

## Reflection on Gaining Trust of Students with Careers Between Academic Expertise and Intellectual Pursuit

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the author's thoughts on gaining trust as an instructor from business school students with careers.

Unlike would-be researcher graduate students taking an academic path, the majority of students with careers do not consider researcher instructors to be career models, which limits the authority of business schools and their faculty members. However, even when difficult for researcher instructors at business schools—including the author—to gain the trust of students with careers, for these students to learn effectively it is crucial to be worthy of respect as a person in their eyes. A question then emerged: How to become a respected instructor for students with careers.

In the process of seeking an answer to this question, the author came to understand that he must contribute to business management practice as a researcher by walking side-by-side with business practitioners from the researcher's viewpoint. Moreover, a researcher must challenge students with careers in terms of attitude toward intellectual inquiry and always win them over. While business education conducted at business schools is clearly professional education, it is healthier to guide education practice toward intellectual pursuit by seeking more universal values instead of directing it toward academic expertise by seeking individual values of business education.

Attainment of the above understanding was facilitated by the fact that the author is a practitioner and researcher of education that uses case method of instruction. This unique teaching approach was inextricably linked to reflection about teaching at business schools and planted the seeds of a philosophy.

### **Keywords**

Business schools, students with careers, trust, respect, authority, case method

## **Introduction**

“Several premises are required for education to work,” or so goes the hypothesis; yet when the premises are questioned and uncertainty arises, educators must reconsider criteria for establishment of education and rebuild the logic necessary for solid education. If educators encounter situations that require reflection during the process, there may also be an opportunity to generate a philosophy.

This paper has as its discussion stage the education of students with careers at a business school where the author taught for 10 years, and discusses the author’s thoughts on gaining their trust. Setting aside the question of whether the author’s continuing contemplation can be counted as a philosophy, the thoughts gained through instruction experience at a business school are summarized here.

For this purpose, characteristics of business education and how it is pursued at business schools as well as the author’s confusions, reflections, clues and discoveries are discussed, in this order.

This paper does not employ research paper style discussion where knowledge is overlaid based on the literature. While several references were cited and reviewed as part of an abstract draft for an academic conference where this proposition was published and for slides used in its presentation, here the paper is structured with a focus on the author’s internal reflection.

### **1. Business Education Market and Business Schools**

Business education is characterized by its diverse providers. Companies or business conductors usually have an internal education and training department. Employees assigned to the department become trainers and provide internal education and training. There are a number of business education and training companies of different sizes that sell education to companies, as well as a great number of individual vendors<sup>1</sup>. Amidst the plethora of business education providers, universities maintain a certain presence, yet traditional research universities’ presence is vague.

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<sup>1</sup> Freelance seminar trainers, etc.

Countless corporations provide business education and severely compete in terms of education quality and price. Business education is a huge, big-money market of diverse providers. There is market segmentation as well as competition strategies according to market position, and almost all education providers are evaluated, distinguished and weeded out by market mechanism.

Let's now focus on business schools. Universities are the only institutions that conduct business education based on academics, yet at business schools this does not necessarily apply to all their education programs. Many business schools employ a mixture of researchers and practitioners as faculty members, and which type takes the lead cannot be generalized. Among researcher instructors, some well-known professors are in the forefront of business education, which bestows authority. Yet a number of students with careers express a desire to learn from practitioner instructors rather than researcher instructors, because of the peace of mind inherent with the practical experience of instructors.

If the author were to direct these arguments at researchers in the philosophy of education, the main readers of this paper, he would first emphasize that the majority of students taking business education do not consider researcher instructors to be career models. The number of students who anticipate a long-term relationship with a researcher based on pursuit of academic research is also assumed to be relatively limited. It can also be said that students with careers do not necessarily trust their school and instructors, especially researcher instructors. This is because of difficulty believing that researchers of business administration can actually manage a business. Therefore, the authority of business schools and their instructors is limited for students with careers. This is the major difference on the business education side when comparing education in philosophy of education and business education. The difference, however, is also largely attributable to the fact that the former is education to train researchers and the latter is education to train practitioners.

## **2. Author's confusions**

One discovery after having started teaching is that business schools are an education site where instructors do not easily gain respect or trust.

Despite a number of twists and turns in the author's path to becoming a university instructor, his career has always been spent in the position of educator, including time employed at a private company, and there was a strong subconscious need to continue performing as an educator while satisfying personal standards at university. While confident in his sophistication in fundamental qualifications as a coursework educator—including basic teaching actions, giving clear classroom direction<sup>2</sup>, and communication with students in and out of the classroom—trial and error continued in the contemplation of fundamental values of education activities and how to improve feasibility. Students in front of him included those already assuming important roles at industry leader companies as well as promising “thoroughbreds” with a bright future, or people earning much more than university faculty. The author was then unreservedly evaluated by these students based on their individually established evaluation scales. In circumstances where a great deal of courage was required to teach every class, “establishing himself as an instructor through questioning his qualifications and repeated review” was an urgent matter.

In the author's case, uncertainty over a career as a business school instructor made the process of reflecting on what works and what doesn't even more complex. Despite teaching at a business school, business administration was not the author's discipline, and he could not take the standard path of a business school instructor career. Yet his school traditionally used the approach of case method of instruction, and this provided an opportunity for the author to build his own career—luckily, as a result of capitalizing on the opportunity, the author finds himself in a position to write this paper. Nevertheless, not being able to take the standard path of a business school instructor was indeed a major concern. Therefore, a breakthrough unique to the author—contributing to a business school through pedagogy—was needed, knowing it was probably unprecedented for business school instructors. As such, the author, who had confidently referred to himself as an “educator” for many years, experienced deep distress, until starting to see, albeit vaguely, the prospects for a breakthrough.

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<sup>2</sup> Expressed as “conveying directions” by primary and middle school teachers and “effectively establishing control” by representatives of training companies.

### **3. Contemplation to leave confusion behind**

Despite having concerns, the author, originally a business management practitioner, had a realistic understanding of the general mindset of students with careers. This understanding provided clues to moving his thinking forward, and the author soon grasped that it was no use to compete based on research achievements against students who are confident about practical business performance achievements. Talking highly of researchers based on different criteria from the evaluation scale used for confident students would not lead to understanding nor would it motivate them to actively try to understand.

Yet for students to effectively learn from the author, it was crucial to be worthy of respect as a person in their eyes. How to be a respected instructor for students with careers—a clear, new question was revealed. While the process of solving this question continues, a few answers have emerged.

First, the author pledged to contribute to business management practice as a researcher by walking side-by-side with practical business practitioners from the viewpoint of a researcher. Here, it is important to accompany or support practitioners without competing. Students with careers are not people researchers should compete with. Researchers should only compete with other researchers. Instead of competing, the author often tried to send a message that “we are both working hard” to students with careers. Instructors should challenge these business school students in terms of attitudes toward intellectual inquiry. In this particular challenge, the author decided not to come in second against students with careers. After gaining this understanding, the author seldom accommodated students and was not greatly bothered by superficial student satisfaction evaluation.

The next revelation was that while business education at business schools is clearly professional education, it is healthier to guide education practice toward intellectual pursuit by seeking more universal values instead of directing it toward academic expertise by seeking individual values of business education. This understanding originates in learning gained in an interview with Professor Emeritus Thomas R. Piper of Harvard Business

School<sup>3</sup>. According to Professor Emeritus Piper, “business education is training in values, attitudes and skills, and it is essentially different from traditional graduate school education that pursues science.” The author received this advice later in his business school career, and it provided a valuable clue that enabled moving forward with his thinking. While identifying with a shift in the axis of education values from expertise to attitudes, the author had a glimpse of the mechanics of the shifting focus in education at graduate schools for people with careers in the US, moving away from expertise toward attitudes.

#### **4. Case method of instruction, a teaching approach that triggers and supports reflection**

Case method of instruction is a teaching approach where students learn through spontaneous discussion with each other based on case materials. In this teaching approach, instructors do not give lectures but instead let students discuss. It is the core teaching approach at Harvard Business School in the US and Keio Business School in Japan. Moreover, it is representative of traditional teaching approaches at business schools. The school where the author previously taught (Keio Business School) is a traditional school where case method of instruction is utilized, and as the author himself mainly studied this teaching approach for his research, case method of instruction has always been at the core of his education practice.

While instructors have limited authority and building trust of students with careers does not necessarily occur naturally at business schools as discussed previously, case method of instruction was another major factor that made it difficult to establish a “reason for instructors to be instructors.” This is because teaching what should be taught while letting students freely discuss is a very difficult task for instructors. If an instructor tries to forcefully move in a desired direction while calling for free discussion, it would immediately be perceived as “no freedom in reality.” If an instructor winces after continuing to suffer inconvenient comments, the atmosphere

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Professor Emeritus Piper, Thomas R., Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, 2013/2/21 9:00-10:30, @Cumnock, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA.

would instantly be perceived as “not all comments are welcome here.” An instructor who cannot smoothly achieve both free discussion and education objectives is in a critical situation, and his or her lack of confidence is revealed, or loss of composure could result in insufficient attention to students as well as create distance from the image of a respected instructor for students. Using this teaching approach reveals the capabilities of instructors. Therefore, it is not too much to say that instructors face risks as an instructor and as an intellectual.

With case method of instruction, there are few class scenes where instructors’ comments take the spotlight on the basis of authority and information asymmetry. It is education practice similar to composite art, and uses educational resources—the experience and awareness of issues of students with careers—as a driver, guiding students to a place only they can go. At this point, a significant level of insight into people, capability in terms of education technique and deep affection for students are essential for instructors.

Advocating classes where instructors would realize their own inadequacies by having students think requires substantial preparation on the part of instructors. Being thoroughly prepared when appearing in the classroom would change students’ perceptions of university faculty who, at first glance, seem to have established careers. Finally, respect and trust increase as “the teacher thinks that far ahead” and “is so well prepared to teach our class.” When thinking this way, ultimately it is the instructor’s attitude toward intellectual inquiry that affects students’ mindset and motivates them to engage in true learning. Professional education for students with careers seems to be filled with scenes where we realize such truths, because it is staged where a relationship of trust between students and instructors does not smoothly function.

The circumstance of the author only being able to take the path of intellectual pursuit due to difficulty pursuing academic inquiry of business administration may have been a blessing in disguise. In addition, the author was grateful for the existence of case method of instruction as a teaching approach and for personally being able to work on research of education based on the method. It cannot be denied that case method of instruction was an aporia for the author, but one that helped him move forward with reflection in some areas. This unique teaching approach was inextricably

linked to reflection about teaching at business schools and planted the seeds of a philosophy.

## **Conclusion**

The mechanism at issue in this paper seems to directly apply to professional degree programs at graduate schools of education. Naturally, an aporia of gaining trust from students with careers is not resolved for graduate-level professional education, advanced business schools, or the business administration instructors who teach there. However, in the process of professional degree programs at graduate schools of education gaining greater presence as graduate schools for people with careers in the school administration field, it is likely inevitable to face situations of overcoming authority and trust issues in education. When this occurs, some assistance may be afforded by senior scholars like Professor Emeritus Piper who have sincerely and persistently contemplated such issues, or educators such as the author who have been bound by restraining factors or have repeatedly held internal arguments based on educational thinking found within the teaching approach.

The author has noticed subconscious glimmers of a new ego emerging in recent years as he examines the core attitude of intellectual pursuit against the possibility of arrogance with increasing academic expertise. This will become an important asset in winning future trust as a scholar.