

Teaching social justice through experiential learning

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Abstract

The role of universities in promoting the common good was emphasized by Pope Francis during his last pastoral visit to Kenya in 2015. Specifically, the Holy Father underlined the importance of universities in shaping the minds and hearts of new generations toward the building of a more just and inclusive society, respectful of human dignity and attentive to the needs of the poor. One of the ways in which universities contribute toward promotion of the common good is by teaching ethics courses to future business leaders.

Traditionally business schools have relied on the use of case studies as dominant teaching strategy in teaching business ethics. Underlying this approach is the intent of developing student moral reasoning skills to solve complex moral dilemmas embedded in these cases. More recently, however, educators have challenged this traditional approach and argue that developing student ability to solve ethical dilemmas can be useful but is not sufficient to ensure ethical behavior. Equally important is the need to employ teaching strategies which aim at enhancing students' capacity for developing virtues.

This paper describes an experiential exercise on social justice in a business ethics course taught at a private university in Kenya. The activity was designed to enhance students' moral awareness about the plight of Kenyan workers and the responsibility that business firms have in fostering the dignity of human work. Divided into small groups, students did home visits in a poor neighbourhood and conducted face-to-face interviews with heads of families about their household income, living expenses, and working conditions. Students were asked to share the insights they learnt as a group and submit individual reflection papers about lessons drawn from these visits. Analysis of student experiences reveal how this exercise has significantly enhanced their appreciation of the dignity of the poor. Students' insights also show how they personally benefited from the values of the people they interacted with during the visits. These values include resilience, sense of solidarity, generosity, hope, optimism, hard work, love for their children, and a strong faith in God.