

Using Short Fiction to Teach Business and Environmental Ethics

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Abstract. This study firstly explores Ecohumanism as the educational paradigm in today's world. Raising environmental awareness is essential in studying economics to care for the sustainability of earth resources. Using the content-analysis method, the first part of the study looks at how several basic principles in business and environmental ethics can be found in the world of fiction, in this case, a short story. The second part applies quantitative-qualitative data to examine the accounting students' ability in showing ethical attitudes when facing business problems that potentially cause ethical violations as represented in the short story. From the questionnaire involving 118 accounting students in Indonesia and interviews with randomly selected students, the analysis reveals that the students grasp the concepts of integrity, respect for rules, respect for the environment, and professionalism. This study contributes to the gap in the practical and pedagogical field of using fictional case to teach business and environmental ethics for students of economics.

Keywords: Ecohumanism; ethics; fiction; professionalism; sustainability.

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1. Introduction

Depletion of the earth has accelerated the paradigm shift in education towards sustainable pedagogy. Educational reform has begun to lead to better services for people's social and ecological well-being since the 1970s (Ball & Lai, 2006). By the end of the twentieth century, UNESCO has advocated continuing education for a sustainable future. It has persistently promoted the link between culture and ecology. Nature or Green schools known as Education for Sustainable Development in the West started to emerge to be followed later all over the world (Hopkins & McKeown, 1999). The inclusion of Ecohumanism in the curriculum system is urgent in ecologically design schools and institutions worldwide (e.g. Hoecherl-Alden & Peterson, 2018; Kovaleva, Maslova, Kovalev, Avetikovna, Samygin, Kaznacheeva, & Lyashenko, 2019; Von der Heidt & Lamberton, 2011).

Michnowski uses the term Ecohumanism to mean partnership-based collaboration for mutual assistance, all people (both rich and poor, from very developed and underdeveloped countries), their offspring, and the natural environment (Dewi, 2018, p. 169). Michnowski's view of Ecohumanism is related to the United Nations' call for fair globalization, allowing productive and proper employment for all to achieve sustainable development. A combination of two transformations is therefore needed: humanistic and eco-developmental (Michnowski, 2010). Ecohumanism is thus a relevant educational philosophy to prepare students to participate in conserving a sustainable and better future.

It is now common to use the logic of sustainability in language and literature teaching (e.g. Garrard, 2007; Wright & Wright, 2010; Dewi, 2018) alongside the teaching of economics, management, and other interconnected disciplines (Westerman & Westerman, 2009; Siundu & Wegesa, 2010; Schwarze, Peeples, Schneider & Bsumek, 2014). Indeed, introducing literature to students of different disciplines is not new. Reviewing several pedagogical studies on teaching economics using English literature, Ruder (2010) recommends economics teachers to use short stories to supplement the conventional teaching methods in the economics classroom. He argues that interdisciplinary and diverse reading materials facilitate learners in understanding basic economics concepts, for instance business cycles, non-monetary benefits and costs, the market economy, supply and demand, etc. Through reading literature, one can learn about concepts of loan and interests (Kish-Goodling, 1998). Other basic principles such as opportunity cost, incentives, game theory, etc. become more interesting when introduced via literature, popular culture (Luccasen & Thomas, 2010), and film (Schwarze, et al., 2014).

Given that any business today must be responsible for the environment and stakeholders, teaching business and environmental ethics is vital with which reading works of literature can be a choice. The objective of this study is, therefore, twofold. First, it aims to identify business and environmental ethics to infer from one sample short story with sustainable themes. Secondly, it seeks to find out what values in business and environmental ethics that the students of accounting participating in this research can learn from reading the given story. This study aims to fill in the gap in blended learning approach in economics

class by way of, for instance, games, simulation, movies, and case studies (Blank, 1985; Franco, 2017; Poon, 2013; Macy & Terry, 2008) by conducting a research on teaching economics students using a piece of literature.

2. Literature Review

The article starts with a review of Ecohumanism as a learning paradigm to apply across disciplines. Just as language and literature teaching needs to include insights in sustainable business ethics, so do students of economics today have to prepare themselves to become future ecopreneurs. This section, therefore, is to go through the basic principles in business ethics and environmental ethics that economic students should know.

2.1 Business and Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics is a decision all parties should strive to involve the community, business people, and policymakers towards sustainable living. People can accomplish ecological ethics by increasing ecological awareness, skills, and attitudes. It is essential to look for innovative strategies to make people think about environmentally friendly directions by instituting environmental ethics (Barau, Stringer & Adamu, 2016). The decline of ecological ethics and local wisdom in Africa, for example, are caused by colonization, globalization, and urbanization that have all damaged indigenous knowledge systems and institutions. Citing the statements of earlier studies (e.g. Gerber, Veuthey & Martínez-Alier, 2009), Barau et al. (2016) concur that forest exploitation happens because African communities regard forests as a source of power, wealth, health, sanctity, and security.

At the conceptual level, Sonny Keraf via Agoes & Ardana (2014) mention five principles of business ethics, i.e. autonomy, honesty, justice, mutual benefit, and moral integrity. These principles are in line with the Caux Round Table's seven principles of business ethics, namely (1) business responsibility from shareholders to stakeholders, (2) economic impacts of social business towards innovation, justice, and the world community, (3) responsible business behavior from its tacit law to a spirit of mutual trust, (4) respect for rules, (5) support for multilateral trade, (6) respect for environment, and (7) avoidance of unethical operations (Young, 2003, pp. 77-80).

Environmental ethics in business practice, however, is easier said than done. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is often used to test individual ethical behaviour, as has been investigated by, for instance, Anggraini and Siswanto (2016) and Winrow (2016). The results of both studies indicate that ethical action occurs consciously, and the individual involved knows about the consequences of the performed actions. A person with confident moral attitude has the belief that the approach is right. Thus, having the opportunity and ability to carry it out, the person will perform moral actions. Seen through TPB, the more one has an intention to take action, the higher the response will be accepted. The intention is related to motivational factors that indicate how much a person is willing to try and how much effort the person seeks to take action (Buchan, 2005). It is easy for people with such intention to help ensure transformations to

more sustainable and ethical societies around the world. Here, the most preferred individual is that of the business community because s/he directly conducts environmentally linked business activities when using natural resources in the production chain. Developing ethics of care initiated by individuals is at the core of transformation towards sustainability. The business of any kinds must be responsible for the environment and stakeholders alike. Principles of business ethics and TPB` will be used as theoretical concepts in this present study. Efforts should, therefore, be made in introducing ethically sustainable business by providing enlightenment towards the envisioned transformation or what Pope Francis, quoting Saint John Paul II, calls “ecological conversion” (Francis, 2005, p. 5).

This study is to use the principles in business and environmental ethics and ethical behaviour theory above to interpret the short story chosen, to see if it can supplement the reading materials in the economics class. The bulk of research in sustainable business education often applies case study research designs and methods (e.g. Gusc & van Veen-Dirks, 2017; Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008; Winn, Pinkse, & Illge, 2012). Thus, the use of literary works as representation of real business issues is hard to find. This present study is, therefore, a cross-over of literature and social studies using Ecohumanism as the shared pedagogical paradigm. The belief that sustainable entrepreneurship must embrace environmental ethics is resonant with the virtue in literary studies, i.e. promoting social transformation.

3. Method

This two-part study used firstly, qualitative content analysis methodology to interpret a short story with environmental topics to see how the story is suitable to teach business and ecological ethics to economics students. Diverse principles in businesses and environmental ethics (e.g. Barau et al., 2016; Francis, 2005; Agoes & Ardana, 2014), as well as TPB (Buchan, 2005; Anggraini & Siswanto, 2016) become the bases to interpret the short stories. In order to interpret and contextualize the texts, this study applied library research techniques that change imagination into insight (George, 2008).

Secondly, this research also combined quantitative and qualitative data to attest the interpretative findings in Part One of the study. In conducting the second part, this study used a scenario-based survey containing a particular case; and the respondents were requested to give opinions about the situation. The research instruments include Juan A. A. Sedillo’s “Gentleman of Rio en Medio” taken as a case scenario, questionnaires, and interviews. The participants were 118 students of the Accounting Study Program of Sanata Dharma University, Indonesia, enrolling in “Business and Profession Ethics” class.

First of all, principal components analysis (PCA) was previously conducted to map out the constructs used in the research instrument. The constructs include principles in sustainable business ethics and interconnected themes procured from the short story. The 20 questionnaire statements were composed based on the constructs. Cronbach’s alpha (CA) was later used to validate the data

obtained from the questionnaires. Next, the students were assigned to read the short story and complete the survey related to the actions and attitudes of both the buyer and the seller in doing business.

As for the qualitative data, this research randomly selected 12 (twelve) students for in-depth interviews based on the selection method proposed by Kuper, Lingard, & Levinson (2008). The use of the interview to validate the quantitative data is common for research in business ethics to know better the respondents' attitude toward the object studied (e.g. Latan, et al., 2018). For clarity sake, the Indonesian version of the story was available; and questionnaires, as well as interview sessions were in Indonesian. Their critical ideas in understanding the fictional case were transcribed to compare with the quantitative data. In this way, the interviews validate the research's trustworthiness.

4. Findings and Discussion

To begin with, précis of the short story is necessary. Don Anselmo has made a deal via a real estate agent to sell his house and land in New Mexico to an American family. Having observed that the property is worth more than the price agreed upon, the buyer offers more money. Still, Don Anselmo refuses the offer for this elderly gentleman is happy with the initial deal. The Americans who eventually live there, however, are not satisfied because village children keep coming to the land to play in the orchards. Defending the children, Don Anselmo claims that the fruit trees belong to the people of the village who are mostly his relatives for whom they planted the trees. The Americans are astonished to hear his indisputable reasoning. However, they later buy the trees one by one from Don Anselmo's descendants, most probably to the disappointment of the old gentleman. What follows is a brief analysis of the story's highlights and issues to put forward that correspond with business and environmental ethics.

4.1 Sustainability

Don Anselmo is aware of his environment. When the story opens, the environmental theme is evident through the description of Don Anselmo's country estate in the valley of Rio en Medio, his ancestral home for centuries: "His house was small and wretched, but quaint. The little creek ran through his land. His orchard was gnarled and beautiful" (Sedillo, 1980, p. 55). The culture of Don Anselmo's community in New Mexico at that time highly respects the environment. Acting independently, Don Anselmo planted a tree each time a child was born to hand down. Here, the gentleman is resolute in believing that the fruit trees belong to his large families. To quote at length, his reasoning:

"I am the oldest man in the village. Almost everyone there is my relative and all the children of Rio en Medio are my sobrinos and nietos, my descendants. Every time a child has been born in Rio en Medio since I took possession of that house from my mother, I have planted a tree for that child. The trees in that orchard are not mine, Señor, they belong to the children of the village. Every person in Rio en Medio born since the railroad came to Santa Fe owns a tree in that

orchard. I did not sell the trees because I could not. They are not mine."
(Sedillo, 1980, p. 56).

Don Anselmo's intention and behavioural control to preserve the environment is commendable in the light of Theory of Planned Behavior (Anggraini & Siswanto, 2016; Barau et al. , 2016) to which the American buyer will unlikely emulate. It is not evident in the story that the American family will let the trees grow once they bought them.

4.2. Honesty

The American and Don Anselmo do the transaction honestly. According to the previous agreement, the American buyer will pay twelve hundred dollars for the property of Don Anselmo. Later discovery from the surveyor shows that much more land than eight acres is involved. The buyer is thence ready to pay for the additional area, almost twice as much. Declining the offer and settles for the original amount, Don Anselmo says:

"I know these Americans are good people, and that is why I have agreed to sell to them. But I do not care to be insulted. I have agreed to sell my house and land for twelve hundred dollars and 101 that is the price."
(Sedillo, 1980, p. 56)

The American is honest about the exact measure and worth of the land, while Don Anselmo is, likewise, honourable.

4.3 Business Competence

Another aspect of the story useful for economics students to learn is business competence. The term "competence" is defined as "the capacity of a person to understand a situation and to act reasonably" (competence. BusinessDictionary.com. Retrieved October 17, 2019, from BusinessDictionary.com website: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/competence.html>).

The American buyer uses competent, mature considerations in business. The property agent says this to Don Anselmo: "[W]hen one signs a deed and sells real property one sells also everything that grows on the land, and those trees, every one of them, are on the land and inside the boundaries of what you sold." (Sedillo, 1980, p. 56). Feeling deprived of their own space and privacy, the American family buys the ownership of the trees the descendant of Don Anselmo.

Conversely, the seller ignores business considerations. Since competence also indicates sufficiency of skill and knowledge to enable someone to re (act) appropriately in any given situation, it is the knowledge of business law that Don Anselmo barely owns.

4.4 Moral Integrity

Problem occurs because the buyer seeks privacy, while Don Anselmo allows the village children to enter the property, believing that they have the rights in so doing. Nonetheless, both the buyer and the seller stick to the agreement, given

their moral integrity. Here, the concepts of ethical integrity come from the Aristotelian, humanistic qualities in competing in the world of business, i.e. partnership characterized by sound judgments in pursuit of excellence and cooperation within the society (Solomon, 1992). This kind of business depends on trust, honesty, fairness, and compassion.

From the story, the students can learn that the customary law may be incompatible with the formal proposal. However, to respect the customary law, the buyer does not solve the tree problems by himself but to have it discussed first with the seller's children.

5. Using Short Story for Sustainability

This second part of the study examines how Juan A. A. Sedillo's short story "Gentleman of Rio en Medio" can be used to teach Business and Environmental Ethics to students of the Accounting Department. Twenty questionnaire statements are constructed based on the themes found in the short story as well as essential perspectives in the education of business ethics and environmental ethics. The accounts are made to capture the action and moral choice made by both the buyer and the seller to gauge the students' comprehension of ethics in business and environmental conservation.

This research uses ordinal Likert scale-type question and answer style. There were 118 data gathered from 127 students. Hence, the response rate is quite high, i.e. 92.91%. In the survey, the students were requested to rate 20 questionnaire statements on 5-point-scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" scored 5, "Agree" scored 4, "Neutral" scored 3, "Disagree" scored 2, and "Strongly Disagree" scored 1. The "Neutral" option was made inaccessible to prevent students from declining to vote. The participants mostly identified 8 topmost statements out of the 20 questionnaire statements that match up with business and environmental ethics. These data analysis results were organized into four focus categories, i.e. four principles in business ethics that include Building Trust, Respect for Rules, Respect for Environment, and Professionalism. Figure 1 below shows the distribution of the buyer's and seller's strength of these four ethical principles.

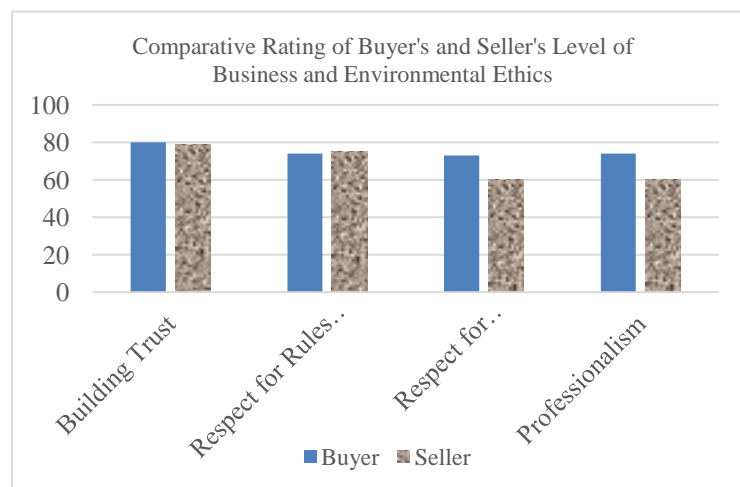


Figure 1: Comparative Level of Business & Environmental Ethics

The following table presents the questionnaire items that correspond with the four principles in business and environmental ethics emphasized in this present study.

Table 1: Questionnaire Statements and Corresponding Ethical Principles

No.	Questionnaire Statements	Principle
1	The Buyer has high integrity as shown by his willingness to pay according to the actual size of the land.	Building Trust
2	The Seller has high integrity by refusing to receive more money than the previously agreed.	Building Trust
3	The Buyer solves the orchards entitlement issue carefully by approaching the Seller's family.	Respect for Rules and Conventions
4	The Seller leaves the orchards ownership dispute with his descendants to settle.	Respect for Rules and Conventions
5	The Buyer will damage the environment by chopping down the fruit trees for commercial business interest.	Respect for Environment
6	The Seller hardly knows that the environment will be damaged after he sells the property for sufficient business interest.	Respect for Environment
7	The Buyer solves the trees entitlement problem professionally via customary and formal laws.	Professionalism
8	The Seller shows professionalism throughout the transaction process.	Professionalism

Having analyzed the quantitative data, the researchers interviewed the 12 students purposefully selected to validate the obtained data. The method of selection is that of Kuper, Lingard & Levinson, W. (2008), that is, the interviewees are seen as having good knowledge and can sufficiently clarify the information given via survey method. The following is the deployment of the buyer's and the seller's rating based on respective category supported by relevant statements made during the interviews. The average score emerges in the following four categories: 1-25 shallow, 26-50 low, 51-75 high, and 76-100 very high. The maximum rating is 100.

5.2 Respect for Rules and Conventions

Table 3 compares the students' perception of the respect for rules and conventions shown individually by the buyer and the seller of the property. The buyer's and the seller's compliance to regulations is rated, respectively, 75 and 74 by 118 respondents. Thus, both parties show high respect for regulations since their scores are within the 51-75 range.

Table 3: Rate of Respect for Rules and Conventions

No	Questionnaire Statement	Principle	Average Score
3	The Buyer solves the orchards entitlement issue carefully by approaching the seller's family.	Respect for Rules & Conventions	75
4	The Seller leaves the orchards ownership dispute with his descendants to settle.	Respect for Rules & Conventions	74

Here, according to the survey, most students believed that Don Anselmo gives respect for conventional rules concerning family treasure, and he leaves the matter to his descendants to settle. Further, during the interview, one student passed judgment on the seller saying that although law-abiding, Don Anselmo is incompetent in his business dealings. Don Anselmo is prudent when treating anything that grows on what used to be his land. He obeys customary law, but because of the business law, he is not sensible. Meanwhile, the buyer receives a slightly lower rate in terms of respect for rules. When pursued further during the interview, nearly all students pointed out the buyer's acceptance of the seller's adherence to customary law. Instead of violating the traditional convention openly, he later makes another business negotiation with Don Anselmo's descendants, hence opting for formal rules.

5.3 Respect for Environment

Table 4 presents the students' rating of the buyer's and the seller's level of care for the environment. The results of the environmental preservation assessment show that the average score is 73 for the buyer and 60 for the seller. Both are still ranked high, given the score range of 51-75. Compared to the buyer, the sellers pay less attention to environmental preservation because the seller has given up his ownership rights.

Table 4: Rate of Respect for Environment

No.	Questionnaire Statements	Principle	Average Score
5	The Buyer will damage the environment by chopping down the fruit trees for beneficial business interest.	Respect for Environment	73
6	The Seller hardly knows that the environment will be damaged after he sells the property for sufficient business interest.	Respect for Environment	60

The survey, however, shows discrepancy with statements made during the interview. On being asked about the American buyer's environmental ethics, most students disapproved his business attitude. One student had this to say:

“In my opinion, the enjoyment of business profit is only a pseudo pleasure that will be felt by only a handful of people. In the meantime, harmony among people and other living things are eternal. Therefore, let us think more about the future of our earth, leaving aside the selfishness and superficial pleasure”.

It is clear here that the student was able to grasp the importance of ecological conservation. Other interviewees concurred that the buyer wants to avoid conflict at the early stage. But later on, the American family buys the trees from Don Anselmo’s offspring, believing that replacing the trees with certain payments is acceptable because the land now belongs to the Americans.

Meanwhile, to validate the lower rating of the seller’s environmental awareness, the interviews generally reveal that Don Anselmo is blamable for not explaining how much the orchards mean to him. To infer, the younger generations of the Mexican-American family in the story hardly know the possible destruction of the environment. We later know that the Americans finally buy the tree from his descendants. During the interview, one student opined that once the fruit trees are legally purchased one by one, the younger Anselmos may have nothing left. Here we see that the short story allows students to use their critical thinking in solving ethical problems. Literary works like short stories or even movies in economics class “present an intriguing vehicle for engaging students and presenting the ethical dilemmas with the necessary depth that the students need without being preachy” (Macy& Terry, 2008, p. 48).

5.4. Professionalism

As shown in Table 5, falling within the score range of 51-75, the survey result of professionalism assessments is considered high. The seller is assessed less professional because he is not a businessman. As shown in Table 6, the rating disparity is quite significant. The buyer’s professionalism is rated 74, while the seller is rated 60.

Table 5: Rate of Professionalism

No	Questionnaire Statements	Principle	Average Score
7	The Buyer solves the trees entitlement problem professionally via customary and formal laws.	Professionalism	74
8	The Seller shows professionalism throughout the transaction process.	Professionalism	60

The interviews reveal that honesty is not always in harmony with professionalism. “If he were professional, he’d better not sell but save the land for his descendants”, one student remarked. Don Anselmo is honest, but he is naïve and not entirely professional in the land transaction.

Conversely, the students perceived that the buyer’s attempt to integrate customary and business laws is acceptable. Most respondents thus affirmed the

buyer's professionalism. Appreciating the agreement earlier made with the elderly gentleman, the buyer receives a higher rate of professionalism. The students, in general, learned about professionalism and the often conflicting ideas between customary laws and formal laws. Analysis on the qualitative data further shows that the students realized that both law types exist for *Bonum commune* to treat with discernment.

With the above findings, it is safe to reiterate that literary texts can function as supplementary teaching materials for non-literature students. The result confirms that literature often offers comparably, reliable accounts of business cases to learn from (Ruder, 2010). The accounting students under investigation can appreciate ethics in a societal sense.

In sum, using Juan A. A. Sedillo's "Gentleman of Rio en Medio" as an imaginary business case in "Business Ethics and Profession" class, this study has further proven that the short story helps the accounting students to imagine the dilemma in a property transaction. Both the buyer and the seller insist on their principles in doing business ethically. This story also helps students to appreciate customary law vis-à-vis business law, the pursuit of profit versus natural preservation, and business incompetence against professionalism. They can treat the given story as a real oscillation in today's business.

6. Conclusion

This study has shown that Ecohumanism is appropriate to apply as a philosophical basis in teaching principles of business and environmental ethics. Deliberate acts of respect and self-control are necessary for business people because only through this ethical behaviour can sustainable business uphold the co-existence of human community members and the non-human ones. Using the Theory of Planned Behavior, it becomes clear that ethical consideration is a teachable habit, and that literary works can help sharpen people's environmental awareness. This study has also shown that short fiction with the ecological theme is usable for research beyond literary fields. Such creative arts as short stories heighten the students' level of imagination. Stories allow them to understand such concepts as sustainability, honesty, business competence, moral integrity, and many more. Therefore, the discussed short story provides a pedagogical tool to teach students basic concepts in professional and environmental ethics in the business worlds. Finally, by reflecting on the teaching practice discussed, this study benefits the students through its different exposures of business ethics and ecological shrewdness for their future references when facing similar business situations. This study's contribution to interdisciplinary research, however, is limited to the use of American Literature to teach business ethics for accounting students. More works need to be done to uncover the wealth of World Literature with environmental themes to enrich research that integrates sustainability into business education.

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