> ...there is no gentile or Jew, circumcised or an uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free but Christ is all, and is in all (Colossians, 3, 11).

> We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions. In the same way, though we are many, we are of one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body (Romans, 12).

> ...there is one God and Father of all mankind [sic], who is Lord of all, works through all and is in all (Ephesians, 4).

The concept of interconnectedness is also captured in values celebrated in Buddhism, Ubuntu, and Islam. According to Dhiman (S. personal communication, March 31, 2017) and Thiele (2011), it allies with the notion of co-arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) from the early Pali scriptures of India, or interconnected origination that forms the central tenet of Buddhism, denoted by the 12-link chain of causation. It is illustrated in the story of Indra's net from the Avatamsaka Sutra. The legend of Indra's Net tells of how, long ago, a net, stitched with bells, was cast over all people of the world so that when the bells jingled, they would be reminded of their connection, each to one another (Dray et al. 2003). Other versions of Indra's net that illustrate the interpenetration of phenomena refer to a net of multifaceted jewels reflecting one another in endless interrelationships (Thiele 2011). Dray et al. (2003) began their paper, incidentally, by remarking upon how the "net" resonates metaphorically with our contemporary understandings of the Internet and its capacity to remind us of the interconnectedness of the world. Another example, indeed, of how spiritual conceptualizations of interconnectedness find relevance in secular experience.

The spread of Buddhist thought and the wisdom surrounding interconnectedness can be traced from Mahayan Buddhism in the tradition of the Avatamsaka to the philosophically orientated, Hua-yen school of Chinese Buddhism that explored metaphysics and meditation practices, also identifiable in Japan's interpretation through Zen Buddhism (Thiele 2011, p. 17).

Love (2008) draws attention to the sympathetic association of interconnectedness with Buddhist beliefs and practices such as mindfulness. Mindfulness, a state of mind focusing on the present moment, enables enriched and meaningful life experiences for its practitioners (Goldman Schyler et al. 2016, p. 1) and encourages perspectives that embrace interconnectedness and holism, tied back to unity (Beer et al. 2015, p. 178; Porter et al. 2009, p. 11; Srinvasan 2014).

The African spiritual tradition or world view of Ubuntu is shared by many peoples in the southern, central, and eastern regions of Africa (Bell and Metz 2011; Lewis 2010). Interconnectedness and attendant values, such as empathy,

respect, compassion, tolerance, harmony, and a focus on unity (Lewis 2010; Piper 2016; West 2014), are also celebrated in a collective orientation that nurtures inclusivity, where all feel valued and welcome, sharing both human suffering and joy (Smith and Lindsay 2014). Beyond, interconnectedness within local and global communities however, the spiritual element of Ubuntu lies not only in relationships with others on earth but also with "ones such as God and ancestors," although these associations may not be emphasized by African theorists, according to Bell and Metz (2011, p. 83).

Problems arising from the conceptual translation of precolonial Ubuntu into English aside (West 2014) the rising interest in Ubuntu in the West has been attributed to the attention paid to it by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Lewis 2010). The work of Tutu highlighted how Ubuntu could be practically applied to make possible a framework for reconciliation and renewal, necessary in post-apartheid South Africa (S. Dhiman, personal communication, 31 March 2017). In a sermon, published in the Anglican Theological Review in 1995, Tutu referred to Ubuntu as

> . . .the essence of being human, that says, 'my humanity is caught up with your humanity'. For we say in our idiom, 'a person is a person through other persons'. Ubuntu speaks about an inclusive kind of community.

In his sermon, Tutu contrasts the notion of inclusivity and interconnectedness in Ubuntu with the exclusion, alienation, and separateness of apartheid. This observation, I will borrow in a subsequent discussion within the chapter, on the nature of internationally diverse learning environments and relationships, demonstrating, I hope, the flexibility of Ubuntu, within the paradigm of interconnectedness, in that it can be applied to multiple settings – arguably, one indication of its conceptual rigor.

Interconnectedness also seems to be associated with the Islamic concept of Ummah. In a qualitative, Malaysian study revealing the positive effect of religiosity at work, the authors explain Ummah, an abiding spiritual value, affirming a worldwide, community connection that encourages employees to support one another in ways, the authors argue, improve engagement and teamwork (Raida et al. 2016).

Spiritual perspectives on interconnectedness can be brought with strategic relevance to a context, in order to generate change. Interconnectedness, as a paradigm, involves, not simply holding a spiritually driven perspective, but also, a capacity to generate change through action and behavior in certain settings such as the internationalized environment of higher education. Possible applications of a spiritually inspired paradigm of interconnectedness is also relevant when applied to educational relationships with other stakeholders, how the future of learning can be planned, responding to cultural and spiritual diversity among students, creating the necessary conditions for transformation and finally re-framing personal and professional identity at work.

In summary, this section has served to support the view that many spiritual and religious traditions (Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Ubuntu), to one extent or another, celebrate human interconnectedness. Specifically, interconnectedness is embedded in Buddhist belief and practices such as mindfulness and the 12-link

chain of causation, the metaphorical story of Indra's net from the Avatamsaka Sutra. Ubuntu, as a precolonial spirituality, serves as evidence and inspiration for how interconnectedness can be operationalized as a framework in forgiveness, reconciliation, and social renewal, evident in the work of Desmond Tutu who noted that it is entirely consistent with Anglican tenets. In a sense, this assumption does more than simply observe the value religious and philosophies place upon interconnectedness. It links these belief systems as one.

Stakeholders in Higher Education

The holistic nature of interconnectedness assumes that the responsibility for student learning does not rest with an individual learner or teacher. Even a motivated, independent learner has probably been mentored and supported in different ways by an army of co-conspirators: friends, an extended family, various professionals, institutions, industry, and governments that ideally provide direction and adequate funding.

As Beer et al. (2015) observed, consciously or unconsciously, learning depends upon the interconnectedness of many who have a shared responsibility as a learning community. The investment the community makes is returned when the successful learner becomes the accomplished employee (Marques 2007) certainly, but also, as an informed, ethical, fulfilled, and compassionate citizen. As Luo (2014) suggests, learning has the potential to not only enable insights into societal needs and expectations but also to bring about deep social change, particularly where teaching and research work in unison.

Interconnectedness in educational contexts, through multiple, concerted, well-managed partnerships, capitalizes upon and expands resources to open up possibilities that would not otherwise occur. The potential reach of that change is infinite. The optimistic observation of Pavlovich and Krahnke (2012, p. 131) that organizational research is shifting from competitiveness and reductionism toward the creation of partnerships is encouraging and conducive to operationalizing interconnectedness.

The Now and the Future

Interconnectedness creates a reality that transcends time and space (Hoo and Friedman 2011). As educators, we try to envision the future, the direction it may take and how learners will need to be prepared and ready. Doing so can be a guessing game because it is far from clear how the past, present, and future are interconnected. As O'Neil and Snook (2015) concluded that the process of preparing students for a future arguably represents a poor choice between either a misplaced assumption that the signals of a possible future can be found in the present or that we can shape the future once we have identified the direction we wish to take, and focus upon working toward it.

The work of Porter et al. (2009, p. 49) provides useful insights in considering the interconnectedness of now and the future in educational contexts. As the authors point out, one encouraging signal may be in the brain's neuroplasticity and its capacity to adapt to changing conditions that may be at least as valuable as the imagination of educators or empirical futurists in providing insights into the kinds of learning now that can be relevant to future communities. We hardly know, however, if what we teach in the present moment will prove to be useful scaffolding upon which future learning can rest (Porter et al. 2009, p. 49).

Perhaps, our most important work as teachers is to ensure that the minds of our students are stimulated, questioning, innovative, and alert – kept in good working order for purposes we may never know. Teaching *with* and *about* spirit is one way to do this because it provides a perspective on interconnectedness that suggests an enduring, sustainable strategy for an uncertain future.

This is the lesson of interconnectedness. It is about the learning we take forward. Learning that defines our values acts as a rudder for decision-making, molding our identity, who we are, and what we can give and become. As Dhiman (2011, p. 42) remarked, all, "spiritual seeking involves some movement from what/where we think we are to what/where we would like to become."

Bringing who we are to work raises the potential for transforming individuals, who with the right skills, insights, and perspectives may be able to contribute to and inform future communities. Genuine, personal relationships between students and educators matter (Crossman 2007; Srinivasan 2014); since they do not simply represent or illustrate interconnectedness, they *are* interconnectedness and provide the energy and inspiration for creating a better world.

Cultural Interconnectedness in University Learning

Embedded deeply in Chinese philosophy and values is "He," a holistic concept that acknowledges close relationships among humans and nature (Chan et al. 2009), resonant of similar assumptions in the literature (Hoo and Friedman 2011, p. 89). "He" creates the kind of conceptual space where arguments about the synergies between spiritual and environmental leadership (see Crossman 2011) are more likely to be perceived as mainstream than as "left field" (What is the essence of leadership? 2012).

The reverence in China, for "He" and the notion of interconnectedness among all things, suggests that some cultures place greater emphasis upon interconnectedness than others. As Porter et al. (2009) point out in their book *Interconnectedness and the Individual*, patterns of Western thinking make it difficult to appreciate interconnectedness. They argue this is so because of the focus upon separateness, independence, self-reliance, and self-determination as well as a tendency to favor linear logic that fails to appreciate the simultaneous and dynamic interaction of complex phenomena, whether spiritual or temporal. The capacity of Western universities to operationalize an interconnected paradigm may also require more development than for those in the East, because of the difficulty of creating a collectivist, collaborative response, particularly necessary in galvanizing social responsibility (Porter et al. 2009,

p. 57). As Pavlovich and Krahnke (2012, p. 131) point out, connectedness suggests a transition from individual to collective perspectives.

Embedding an interconnected paradigm in Western universities, however, should not be interpreted as a process that serves to polarize individualist and collectivist ways of thinking. While acknowledging that human beings tend to perceive phenomena as part of an interconnected whole in their sense-making, rather than in disconnected, atomized terms, Kalin's (2011) work from the perspective of Islamic tradition speaks to the complementary nature of unity and plurality/diversity, where a binary opposition between the two fails to do justice to either. When interconnectedness is understood in this way, it has the capacity to respond to the question posed by Adler (2015, p. 480)

> Living together on one planet, how do we simultaneously celebrate our collective humanity and the unique resonance of each of our individual voices?

Adler's question and the potential for bringing the paradigm of interconnectedness to the foreground are particularly relevant to appraisals of internationalization and its consequences in culturally diverse classrooms.

Learning Relationships with and Among Culturally Diverse Students

"You must see that justice is done, and must show kindness and mercy to one another. Do not oppress ... foreigners who live among you, or anyone else in need" (Zechariah 8: 9–11).

The scale of internationalization in universities provides what are probably unprecedented opportunities for exchanging intercultural perspectives in learning among and between both students and academics. Despite the promising conditions that internationalization creates for cultivating interconnectedness, signals from research literature suggest that any hopes in this direction have not yet been entirely realized.

Spiro (2014), for example, reveals that both international and home students report a sense of isolation from one another. Similarly, Grant and Brueck (2011, p. 4) explore notions of the insider and outsider, inclusion or exclusion, belonging or rejection, and observe a tendency for cultural *othering*, where international students are the focus of aversion, perceived as deviant, ostracized, silenced, and subject to condescension. Home students reportedly engage in "passive xenophobia," resistant to connecting and working with international students, perceiving them to pose a threat to their own success in learning and assignments (Harrison and Peacock 2010, p. 902). These kinds of observations are disturbing because if we cannot overcome a resistance to working together in our culturally diverse classrooms, what hope is there for a spiritually interconnected world? A world that is inclusive, equitable, and just (Grant and Bruek 2011, p. 3). A world that is peaceful and ultimately sustainable (Weil 2016, p. 1).

In aspiring, somewhat ambitiously, to the creation of a better world, an interconnected paradigm encourages individuals to consider personal actions on a micro level to collective consequences on a global stage. In an educational context, it inspires teachers to explore their responsibility in creating interconnected classrooms where, as Spiro (2014) suggests, students can feel their contributions are equally valued, where they can learn from one another and have the courage to reach out, beyond familiar social networks.

Making possible an exchange of cultural and spiritual capital is a tool for achieving interconnectedness and, ultimately, the greater good – and assume here that our spiritual capital is intertwined in complex ways with cultural capital. The concept of "cultural capital" is employed in this chapter, a little differently from the way Bourdieu originally conceived it. He referred to cultural capital as a source of power that privileges groups, predominantly, middle class, white ones (Mercuri 2012). I use it as a resource to which each of us can lay claim in order to expand the world view of all. Connecting our students by capitalizing upon and sharing their cultural and spiritual capital in learning is increasingly necessary in a political and media-driven environment that often works to divide our human connectedness. Religion, like race, gender, class, sexuality, and dis/ability, can be both celebrated and contested sites. They can become contexts for raising justice issues, generating initiatives for achieving equity and the common good, beyond personal comfort zones toward real growth, development, and societal transformation (Grant and Bruek 2011). When students engage in discussions about cultural differences and similarities, enduring friendships can form and through these relationships, perspectives can be altered, so that in "learning together, we have the power to change the world" (Loveland 2014, p. 2). These are the conditions where empathetic exchanges can be fostered in the classroom, and a sense of interconnectedness ignited. Pavlovich and Krahnke put this well

> ". . .. empathy enhances connectedness through the unconscious sharing of neuro-pathways that dissolves the barriers between self and others" (Pavlovich and Krahnke 2012, p. 131).

These kinds of interventions have been associated in the literature with perceptions of improved student "connectedness" (see for example, Rosenthal et al. 2007). Interconnectedness can and does shape well-being, resilience, and academic success, whereas the alternative, disconnectedness, exacerbates, and marginalization (Tran and Gomes 2017). In my own postgraduate management classes, teaching workplace spirituality as a topic, through the lens of spiritual diversity at work, I have come to know the power of spiritual and religious interconnectedness as a powerful force for resistance against disconnectedness and marginalization through growing understanding and empathy among students. Fraught with complexities and spiritual sensitivities, many students and institutions alike would prefer to ignore what we are led to believe is a "powder keg," but handled with care, it is possible to unite students as future professionals, to see the power of oneness, inherent in interconnectedness.

Interconnectedness and Transformational Learning

Complex problems can give rise to the creation of new perspectives through a process of critical reflection on, for example, how phenomena under examination relate to personal experience (Lundren and Poell 2016). In a text dedicated to interconnectedness in higher education, Beer and colleagues argue that, as a concept, interconnectedness rests upon critically reflective practices that in turn enable transformative learning (Beer et al. 2015, p. 161). Mezirow's construction of transformative learning is one that entails a larger or expanded view of the world (Kroth and Cranton 2014) and from that view it is easier to appreciate the connections of elements within our world than, if for example, we hold on to a narrowed focus.

Perspectives, identity, and relationships with others are profoundly altered through transformative processes, involving extensive personal reassessment that challenges individuals in their familiar assumptions and enables the emergence of new opportunities and directions (Mezirow 1978, p. 101). So, being interconnected is not simply concerned with a developing awareness that all things in the world relate to one another, it is that physically, mentally, metaphysically, people cannot aspire to becoming who they could be, without being sensitive to their surroundings (Krog 2008). Interconnectedness, as a transformational process, thus shapes self-knowledge and identity, inevitably impacting on wider environments.

Transformative learning can ignite shifts from habitual, assimilated, and uncritical perspectives so that values, feelings, and meanings can be simultaneously negotiated as interconnected phenomena (Kroth and Cranton 2014, p. 6). The process is essentially one where learners embrace innovative forms of meaning making, replacing former constructions that no longer seem to function well (Christie et al. 2015, p. 10). The power of transformational learning, however, lies in its capacity to transform social, political, and economic conditions in ways that have the potential to break self-perpetuating and harmful social cycles, embedded in the abuse of human rights, inequality, poverty, and injustice in the service of social good (Ramadas 1997; Viezzer 2006). Piper (2016), writing of Ubuntu education also captures these themes of transformation within that philosophy, rooted, according to Lewis (2010, p. 69), in the "principle of interconnectedness." These are also contexts that command spiritual and religious attention and energy. Spirituality, interconnection, social good, and transformative learning thus meld together in a rightful synergy.

Loveland's (2014, p. 2) observation that interconnectedness involves a shared goal of, "working together to build a better world" is charged with this notion of transformation for the social good. The element of spiritual interconnectedness through contemplative, transformative, deep learning, and mindfulness is established in the literature and associated with academic success (Beer et al. 2015, p. 178). Social good, spiritually inspired, represents the optimum outcome of interconnectedness. It brings with it a commitment to work for the interests of others, according to Faver (2011, p. 119), and a promise of joy.

However, very little evidence exists in higher education that the vision of interconnectedness, transformative learning, or mindfulness are being operationalized

(Beer et al. 2015, p. 161), suggesting that much work still needs to be done for the spiritual vision of interconnectedness, through transformative learning, to be realized.

The Professional, the Personal, and the Spiritual Self

The spiritual aspects of interconnectedness, when applied to the learning context, guide decision-making in all aspects of that environment, bringing both professional and personal identity to the fore. As Hoo and Friedman (2011, p. 89) observed, interconnectedness inherently involves "the expansion of one's identity" and therefore can be extended to personal and professional identities of educators, who they are and what they can and wish to give. If one accepts that spiritual perspectives in learning, broadly interpreted, are crucial to success in higher education (see Beer et al. 2015, p. 178), then addressing spiritual perspectives in how and sometimes, what is taught, would seem to be well advised. In secularized educational environments, however, this assumption is not necessarily accepted, as a result of historical, social, political, and cultural shifts.

Historically, the enlightenment colluded with the rise of professionalism. What occurred, now known as the "Cartesian split" – derived from the work of Descartes – facilitated the separation of rationality and the state (Crossman 2003) from all that is subjective and spiritual, in ways that applied a surgeon's scalpel to the fluid interchange and relationship between who we are and how and who we teach. In other words, the enlightenment served, ultimately, to separate the personal, emotional, identities of teachers from their professional selves and, some might argue, their spiritual selves (Crossman 2003). What seems to beguile and challenge those who have become absorbed in workplace spirituality as a line of enquiry is the perception that the separating out of these aspects of human experience is actually possible or indeed desirable.

There are merits in secularism – of course there are – but it cannot reach maturity as a concept, without an appreciation of the spiritual notes that come to play in the human experience. A secular education should not be interpreted as one that denies the existence of spiritual belief within the community, nor, indeed, its disbelief. Rather, it should be concerned with all the interconnecting aspects that make up human experience. Universities have a responsibility to prepare people for spiritual diversity in the workforce and its implications, as attention to these issues appears to be intensifying in the public space, despite evidence that some employers are not yet persuaded of the relevance of workplace spirituality in the curriculum (Crossman 2015b). Certainly, there seems to be no one way to decide how to do this (Crossman 2015b; Haroutiounian et al. 2000), but it does seem surprising that despite extensive work on workplace spirituality and its relevance to secular, organizational life, over the last three decades, scarcely any signs exist to suggest that it is addressed in university curricula (Crossman 2015b).

Throughout the twentieth century, new disciplines emerged, gathering credibility, and as Habermas (1989, p. 3) noted, the followers of these disciplines adopted perspectives and theories exhibiting a heightened respect for rationality, rules, and

logic. Education was no exception in its developing professionalism and systematic teacher training, yet as Sullivan (2007) remarked, interconnectedness is not necessarily grounded in a systematic approach or a preoccupation with strategy. When Sullivan (2007) calls for universities to see the interconnectedness between all forms of knowing, so that faith and learning might be considered as allies rather than opponents, in the interests of inclusive learning spaces, it is arguably, a call to reclaim a sense of vocation in redefining professionalism.

Teaching, as a "vocation" with all its spiritual connotations, including, according to Buij (2005), calling and service has been eased aside in favor of secular professionalism so that vocation can now be understood theologically or not. Whether one views teaching as primarily a profession or as a vocation, according to Buijs (2005), influences levels of commitment, the nature of expectations, interaction among teachers and students, and what happens in university classrooms. Bringing who we are to work raises the potential for transforming, not simply, a learner's grade point average, but the contribution, that ultimately, they will make to communities beyond the university. Appreciating the interconnectedness of the professional and the personal, in creating transformation, is critical to a spiritual orientation and vision in that process.

Looking through a spiritual lens, the "how" of our communication with students about their work, matters at least as much as the "what." The practical application of mindfulness, for example, as a spiritual experience is relevant to the how, in terms of effective listening and communication, as well as compassionate speech (Srinivasan 2014). With respect to assessment, by correcting every error, we may simply overwhelm students with our own conscientiousness, or worse create dependency behaviors among students who believe the appropriate response to feedback is to "tick off" our comments and criticisms, becoming anxious about "the trees" and never appreciating "the forest." Indeed, mindfulness according to Beer et al. (2015) encourages intentional communication which might be interpreted as "less is more." It is not how much feedback we give; it is the impact of really considering what is worth saying and where what we communicate will have most positive impact.

As discussed, mindfulness is integral to the concept of interconnectedness, but it is also relevant to maintaining a work life balance, despite the increasing demands made upon educators, raising concerns about their well-being (Beer et al. 2015). A preoccupation with mass education, managerialism, bureaucracy, time consuming, quality audit processes, casualization, ranking league tables, and work intensification are all perceived as systems of practice embedded in the culture of universities that signal distrust in them by a coercive management and result in alarming levels of stress among academics and the erosion of collegiality (Anderson 2007; Cheng 2009; Clarke et al. 2012). Positive psychology literature may provide some way forward. Lewis (2011), a researcher in this emerging discipline, questions, firstly, the position of management texts that seem to assume that what is beneficial for organizations is so for employees and, secondly, that necessary improvements in productivity require no ethical justification. Ironically perhaps, positive behaviors in organizations may, in fact, have benefits for businesses and other organizations, though changing to a positive culture is by no means an easy process (Lewis 2011).

Beer et al. (2015, p. 162) may well ask, how it can be possible for teachers to create the right environment for transformative learning, if they do not nourish their own growth and capacity for creativity. Ultimately, the extraction of more and more work in the form of marking, planning, administration, and resource development in less and less time is counterproductive because it does not create greater efficiencies at all – instead it has the opposite effect.

None of these conditions in higher education are consistent with a spiritual perspective of interconnectedness. Some evidence suggests religiosity can have a positive influence upon work-life balance that brings a sense of meaning to work (Sav 2016) and perhaps we may be heartened in this knowledge to consider possible applications to the context of higher education. Teachers have to be ready, spiritually, certainly, and as Beer et al. (2015) suggest, healthy, physically and mentally to be able to sustain compassion (if not, passion), in the course of their work.

As commercial changes in university landscapes appear to tighten control over academic work, in ways that undermine a sense of vocation, now more than ever, maintaining a balanced and healthy life and standing firm against all demands that place personal well-being and dignity in danger is crucial. A paradigm of interconnectedness can serve as both a counterpoint to negative environments and a blueprint for their improvement. The vision of interconnectedness is characterized by an organizational climate of collective "thriving," through the development of interpersonal relationships, where trust, genuineness, belonging, and interpersonal sensitivity flourish (Karakas et al. 2015, p. 816). It is a vision as much to inspire our classroom teaching, as it is our collegial, workplace relationships.

Mindfulness has been associated with a variety of therapeutic benefits in the literature, perhaps most notably achieved through meditation (Goldman Schyler et al. 2016; Srinivasan 2014, p. 62). A gamut of authors observe the positive effect of mindfulness, evident in the enhancement of learning, resilience, well-being, harmony, kindness, positive communication, and managing and reducing stress and painful emotions, all of which have the potential to alter core values (Beer et al. 2015; Goldman Schyler et al. 2016, p. 1; Porter et al. 2009, p. 11; Srinivasan 2014, 2015). The perspective that mindfulness brings to interconnectedness inspires a sacred commitment in the hope of creating peace, compassion, and nonjudgmental awareness (Srinivasan 2014) – so necessary in challenging university environments.

As a paradigm, interconnectedness can be brought to the work of educational managers who share in the responsibility of establishing dignity and respect in their operational environments. Interconnectedness does not deal in the currency of coercive and exploitative strategies where economic ends tend to be prioritized above other aims in universities. If a spiritual perspective can affect employee performance for the better (Karakas 2010), then interconnectedness as a paradigm arguably has the capability to address both quantitative and qualitative aspects of experience for educational managers, academics, and students alike.

This section began with an account of how teaching as a profession has tended to challenge the notion of vocation, and yet, Srinivasan (2014) tells us, more than a century after the training of teachers began in the West, that teaching from a mindfulness perspective, as an integral, spiritual construct of interconnectedness

involves a sacred commitment in university and business school contexts. This is because, the values associated with professionalism have been socially and culturally constructed in the context of secularism for decades, so a spiritual perspective might be considered innovative, courageous, and a clear sign of an emerging counter-culture. Such a shift, contemporaneously, within teaching, as a discipline, has facilitated a holistic approach where teachers can draw upon a sense of higher purpose in their choice and practice of teaching as a profession and as a vocation.

Conclusion

There is much to celebrate in the possibilities that spiritual interconnectedness presents, as a paradigm for teaching and learning. But it is not a task for the fainthearted because it has as many applications as our human imaginations can envision and few interconnections are as simple to conceive or implement as we would like them to be. The scope for future research is largely unchartered since few examples of specific educational applications promoting interconnectedness appear to exist. Case studies could prove a useful departure because they are capable of casting light upon how academics and educational managers implement interconnectedness as a paradigm for learning and strategic decision-making at the macro level. Mapping behavior and decisions across university functions consistent with interconnectedness principles could also constitute helpful research and would provide institutions and organizations with ideas on how interconnectedness can be put into practice.

I have approached interconnectedness in the contexts of stakeholders in learning, linking now with the future, learning relationships among students, the professional, and the personal, and how interconnectedness itself rests on connections between mindfulness and transformative learning. Navigating the potential of interconnectedness as a spiritual paradigm in our work will involve personal reflection and necessitate macro-level attention in not only re-imagining education but also re-structuring it. Interconnectedness, as a paradigm, simply cannot operate without questioning the econophonic principles upon which universities appear to increasingly rely in the current environment.

Thus, this chapter has involved an exploration into some of the spiritual traditions that can inform a conceptualization of interconnectedness and has argued how such understandings might inform practical contexts and issues in higher education and its internationalization. The discussion has been somewhat limited, however, by the adoption of a broad approach to the issue. My hope is that it may ignite further attention to the potential of interconnectedness, perhaps resulting in the development of criteria as a basis for a model of some kind. Doing so would assist educators and educational managers to formulate and adopt strategies more readily, to transform university environments where a meaningful balance might be achieved in both ensuring sustainable financial conditions and due consideration of spiritual, ethical, and subjective perspectives on the educational experience.

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