

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

Towards an Authentic Classroom Environment with a Teacher Diary Study Based on the I Ching, the Dao De Ching and the Zhuangzi

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Abstract

This report shares the experience of a teacher undertaking an introspective teacher diary study to embrace the wisdom of the I Ching (also known as “The Book of Changes”). This was in order to infuse the classroom with Daoism for an authentic environment. The diary’s insights emerged through five methodological processes: (1) Daily introspections with the I Ching, the Dao De Ching and the Zhuangzi (thereby inspiring the prompts for the diary writing), (2) meditation (to calm the mind), (3) participant-observation (supporting spontaneous flexibility in the classroom), (4) the Microsoft Tools Program (which served to match thought patterns in diary entries), and (5) yin and yang, wuwei, ziran and qi (which helped embrace Daoist principles). These processes led to the discovery of eight Daoist-inspired principles for what is considered here as an optimal classroom atmosphere: (1) The functionality of blending yang-directness and yin-indirectness (balancing instruction with inspiration), (2) the virtue of choosing authenticity over authoritarianism (to inspire humility), (3) the significance of selflessness (encouraging spontaneity over impulsiveness), (4) the recognition of the

fullness of emptiness (to open the space for creativity to flourish), (5) the value of compassion, frugality and humility (which nurture gentleness), (6) the usefulness of emotional detachments (for enhancing adaptability to unforeseen situations), (7) the tangibility of leadership by example (engendering trust), and (8) the wisdom of simplicity (avoiding excessive complications).

Introduction

Teacher diary studies are written self-reflections of experiences in the classroom. They are examined for recurring thought patterns that facilitate an introspective awareness. The purpose is to lead to deeper insights about practice, which can then contribute to personal-professional development.

They encourage the discovery and implementation of novel ways of approaching classroom instruction. Linguists have recognized benefits of diary studies for their introspective contributions in a wide variety of educational settings (Bailey, 1990; Bell, 1993; Henderson, Morris & Fitz-Gibbon, 1987; Howell-Richardson & Parkinson, 1988; Jarvis,

1992; Nunan, 1992; Richards & Lockhart, 1996).

The current diary study under consideration pursued enhancement of an authentic classroom atmosphere. Authentic is meant here as an atmosphere which promotes student-centeredness, active learning and where the teacher is an encouraging facilitator. The opposite of this is considered to be an undesirable authoritarian classroom atmosphere where the teacher is the center of attention and dictates the course content whilst students are merely passive recipients.

The diary study was inspired by the following two well-known Daoist-inspired sayings: (1) *I hear, I forget. I see, I remember. I do, I understand*, and (2) *Give people fish and you feed them for a day, but teach people how to fish and you feed them for a lifetime*. Thus, in authentic classrooms, intelligence and wisdom as well as processes and outcomes are all equally treasured. The teacher's role is more of a "guide on the side" rather than a "sage on the stage."

In an ideal authentic classroom there would be a mutual acceptance on the part of teacher and students that beyond the tangible human constructs of personal identity, rules and regulations, course outlines, deadlines, examinations and grades lie the equally important intangible dimensions of nurturing, facilitating and inspiring. Through becoming authentically compassionate and humble in the classroom, a shared teacher-student state of awareness helps to transcend fears based on "winners" and "losers." This, in turn, encourages more mutual trust. The point of the attitude is to open the way to a greater sense of a shared intrinsic enjoyment of

learning as process and of what is learnt, between the teacher and the students.

I have found undertaking diary studies based on Chinese philosophy to be valuable in formulating novel approaches to education, especially in my earlier diary studies. In a diary study based on *The Art of War* (Jeffrey 2010) ways were found that contributed to longer-term win-win strategic outcomes in an educational setting. In another diary study that applied the *36 Stratagems* (Jeffrey 2013) short-term tactical classroom situations to ensure mutually successful outcomes to challenges were discovered. Thereafter, a broad holistic awareness was embraced by myself as a teacher, through a diary study applying the *Dao De Ching* (Jeffrey 2015). This helped to synchronize classroom relations with the ever-present yet ineffable rhythms of the Dao. Following that, in another diary study based on the other Daoist classic known as the *Zhuangzi* (Jeffrey 2019), more dimensions were added to the appreciation of Daoism's contribution to a harmonious classroom atmosphere.

In a further attempt to find a means of applying Daoist philosophy to educational practice, the current diary study under discussion went another thousand years back in history from the *Dao De Ching* and the *Zhuangzi* to embrace the foundation of Chinese philosophy which is the *I Ching*. To bring it into the present in ways appreciable to modern sensibilities it was infused with Daoism. The combinations were melded to that of my experiences as an educator in order to find contributions to developing what I am calling here authenticity, and to reduce authoritarianism in the classroom.

This diary study took place from December 2017 to December 2018 at the

Sichuan University—Pittsburgh Institute (SCUPI), Chengdu, People's Republic of China. SCUPI was established in 2013 through collaboration between Sichuan University in China and Pittsburgh University in the US to provide Chinese engineering students the opportunity of an American-style education in China with English as the medium of instruction. The students featuring in the study were freshmen/women and sophomores. My role was as a lecturer teaching English for Academic Purposes and a consultant in the Writing Center assisting them with their writing skills.

The I Ching

The *I Ching* is the most ancient of China's historical texts, and is potentially the world's oldest book. It was originally used as a divination method based on the configurations of cracks on tortoise shells that have over thousands of years evolved into a contemplative means of guidance to decision making throughout the world today.

Its oracle is comprised of 64 hexagrams. These consist of six-lined broken (*yin*) and unbroken (*yang*) lines. There is a situational description for each hexagram in the text that determines the outcomes of enquiries based on its *yin* and *yang* configurations. Its introduction to the West was pioneered by Legge (1882), followed by McClatchie (1876), Blofeld (1965), Wilhelm (1950) and Shaughnessy (1996), among several others.

According to Ritsema and Sabbadini (2005), the origins of the *I Ching* can be traced back to the Zhou dynasty (1122 – 256 BC) when it was known as the *Zhou Yi* (meaning “Changes of the Zhou”), and then later became canonized as a classic during

the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). Although it was initially based on divination, its present form is essentially a book of wisdom, guiding its practitioners to look inwardly and to intuitively contemplate ways of acting judiciously in the face of unpredictable and fluctuating situations.

In the foreword to Wilhelm's (1950) translation of the *I Ching*, the renowned psychoanalyst Jung, who introduced the concepts of archetypes (patterns that are universally shared in the collective unconscious) and synchronicity (non-causal yet meaningful coincidences), wrote:

The Chinese mind, as I see it at work in the *I Ching*, seems to be exclusively preoccupied with the chance aspect of events. What we call coincidence seems to be the chief concern of this peculiar mind, and what we worship as causality passes almost unnoticed....Synchronicity takes the coincidence of events in space and time as meaning something more than mere chance, namely, a peculiar interdependence of objective events among themselves as well as with the subjective (psychic) state of the observer or observers.

Jung (Wilhelm, 1950) considered the 64 hexagrams of the *I Ching* were similar to his notion of the universally shared archetypes of situations existing within the collective unconscious; these lying beyond an individual's conscious awareness. It is towards these that the *I Ching* guides its practitioner for deeper situational insights.

Because of the synchronicity of non-causal yet meaningful events with the infusion of the archetypes of the collective unconscious into conscious awareness, the *I Ching* transcends the realm of chance coincidences. It thus can be considered to serve as a guide to finding best possible solutions to circumstances at the specific times and under the conditions that it is consulted. The idea is that this facilitates access to the vast depth of intuitive wisdom within the collective unconscious of everyone beyond individual levels of consciousness. The *I Ching* thus serves as an intuitive guide to decision making.

There are many ways to build the *I Ching* hexagrams, such as the ancient approach of using pinches of rice and throwing yarrow sticks while counting them. In more recent times the use of coins has become popular. Using the *I Ching* with coins comprises the following actions with three coins and involves casting those six times to build up a hexagram from the bottom upwards in the following manner: (1) First formulating a question, (2) then tossing the coins, and (3) finally reflecting on the hexagram's interpretations found in the oracle (interpretations of hexagrams).

The question is preferably written down and thought through carefully and contemplatively. It should not merely be a "yes" or "no" question, but rather a "what if..." or "how should..." type of question. Thereafter, the coins are cast, whilst deciding whether "heads" and "tails" is *yin* or *yang*, and giving a value of two and three respectively. Tallying the outcomes of each cast of the coins builds up a value of six, seven, eight or nine, with the value of seven as "young *yang*" and eight "young *yin*" (which remain constant), while six as "old *yin*" and nine as "old *yang*" (which change

their positions from *yin* to *yang* and *yang* to *yin* respectively for the formation of a second hexagram). The first hexagram provides more of a specific reflection while the second hexagram (if there is one, depending on if there are any changing *yin* and *yang* lines in the first hexagram) serves as a supplementary reflection of the situation.

The Influence of the *I Ching* on Daoism

Although the *I Ching* has been influential for almost all of Chinese philosophy including Confucianism (Serran-Pagan y Fuentes, 2017), this report focuses mainly on its application within the Daoist tradition.

The non-dualistic essence of *yin* and *yang* in the *I Ching* influenced Daoism's core values of compassion, moderation, and humility. Daoism is one of the three central Chinese philosophies, alongside Confucianism and Buddhism. It is the philosophy of living peacefully, harmoniously and non-judgmentally with the Dao which, although ineffable, is "an integral part of nature and the greater universe, which functions in perfect harmony and is fundamentally good" (Kohn, 2009, p. 365).

The primary Daoist classic, the *Dao De Ching* (meaning "The Way and its Virtue"), is believed to have been written around the 6th century B.C. by the semi-legendary Lao Tzu. It is a short book of 81 poetically styled chapters which encourage us to follow our intuitions, to be open to all perspectives in accordance with ever-changing situations, and to immerse ourselves in nature.

Another influential Daoist classic, the *Zhuangzi*, was written by Chuang Zhou (and called after his own name), who lived

during the latter part of the 4th century B.C. towards the end of the Warring States Period. The *Zhuangzi* consists of 33 chapters and embraces an unencumbered spirit of “perfect happiness” and “free and easy wandering” as a means to embrace Daoism. It relates these in the form of humorous metaphorical stories based in the common society of that time, mirroring many of the principles of the *Dao De Ching*.

Both these Daoist classics were written at a deeply troubled time in China’s history. They were a part of a wider philosophical awakening known as the *Hundred Schools of Thought* which saw the birth of Confucianism, Legalism and Mohism, among many others. All found their inspirations, to greater and lesser extents, in the foundational *yin* and *yang* philosophy of the *I Ching*.

Alan Watts was a pioneering philosopher who introduced Daoism to the West. Most of his prolific writing and speeches appeared posthumously. He described Daoism as a way of water (1975) and as something beyond intentional seeking (1997). In his wake came many annotated English translations of the *Dao De Ching* such as those of Roberts (2001), Ivanhoe (2002), Ames and Hall (2003), Wagner (2003), Lin (2006), and Moeller (2007), to name a few. Such works informed Westerners of Daoism leading to wider applications such as *The Dao of Pooh* by Hoff (1982) and the *Daoist Cookbook* by Saso (1994). Educators such as Flowers, 1998; Nagel, 1994; Cohen & Bai, 2007 have also adapted Daoism to their teaching styles, seeking to open the way for kindness, tolerance, and patience in their classrooms.

The Five Methodological Approaches

The wisdom of the *I Ching* and its influence on Daoism inspired the following five integrated methodological approaches of the study made and presented here: (1) Consulting the *I Ching* oracle in the mornings and reading of the *Dao De Ching* and the *Zhuangzi* in the evenings (both informing the mindset for the day ahead whilst inspiring the diary prompts for the next day), (2) meditation at home (to calm the mind and unlock deeper levels of intuition and insights), (3) the application of participant-observation in the classroom (to sharpen perceptions of reality and the non-judgmental acceptance of them), (4) the Microsoft Tools Program (which helped in matching thought patterns within the diary entries, thereby leading to further insights), and (5) the principles of *yin* and *yang*, *wuwei*, *ziran* and *qi* (for embracing the cyclical, self-balancing and asymmetrical Daoist dimensions that originate from the *I Ching*).

***I Ching* Consultations and Daoist Contemplations**

Every morning, at 5:00 a.m., the *I Ching* was consulted with the question “What will today bring, and how best should I approach it?” I made sure to add some specifics by including questions about best approaches for the day ahead. This was followed by 30 minutes of meditation with the focus being on the answer of the *I Ching*, which was based on the hexagram built from the bottom upwards through the tossing of the three coins, six times. Then, every evening after each day, a few pages of the *Dao De Ching* and the *Zhuangzi* were read, and inspirational parts that were considered insightful for my classroom for the next day were highlighted. This was done as a way of

blending what had occurred that day to allow it to feed into the next day. This would be followed by another 30 minutes of evening meditation, whilst keeping a notebook alongside to record any unique insights.

Care was taken to ask questions in the manner described above, wherein a more inquiring approach than merely “yes/no” answers was sought. I began by asking questions in terms of the broader circumstances at hand and thereafter narrowed them down to specifics. The guidance from the I Ching usually fell into three categories: (1) keep doing what I am doing, (2) find another way, or (3) get out of the situation.

Turning to the Daoist considerations at the end of each day, an example of an inspirational part in the Dao De Ching from Chapter nine was: “Rather than fill it to the brim by keeping it upright, better to have stopped in time” (Lau, 2009, p. 11). This inspired the prompt: “Continue when helpful, stop when unhelpful” which served as a guide for the next day’s in-class participant-observations and the entries in the diary that followed.

Similarly, an inspirational example of a highlighted part from Chapter two in the Zhuangzi was: “Suddenly he woke up, and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn’t know if he were Zhuang Zhou who had dreamt that he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou” (Watson, 1968, p. 49). This inspired the prompt: “Embrace ambiguity because things are not always what they seem to be.”

The reflective writing, based on the I Ching consultations and the prompts inspired by the Daoist classics followed immediately after each class. The memories

of what had transpired in the classroom were still fresh. The reflective writing was undertaken before the next I Ching consultations, Dao De Ching and Zhuangzi readings and meditation sessions where further insights were written in a notebook. The diary entries were all summarized and ultimately typed into my laptop computer given that the Microsoft Tools Program, to be discussed soon, was an important contribution to synthesizing written thought patterns.

Meditation

Austin (2006), a well-known neurologist and Zen meditator, noted that deep states of intuitive awareness lie within the brain, and within the parasympathetic system of the body; that a calm mind enables one to access them.

The Western psychologist Santee applied the wisdom of the *Zhuangzi* to the psychological needs of stress management, healthcare, and well-being (2011). He noted the pervasiveness of chronic stress in modern society was closely associated with fight-or-flight responses that accrue from thinking patterns based on dichotomies of one thing versus another. He recommended meditation as a means of diffusing such dichotomous thinking patterns.

For these reasons, meditation was practiced throughout this diary study. As mentioned, it began in the mornings after the *I Ching* consultations, and in the evenings after reading the *Dao De Ching* and the *Zhuangzi*. The style of meditation was the Daoist meditative form of *Zuowang*, meaning “sitting in oblivion,” described by Kohn as “a state of deep meditative absorption and mystical oneness, during which all sensory and conscious faculties are

overcome and which is the base point of attaining Dao” (2010, p. 1).

Following this approach to meditation and by focusing on breathing in and out while letting thoughts come and go without grasping on to them, the ensuing calmness opened spaces for novel ideas that lay at deeper levels of consciousness to come to the fore suddenly, but then to vanish just as quickly. Recording them in the notebook helped to capture them, and assisted in letting them go like passing clouds and returning to a meditative state.

Although the meditation was done at home, the state of calmness attained was extended to the classroom environment by virtue of the fact that *Zuowang* can be practiced at any time and place, irrespective of circumstances. Its contribution was noticeable in the calming effect it had upon myself and in enhancing my mental clarity. I found it cultivated a more balanced and authentic classroom atmosphere, with less artificial highs and lows.

Participant-Observation

Jorgensen (1989) described participant-observation as: “...appropriate for studies of almost every aspect of human existence” (p. 12). Adding a Daoist paradigm to participant-observation in the classroom opened the way to being less judgmental and thus more accepting of circumstances, and without trying to fit everything that happened into preconceived notions of how things had to be. This helped me to be more flexible and open to unexpected challenges, and this turned the classroom experience more into a state of flow by comparison to sudden stops and starts that had been a characteristic before.

With the calming of my mind brought about by extending a meditative mindset to

the classroom and combining that with participant-observation, the uniqueness of my own self and each student—within the distinctiveness of each passing moment—became more apparent. This enabled me to tap more easily into student personal interests, their different learning styles, their hopes and fears, and this seemed to encourage the students to take more ownership of their learning experiences.

The Microsoft Tools Program

The Microsoft Windows WordSmith Tools software program (Scott, 1997) made a valuable contribution to this diary study. It further clarified my thoughts through speeding up the sifting of the diary entries wherein I encountered clearly perceived patterns leading to deeper insights.

The main benefit of this program to the diary study was its creation of a corpus of entries in which keywords were listed alphabetically and in terms of frequency. The WordSmith Tools Controller section of the Program had three options: (1) concordances, (2) keywords, and (3) word-lists. Observing the concordances where these most frequent keywords occurred allowed for the formation of patterns paving the way to insights.

The Microsoft Windows WordSmith Tools software program helped in the realization that the *I Ching* consultations and their Daoist reflections were useful in shaping my consciousness away from inflexible fixations based on contrasts and compulsions, towards becoming more inclusive and tolerant. Also, it led to becoming more yielding to the insurmountable and flexible enough to adapt to change as does the proverbial bamboo that yields to the gale and survives

while the stubborn tree that refuses to bend breaks at its base.

Yin and Yang, Wuwei, Ziran and Qi

At the core of this study was the recognition of the complementary polarities of *yin* and *yang* arising with mutuality due to their interdependence. The concepts of *yin* and *yang* have their origins in the *I Ching*. Daoism does not separate one thing from another given *yin* and *yang* are not dualistically opposed entities, as in the Western notion of black as opposite to white. Thus, a *yin* and *yang* perspective sees black and white in a complementary relationship with one another, such that each defines itself in relation to the other and depends on its existence by the fact that the other exists too.

The *I Ching* hexagrams are made up of *yin* and *yang* lines. The first hexagram is made up of all *yang* lines (as in “black”), the second hexagram is made up of all *yin* lines (as in “white”), while the remaining 62 hexagrams are comprised of variations between *yin* and *yang* (adding another 62 varying “shades of grey” between black and white).

Lao Tzu emphasized that harmonizing with the Dao depends on embracing the unity of the mysterious and nameless *yin* (the “Beginning of Heaven and Earth”) and its *yang* manifestations (which is referred to by Daoists as “The Ten Thousand Things” representing the world of form). A metaphorical example of this would be a cup that is recognized by its shape (the *yang* manifestation), and its usefulness by virtue of being hollow inside (the *yin* mystery). This perspective brings out the realization that there are inherent *yin*-tendencies that counterbalance *yang*-

tendencies, and *yang*-tendencies that counterbalance *yin*-tendencies.

This brings situations of excess back into balance, through the Daoist concepts of *wuwei* and *ziran*. *Wuwei* is the principle of unintentional, non-deliberate and unforced acceptance of the way things are. Closely associated with the concept of *wuwei* is *ziran*, which is the principle of naturalness as observed throughout nature where all imbalances are overcome without excessive deliberate effort. Thus, the path to *wuwei* and *ziran* involves an embracement of the way things are by going along with the natural rhythm and flow of situations.

The vital and life-giving energy flows of *qi* occur through the balance of *yin* and *yang*, and are sustained through *wuwei* and *ziran*. Then and thus *Qi* energy is awakened and continues through maintaining an open-minded perspective. With this comes an harmonious meditative acceptance of the inevitability of unexpected changes transcending illusions of excessive comparative thoughts and their rigid conclusions. This frees up spontaneity through the reduction of impulsiveness.

In a classroom that is *qi*-infused the atmosphere is one that is of authentic selves acting in harmony with experience and its vicissitudes.

The Eight *I Ching* Inspired Daoist Principles for an Authentic Classroom

This diary study embraced a harmonization between the logic of Western scientific perspectives and the ineffability of Daoism. It appreciated that Western perspectives are mostly based on logic, tend to be more *yang*-orientated and thus more structural in nature. It also appreciated that the Daoist

approach is mostly ineffable, tends towards being more *yin*-orientated and is thus more formless in nature.

From this holistic perspective, eight authentic learning principles arose from the insights derived from the five integrated methodological approaches above that integrated the *I Ching* consultations with their Daoist ramifications. These are: (1) the functionality of blending *yang*-directness for instruction and *yin*-indirectness for creativity, (2) the virtue of humility in choosing authenticity over authoritarianism, (3) the significance of selflessness which encourages spontaneous actions over impulsiveness, (4) the recognition of the fullness of emptiness to open the space for creativity to flourish, (5) the value of compassion, frugality and humility nurturing gentleness, (6) the usefulness of emotional detachment to enhance adaptability to unforeseen situations, (7) the tangibility of leadership by example for engendering trust, and (8) the wisdom of simplicity to avoid complications. These are examined below, where the *I Ching* readings are from the Cleary (1987) translation, the *Dao De Ching* quotations are from the Lau (2009) translation and the *Zhuangzi* quotations are from the Watson (1968) translation.

First Principle: The Functionality of Blending Yang Directness and Yin Indirectness

Question to the *I Ching*: *In the Writing Center Workshops, the value of brainstorming on scratch paper for the first five minutes of a one-hour writing test was emphasized many times. The students seemed to agree that it was an especially effective approach (in other words, how just five minutes spent brainstorming at the*

outset could make a significant impact on the structure of a paper). Yet, to my surprise, very few students brainstormed in this manner when they wrote their final writing paper at the end of the Workshop series. I often assume that the students and I are of one mind but this was an experience that demonstrated such assumptions are not always accurate. Could there be other approaches that would bring our minds closer together?

***I Ching* hexagram and advice:** “The small goes and the great comes, getting through auspiciously. This is the development of myriad beings due to the combination of heaven and earth. Above and below communicate, so their wills are the same. Yang inside and yin outside, strong inside and docile outside, a leader inside and an ordinary person outside; the path of a leader goes on and on, while the path of an ordinary person vanishes.” Hexagram 11 titled *Tranquility* (comprised of the trigram *heaven* below and the trigram *earth* above)

Similar Daoist perspectives following the *I Ching* reflection:

“The way that can be spoken of is not the constant way; the name that can be named is not the constant name.” *Dao De Ching* (Chapter one).

“Where there is recognition of right there must be recognition of wrong; where there is recognition of wrong there must be recognition of right. Therefore, the sage does not proceed in such a way, but illuminates all in the light of Heaven.” *Zhuangzi* (Chapter two).

Diary excerpt following the reflections: *The title of Hexagram 11, Tranquility, and the configuration of trigrams heaven below (the purely active yang element comprised of three yang lines) and earth above (the purely receptive yin comprised of all yin*

lines), was a realization that tranquility is important in the promotion of like-mindedness. This is a reminder that education is not of a mechanical one size fits all process. It is more a practice of tranquilly blending yin and yang by allowing the “small” to go and the “great” to come, which takes time and patience. However, this brings about a harmonious environment in which learning becomes more meaningful. Through this insight I realized that I had merely explained the value of brainstorming, but had not had the students actually practice a couple of times in the workshops. In subsequent workshops, once the students had practiced it and experienced the benefits for themselves, they became more inclined to use this technique in tests. In this way the yang of teaching skills can be conveyed with the yin of tranquility. There is a fine balance between the yang directness of curriculum delivery, test preparedness, meeting grade expectedness, fulfilling GPA requirements, receiving favorable student evaluations, lesson planning, teaching grammar structures, vocabulary building and administering punishments and rewards and the yin indirectness of inspiring creativity, encouraging student ownership, motivating life-long learning, facilitating classroom activities, sharing the power, engendering trust and being a shoulder to cry on.

Second Principle: The Virtue of Choosing Authenticity over Authoritarianism

Question to the I Ching: *It is undesirable to rigidly enforce discipline as this tends to promote authoritarianism and the negative consequences that come from that. However, an authentic classroom also*

needs a certain amount of discipline. There are times when my decisions and actions are not popular with students, but I feel they need to be taken under unavoidable circumstances. I see myself as a gentle and compassionate person, who feels uncomfortable enforcing discipline even when I know it is necessary. Which is the best approach that allows me to be true to my gentle nature whilst simultaneously enforcing discipline when necessary yet also maintaining classroom harmony?

I Ching hexagram and advice: “Humility gets through. A leader has a conclusion. The way of heaven, descending to save, radiates light. The way of earth, lowly, goes upward. The way of heaven diminishes the full and enhances the humble. The way of earth changes the full and spreads humility. Spirits injure the full and bless the humble. The way of humans is to dislike the full and like the humble. Humility is noble yet enlightened, low yet unsurpassable. This is the conclusion of leaders.” Hexagram 15 titled *Humility* (comprised of the trigram *mountain* below and the trigram *earth* above)

Similar Daoist perspectives following the I Ching reflection:

“A man[woman] of the highest virtue does not keep to virtue and that is why he[sh]e has virtue. The man[woman] of the lowest virtue never strays from virtue and that is why he[sh]e is without virtue.” *Dao De Ching* (Chapter 38)

“You can’t discuss the Way with a cramped scholar—[s]he’s shackled by [her]his doctrines.” *Zhuangzi* (Chapter 17)

Diary excerpt following the reflections: *The title of Hexagram 15, Humility, and the configuration of mountain below (made of two yin lines and a yang line from the bottom upwards) and earth above (the*

purely receptive yin orientated trigram) is a reminder of the value of modesty. When I adopt the position of simply being myself without letting pride come in the way, I tend to nurture an authentic form of respect from the students, who in turn emulate this kind of respect among themselves. But when I enforce things to comply with externally imposed criteria (such as insisting on fulfilling course outcomes without due cognizance of procedural subtleties), then comparisons and competitiveness arise resulting in students achieving less together and a dissipation of mutual trust. Authenticity is thus the embracement of naturalness, such as in nature where nothing compares nor competes, and where nothing is hurried and yet nothing is left undone. Being authoritarian, on the other hand, is fear-based, forceful, narcissistic, demoralizing, contra-Dao and thus counter-productive in every sense. This loss of classroom discipline is more a matter of the fear of losing discipline than of embracing the fact that in a perfect state of affairs discipline is neither attainable nor desirable. A classroom is no more or less what it is, and the acceptance of that is the epitome of humility.

Third Principle: The Significance of Selflessness

Question to the *I Ching*: *I tend to harbor grudges which seem to creep into my perspectives of current daily classroom experiences. These tend to repeat themselves unnecessarily, without giving due consideration to the uniqueness of circumstances. How can I take myself out of this equation and become less judgmental and accepting of circumstances?*

***I Ching* hexagram and advice:** “Accord is auspicious. Accord is assistance; it is the lowly following docilely. Make sure the basis is always right, so that there will be no fault; then firmness is balanced. Then the uneasy will come—above and below respond. Latecomers are unfortunate—their path comes to an end.” Hexagram eight titled *Accord* (comprised of the trigram *earth* below and the trigram *water* above).

Similar Daoist perspectives following the *I Ching* reflection:

“The reason why heaven and earth can be enduring is that they do not give themselves life. Hence, they are able to be long-lived. Therefore, the sage puts [her]his person last and it comes first.” *Dao De Ching* (Chapter seven).

“If a [woman]man follows the mind and makes it [her]his teacher, then who can be without a teacher?” *Zhuangzi* (Chapter two).

Diary excerpt following the reflections:

The title of Hexagram eight, Accord, and the configuration of earth below (the purely receptive yin orientated trigram) and water above (comprised of a yang line between two yin lines) helped me realize the desirability of unison and to bind spontaneously with “what is” rather than with what I consider to be the way things “should be.” My ego is merely the mental image I have of myself and is mostly an illusion, because it’s not the real “me.” So, I should not exist only for myself as I am not a separate entity but an inseparable part of everything that is the classroom. Realizing this, and going more with the flow of unfolding events, makes everything a lot less stressful and classroom relations more harmoniously effective. Selflessness in terms of transcending the ego helps remove the encrusted dichotomies of myself

as “I” versus me and of the students as “them.” It creates a more authentic atmosphere where there are less distinctions between good versus bad and gain versus loss. In this way the yang of egoism that drives stark and stressful distinctions is tempered with the yin of keeping things in accord and with a spirit of unison.

Fourth Principle: The Recognition of the Fullness of Emptiness

Question to the I Ching: *Whenever I enter the classroom, I feel a dreaded responsibility that however things go depends entirely on me. Should this be so?*

I Ching hexagram and advice: “In sameness with people, flexibility finds its place and gains balance, so to correspond with the creative. When it says that sameness with people in the wilderness is successful, and that it is beneficial to cross a great river, this is creative action. Health through civilization and enlightenment, responding with balance correctly is the correctness of a leader. A leader is one who can communicate with the wills of the world.” Hexagram 13 titled *Sameness With People* (comprised of the trigram *fire* below and the trigram *heaven* above)

Similar Daoist perspectives following the I Ching reflection:

“Thirty spokes share one hub. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the cart.” *Dao De Ching* (Chapter 11).

“Words exist because of meaning; once you’ve gotten the meaning, you can forget the words.” *Zhuangzi* (Chapter 26).

Diary excerpt following the reflections: *The title of Hexagram 13, Sameness With People, and the configuration of fire below (comprised of a yin line between two yang*

lines) and heaven above (the purely active yang element comprised of three yang lines) was the realization that a constructive classroom environment comes from nurturing a transcendent fellowship between myself and the students. Through this insight, I’ve become more aware that the spaces between my teachings are essential for their assimilation and digestion. Giving students the space to be themselves enhances their creativity. Knowing this, I can more comfortably step back from being accountable for all outcomes and feel joy in knowing that. It is about removing the unnecessary mental clutter of excessive thinking, thereby opening the way to clearer perceptions of unfolding situations and being more spontaneous than impulsive. In this way the yang of the fear of being responsible for all that happens in a classroom is overcome with the yin of instilling fellowship.

Fifth Principle: The Value of Compassion, Frugality and Humility

Question to the I Ching: *I sometimes become overly consumed with my responsibility for ensuring that my students achieve the best GPAs. It creates a tension between my inner-values of being a teacher that inspires students to become creative learners for their lifetimes, and my responsibility of ensuring high student grades. How can I find a balance between these apparent extremes?*

I Ching hexagram and advice: “In joy, strength responds and its will is carried out. Acting obediently is joy; joy acts obediently, so even heaven and earth conform to it, to say nothing of setting up rulers and mobilizing the army. Heaven and earth act obediently, so the sun and moon are not excessive, the four seasons

are not out of order. Sages act obediently, so punishments are clear and the people accept. The duty of the time of joy is great.” Hexagram 16 titled *Joy* (comprised of the trigram *earth* below and the trigram *thunder* above).

Similar Daoist perspectives following the *I Ching* reflection:

“I have three treasures which I hold and cherish. The first is known as compassion. The second is known as frugality. The third is known as not daring to take the lead in the empire.” *Dao De Ching* (Chapter 67).

“This was the True Man of old: his bearing was lofty and did not crumble; he appeared to lack but accepted nothing; he was dignified in his correctness but not insistent; he was vast in his emptiness but not ostentatious.” *Zhuangzi* (Chapter 6).

Diary excerpt following the reflections:

The title of Hexagram 16, Joy, and the configuration of earth below (the purely receptive yin orientated trigram) and thunder above (comprised of two yin lines over a yang line) was a reminder not to become so serious about everything. Over-seriousness dampens the joyous enthusiasm of embracing the pure enjoyment of unconditionally sharing the learning environment. The less I dominate the situation, the more it seems to harmonize itself with the GPA requirements of the students. When I treat students respectfully, and give them responsibility, I am always impressed at how authentic and resourceful they actually are in reaching the expectations of externally set standards of academic excellence. Unconditional love helps in seeing each student as unique and worthy, as it sees the good in everyone. In this way the yang tension of fulfilling expected learning outcomes is lessened with the yin of joyfulness, and the result is

an improved and more effective classroom environment.

Sixth Principle: The Usefulness of Emotional Detachments

Question to the *I Ching*: *When a student plays up and becomes belligerent in the classroom, and when a student fails the course and contests the grades, it tends to drag me down considerably from an emotional point of view. How should I approach this?*

***I Ching* hexagram and advice:** “Thunder comes through. When thunder comes, there is alarm—fear brings fortune. Then there is laughter—afterward there is an example. Startling for a hundred miles, it startles those far away and terrifies those nearby. If you come out, you can thus preserve the ancestral shrine and the earth and grain shrines, and so be the master of ceremonies.” Hexagram 51 titled *Thunder* (comprised of the trigram *thunder* below and the trigram *thunder* above).

Similar Daoist perspectives following the *I Ching* reflection:

“Know when to stop and you will meet with no danger. You can then endure.” *Dao De Ching* (Chapter 44).

“The Great Man in his teaching is like the shadow that follows a form, the echo that follows a sound.” *Zhuangzi* (Chapter 11).

Diary excerpt following the reflections:

The title of Hexagram 51, Thunder, and the configuration of thunder below and thunder above (both trigrams being comprised of two yin lines over a yang line) is a realization that within the shock of unexpected challenges lie exciting opportunities. In addition, both thunder and bad moods never last long. Before this realization, I had tended to be consumed by my negative emotions, but now I don't cling

to them as much. I let them go like the passing clouds, even if they may bring thunderstorms at times. Everything passes and rainbows are the testimony. This helps in seeing everything from a positive angle. I find when I see things this way a more optimistic reality follows. It opens the way to seeing hidden opportunities within unexpected challenges. In this way the yang of daunting challenges is embraced with the yin of optimistic enthusiasm. The result is living each moment to the full without the regrets of the past and the misgivings about the future. Nothing lasts forever anyway. It is important to appreciate the present.

Seventh Principle: The Tangibility of Leadership by Example

Question to the *I Ching*: *How can I be an effective leader today?*

***I Ching* hexagram and advice:**

“Regulation is successful. Firmness and flexibility divide, and firmness gains balance. Painful regulation is not to be held to, because that would lead to an impasse. Work through danger joyfully, take charge of the situation with discipline, get through with balance and rectitude. As heaven and earth are regulated, the four seasons take place. When laws are established with regulation, they do not damage property or injure people.” Hexagram 60 titled *Regulation* (comprised of the trigram *lake* below and the trigram *water* above)

Similar Daoist perspectives following the *I Ching* reflection:

“Hesitant, he does not utter words lightly. When his task is accomplished and his work done, the people all say it happened to us naturally.” *Dao De Ching* (Chapter 17).

“If you use unfairness to achieve fairness, your fairness will be unfair.” *Zhuangzi* (Chapter 32).

Diary excerpt following the reflections:

The title of Hexagram 60, Regulation, and the configuration of lake below (comprised of a yin line over two yang lines) and water above (comprised of a yang line between two yin lines) helped in finding a style of leadership that was more of a balance of firmness and flexibility. When the students think back on me in years to come, what will they remember most? Hopefully, it will be how I made them feel through my behavior. This means that the testimony of my teaching would be realized if it inspires an interest in learning after many years have passed among the students, and in them inspiring others to do likewise. In this way the yang of ensuring the undertaking of regulatory procedures through being an effective leader is regulated with the yin of flexibility.

Eighth Principle: The Wisdom of Simplicity

Question to the *I Ching*: *In my well-intentioned desires to add as many extra dimensions to equip the students with all they need, I tend to find diminishing attention and follow-through on their part. Is there another approach?*

***I Ching* hexagram and advice:**

“Reduction reduces the lower to increase the higher; the path goes upward. Reduction with sincerity is very auspicious and impeccable. It should be correct. It is beneficial to have somewhere to go. What is the use of the two bowls? They can be used for presentation. The two bowls must have their times; reducing hardness and increasing softness must have their times; reduction and increase, filling and

emptying, go along with the time.” Hexagram 41 titled *Reduction* (comprised of the trigram *lake* below the trigram and *mountain* above)

Similar Daoist perspectives following the *I Ching* reflection:

“The five colors make man’s eyes blind; the five notes make his ears deaf; the five tastes injure his palate. Riding and hunting make his mind go wild with excitement. Goods hard to come by serve to hinder his progress.” *Dao De Ching* (Chapter 12).

“When the tailor-bird builds her nest in the deep wood, she uses no more than one branch. When the mole drinks from the river he takes no more than a bellyful.” *Zhuangzi* (Chapter 1).

Diary excerpt following the reflections:

The title of Hexagram 41, Reduction, and the configuration of lake below (comprised of a yin line over two yang lines) and mountain above (comprised of a yang line over two yin lines) encourages a sense of moderation through sincerity. Less is often more in a classroom setting because less interference dissipates confusion and creates the spaces for a joyous learning environment to manifest itself. In this way the yang of complications can be reduced with the yin of simplicity.

Conclusion

This diary study based on the *I Ching* and infusing it with Daoism was an attempt to nurture a more authentic classroom environment. The choice of pursuing authenticity (rather than authoritarianism) inspired a newfound self-confidence among the students and made divisions less distinct and goals less competitive, and manifested itself in a more harmonious classroom atmosphere. With less comparing and competing, an enhanced

state of *I Ching* and Daoist-inspired aliveness emerged where every student became as worthy as the next. This enhanced mutual trust, respect, motivation, engagement, student independence and increased responsibility for learning with an overall shared dedication to academic achievement.

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