



# The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry

Issue No. 1 · 2014



# The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry

Issue No. 1 • 2014

---

---

**Daniel Barbezat**  
GENERAL EDITOR  
PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS  
AMHERST COLLEGE

**Carrie Bergman**  
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT  
THE CENTER FOR CONTEMPLATIVE MIND IN SOCIETY

## EDITORIAL BOARD

**John Baugher**  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY,  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE

**Melissa Goldthwaite**  
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH  
SAINT JOSEPH'S UNIVERSITY

**Veta Goler**  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF DANCE  
SPELMAN COLLEGE

**Jill Schneiderman**  
PROFESSOR OF EARTH SCIENCE  
VASSAR COLLEGE

---

---



the center for  
Contemplative Mind in Society  
Northampton, MA

The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry  
<http://journal.contemplativeinquiry.org>

ISSN 2333-7281

© 2014 The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society  
PO Box 817  
Northampton, MA 01061  
(413)582-0071  
[journal@contemplativemind.org](mailto:journal@contemplativemind.org)

Daniel P. Barbezat, *General Editor*  
Professor of Economics  
Amherst College  
Amherst, MA 01002  
[dpbarbezat@amherst.edu](mailto:dpbarbezat@amherst.edu)

Carrie J. Bergman, *Editorial Assistant*  
Programs and Communications Coordinator  
The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society  
PO Box 817  
Northampton, MA 01061  
[carrie@contemplativemind.org](mailto:carrie@contemplativemind.org)

All manuscripts receive anonymous reviews by external referees.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, manual, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher.

Subscriptions: <http://journal.contemplativeinquiry.org/index.php/joci/about/subscriptions>

# Contents

Introduction to the First Issue.....vii  
DANIEL BARBEZAT  
CARRIE BERGMAN

Reason in the Service of the Heart:  
The Impacts of Contemplative Practices on Critical Thinking..... I  
DAVID SABLE

A Contemplative Approach to Teaching Observation Skills..... 23  
PETER G. GROSSENBACHER  
ALEXANDER J. ROSSI

Responding to the Challenges of a Contemplative Curriculum..... 35  
CHARLES BURACK

Contemplating the Effects of Oppression:  
Integrating Mindfulness into Diversity Classrooms..... 55  
BETH BERILA

Mindfulness & Bodyfulness:A New Paradigm ..... 69  
CHRISTINE CALDWELL

Secular Ethics, Embodied Cognitive Logics, and Education..... 89  
BRENDAN R. OZAWA-DE SILVA

## REFLECTIONS

A Pedagogical Heartbeat: The Integration of Critical  
and Contemplative Pedagogies for Transformative Education ..... 113  
JUAN D. MAH Y BUSCH

Honor the Negative Space..... 135  
RENÉE A. HILL

Meditations on Contemplative Pedagogy as Sanctuary ..... 141  
JACKIE SEIDEL



## Introduction to the First Issue

The reflective, contemplative and experiential methods developed within the contemplative traditions offer a complimentary set of research methods for exploring the mind and the world. When taken together with conventional methods, an enriched research methodology and pedagogy are available for opening up new pathways for deepening and enlarging perspectives which can lead to real and lasting solutions to the problems we confront.

*- from the founding vision statement of the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education by Arthur Zajonc, Emeritus Professor of Physics at Amherst College and former Director of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society*

In 2008, when Arthur Zajonc wrote these words, the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society had for the previous decade been deeply involved in supporting the integration of contemplative practices in higher education. A program of Contemplative Practice Fellowships had supported 158 faculty across North America in creating courses which integrated reflection and introspection; starting in 2005, annual week-long summer sessions on contemplative curriculum development were held at Smith College, followed by retreats for educators and annual conferences of the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE). A field of scholarship was developing, seeking “an enriched research methodology and pedagogy,” as Arthur described in the ACMHE vision statement, in service to a vision of “an education that embraces and develops an enlarged view, one that has room in it for the exploration of meaning, purpose and values and how to serve our common human future.”

*The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry* represents the latest iteration of the Center’s efforts to support the development of contemplative methods used in higher education. With this journal we seek to foster an interdisciplinary forum for exploring rigorous reflection and introspection throughout all of higher education.

Contemplative inquiry creates an openness to unfamiliar knowledge and ways of knowing; engenders empathy, connection, and compassion; and enables clearer understanding by helping us recognize and articulate our pre-existing beliefs and biases. The development of a critical first-person perspective allows

students to examine their own experience in relationship to the material they study, transforming their understanding of how their learning can affect their actions in the world.

In this way, contemplative inquiry is, at its root, about transforming relationships: the relationship of the student to the material being studied and, more broadly, our understanding of the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and systemic influences and forces which shape our individual lives and our society.

We hope the articles published here will support this process. In this first issue, the authors address how contemplative practices expand learning, knowing, and ethical development; discuss the application of practices in the classroom and the potential pitfalls arising from these methods; and examine the complementarity of contemplative pedagogies with other forms of pedagogy, looking beyond purely superficial benefits of academic achievement to the resounding significance of an education which will echo throughout our lives.

May this work, and that which follows, serve to transform education, making this a far more just and compassionate society.

Daniel Barbezat  
Carrie Bergman

## REFERENCE

Zajonc, A. (2008). "Vision." *The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/acmhe>.



# Reason in the Service of the Heart: The Impacts of Contemplative Practices on Critical Thinking

**David Sable**

*Saint Mary's University*

---

*The primary objective of this research was to determine if a specific set of contemplative practices enhance the underlying dispositions for critical thinking. The set of contemplative practices included mindfulness practice extended into journal writing, listening, inquiry, and dialogue. Taken together, this set of practices became contemplative interaction. Qualitative results showed increased self-confidence, engagement with multiple points of view, and an unexpected sense of connectedness that was stronger between students who disagreed with each other than between students who found easy agreement in their interaction. Quantitative results showed statistically significant gains in the average number of indicators for critical thinking dispositions appearing in student journals. Students' sense of connectedness was based on taking an uncertain journey together and risking the suspension of beliefs long enough to be challenged. Connectedness supports critical thinking that is more focused on deeper and broader understanding than winning an argument. It opens the door to respect, empathy, and compassion: reason in service of the heart.*

*Keywords: mindfulness, contemplation, contemplative interaction, reflective awareness, affective dispositions, critical thinking, connectedness, empathy, felt sense, dialogue*

---

## Introduction

I began to notice the impacts that certain contemplative practices had on student engagement and learning in general when a graduating commerce major wrote on his course evaluation: "I've been in university for four years. This was the first time I had to think." I believe he meant it both ways—it was the first time he was directed to *take the time to think things through* and it was the first time he felt compelled to *think deeply and independently*, to think for himself rather than parrot back what he was told. That was the turning point in my decision to do research on the impact of contemplative practices on student learning and perhaps contribute something of value to the scholarship of teaching and learning. The practices were all based on simple principles of mindfulness and awareness meditation applied to thinking, writing, listening, inquiry, and dialogue.

There is a significant challenge in teaching students to become independent, critical thinkers (Arum & Roska, 2011). There is an even greater challenge enabling students to use critical thinking to discover their connectedness to each other and the world, empathy, and compassion (Zajonc, 2008). For many students entering university today, these challenges are out of reach. The first shock is discovering that learning is more than collecting information and reiterating it (Cote & Allahaar, 2007). These students often know what they know on the basis of accepting authority without considering the source or validity of the authority (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

However, the potential of mindfulness-based contemplative practices to encourage independent thinking, introduce new ways of knowing, and engage students with each other and course content has been noted by teachers and scholars from diverse disciplines (Beauchamp, C., 2006; Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Astin, J.A., 2008; Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur & Schely, 2008; Zajonc, 2003, 2008). The research described below provides evidence that a particular set of contemplative practices enabled undergraduates to reflect on their thinking processes to become more aware of their own mental habits and how they form; inquire with open-minded curiosity, including suspension of assumptions long enough for them to be challenged; and generate justifiable, contextual understandings and judgments, individually and in collaboration. Moreover, it enabled many students to feel more connected and empathetic with people they disagreed with than people they easily agreed with at a superficial level. The contemplative practices include mindfulness meditation practice extended into journal writing, listening, inquiry, and dialogue.

### **Critical Thinking**

The critical thinking movement of the 1980's began in response to widespread criticism of the American educational system. It resulted in over 2000 academic articles by 1987 aimed at defining and improving critical thinking (Hay, 1987). Shortly after, an expert panel of 46 American and Canadian faculty members from a cross-section of academic disciplines took part in a highly collaborative Delphi method, based on the assumption that a group process definition of critical thinking would be more widely accepted than individual judgments. They achieved significant progress in creating a consensus definition of critical thinking (Facione, 1990, 2007). The consensus conceptualization of critical thinking comprised two dimensions: cognitive skills and underlying affective dispositions. The general working definition of the cognitive skills required for critical thinking included: "...purposeful, self-regulatory judgment that results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based" (Facione, 2007, p. 5).

At the same time, the majority of experts in the Delphi process also identified underlying affective dispositions for critical thinking as part of their conceptualization of critical thinking. These dispositions were considered primarily *affective* as opposed to primarily *cognitive* in that they are the essential motivation for students to apply their cognitive skills. The dispositions, listed in Table I, become essential to understanding how critical thinking can be cultivated:

**Table I.**  
Reflective dispositions for critical thinking  
(excerpted and re-sequenced from Facione, 1990, p. 13)

- 
- Open-mindedness regarding divergent world views
  - Prudence in suspending, making, or altering judgments
  - Inquisitiveness with regard to a wide range of issues
  - Honesty in facing one's own biases, prejudices, stereotypes, and egocentric or sociocentric tendencies; trust in the processes of reasoned inquiry
  - Willingness to reconsider and revise views where honest reflection suggests that change is warranted
  - Flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions
  - Understanding of the opinions of other people
  - Fair-mindedness in appraising reasoning
  - Self-confidence in one's own ability to reason
  - Concern to become and remain generally well-informed
- 

All these dispositions for critical thinking are considered "reflective," in the sense that Schön described reflective thinking (1987). As Schön described, they encourage looking back and reconsidering what has occurred (*reflection-on-action*) and they encourage mindfulness: being aware of the present, suspending intellectual habits (temporarily), and looking freshly at the present (*reflection-in-action*). This later quality of mindfulness, including the willingness to suspend judgment at least temporarily, further defines a particular kind of affective disposition: *a reflexive disposition*. Here the word "reflexive" is used in the sense of awareness "bending back" on oneself (Steier, 1991). A reflexive disposition opens awareness and permits attention to present experience both outwardly and inwardly. A reflexive disposition therefore includes awareness of feeling, one's own feeling and others' feelings. In short, most of the experts came to recognize there needed to be an integral relationship between reasoning and feeling in order for learners to be motivated.

## Contemplative Practices

The term “contemplative practices” is used in this study as an umbrella term to designate a particular set of learning activities: mindfulness meditation, structured contemplation, journal writing, mindful listening, reflective inquiry, and dialogue (Sable, 2012). Taken together, contemplative practices encourage individual and interactive examination of assumptions and the metacognitive abilities (thinking about one’s thinking) that are regarded by critical thinking experts essential to critical thinking (Kuhn, 2000; Nelson & Rey, 2000; Paul, 1990).

### *Mindfulness Meditation*

Mindfulness meditation in the context of education is a complement to discursive analysis, an unbiased investigation of experience—qualities, images, feelings, thoughts—without rejecting, fixating on or creating a storyline. Mindfulness meditation practice is training the mind by noticing whatever arises in consciousness and gently returning attention to the breath without judgment. The intention is to be curious about whatever arises but with suspended judgment—key ingredients in preparation for independent, critical thinking. One effect of the practice is to gradually become familiar with the field out of which all experience arises, the clear inner space of the mind itself. Equally important, the mindfulness practitioner becomes familiar with how the mind functions: with projections, filters, and habitual patterns mediating between direct experiences and judgment (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

In basic mindfulness meditation there is no specific situation to focus on, only the natural breathing, the sense of body, and whatever arises without provocation. Insights may come as the mind settles and notices what is not usually noticed. These insights that seem to arise incidentally provide perspectives that may remain after the meditation session. Langer (1989) further describes the outcomes of mindfulness as: “(1) creation of new categories; (2) openness to new information; and (3) awareness of more than one perspective” (p. 62). These outcomes are the same as a reflexive disposition: to “take a fresh look” while suspending judgment and thus open the door to new insight. Langer’s work is further supported by Shapiro et al. (2008), who summarized empirical studies showing significant relationships between mindfulness meditation and “self-knowledge.” Self-knowledge corresponds to the dispositions of facing one’s own biases, habitual patterns of thinking, egocentric or socio-centric tendencies, maintaining openness to divergent points of view, and willingness to reconsider and revise views where honest reflection suggests that change is warranted (Paul, 1990).

Mindfulness meditation is the foundation for the contemplative practices that follow. It supports the basic “stepping back or ‘decentering’ from personal requirements, disciplinary or social norms, and personal and disciplinary assumptions” described by Habermas (1990) and Van Gyn and Ford (2006). Each of the succeeding practices is an extension or an elaboration of mindfulness.

Not all students gain the advantages of mindfulness, perhaps because they cannot manage the discipline of regular practice. Classroom meditation sessions are limited by necessity to short periods. For many students more structured contemplation exercises with specific content to focus their attention are more engaging than mindfulness meditation using the breath alone.

*Structured Contemplation: Holding the Question, an Image, or a Statement*

While the foundation practice for training attention and being present is mindfulness meditation, other structured contemplation exercises also train the attention and open awareness. Mindfulness meditation has no intended object of thought other than the experience of breathing. In contrast, structured contemplation is distinctly focused on a particular question, statement or image. As described by Buchmann (1988), Chickering, Dalton and Stamm (2006), Seamon and Zajonc (1998) and Zajonc (2008), the learning objective of structured contemplation is to take the student's awareness past data noticed only from habitual patterns of thinking to fresh, direct experience.

There are two steps to the structured contemplation practice: 1) holding the object of contemplation and 2) deepening understanding. First, one trains the attention on the object of contemplation *without analyzing or manipulating it in any way*, following the practices described by Seamon and Zajonc (1998) and Zajonc (2008). The contemplation can be in virtually any dimension of thought: social, ethical, scientific, political, or spiritual. In the second step of contemplation one begins to *open the attention beyond the words of the question itself and allow deeper awareness to emerge*. Students open to new meaning that may emerge. In this case, the student is directed to the present moment, not only to memory. Rather than remain entirely intellectual, one may also notice an internal "felt sense" or perceive something previously unnoticed or unformed in words at first (Gendlin, 2000, 1978; Jaison, 2007).

By slowing down the thinking process, the student opens the mental space for fresh perspective to emerge. New dimensions of meaning can appear to come from either side: something new about the questions may emerge or something new inside oneself in response to the questions may emerge (Gendlin, 1978; Gendlin & Levin, 1997). In other words, something new may appear to emerge from the perceived or something new may emerge in the perceiver, or both. This "monitoring of one's thinking" is extended to the affective domain and the subtle or as yet unarticulated meanings associated with the original contemplation question, image, or statement can be brought to conscious attention.

What students may gain from the two steps of structured contemplation is encouragement and familiarity with the affective dispositions of open-mindedness, flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions, "honesty in facing one's own biases, prejudices, stereotypes, egocentric or sociocentric tendencies" (Facione,

1990, p. 13), and prudence in suspending, making or altering judgments. In turn, these dispositions support the self-regulatory judgments in interpretation and inference, core components of critical thinking skills (Endres, 1997).

### *Journals*

Immediately after structured contemplation students are asked to articulate their response to the contemplation questions in writing. The purpose is in part to continue the introspective inquiry and find the fresh words that best convey what they themselves think and feel. It is more of a challenge to write than to think one's response and the intention here is to add a sense of commitment to their responses (Goldberg, 1986). Students are given the time to write their journal entries in class and are advised to write a few paragraphs, but not more than a page. Students are also asked to post what they write after class (via course management software) so that the instructor can see how students are thinking before the next class. In general, narrative journals have become a common pedagogical tool to encourage students to reflect on questions, "explore reactions, discuss relationships, and connect new meaning to past experiences" (Brunt, 2005, p. 257).

### *Journal Reading in Pairs: Contemplative Interaction*

The next stages of the reflective learning process move students from introspection to *contemplative interaction*. Ordinarily, contemplative practices are regarded as individual and introspective. From this point forward students interact and construct what they know as a collaborative process in pairs and in later steps with the whole class led by the instructor. Ultimately, contemplative interaction is aimed at establishing an atmosphere of respect and dialogue where students themselves can apply independent critical thinking. The challenge of reflective interaction begins with reading out loud and listening.

### *Reading, Listening and Reflecting Back (Paraphrasing)*

First, the listener is instructed to listen, absorb what is said, to notice any *tendency to compare with his or her own journal* and make judgments about what is said by the reader. Langer (1989) calls this tendency a "premature cognitive commitment" (p. 19). By simply calling attention to this possible habitual pattern of thinking, the listener is alerted and can to some degree suspend judgments for the moment, just listening openly. Listening in pairs allows students who are reading to each other to feel less rushed and less pressured than speaking in the larger classroom format.

The listener then paraphrases or reflects back what has been said, trying to communicate just what the first person said without adding to or interpreting their meaning. The first person confirms, corrects, or fills in if something important

to them is missing. The intention of this step is two-fold: 1) the listener may notice that a significant amount of what they hear, even from someone sitting close in paired interaction, is forgotten, and 2) the reader may notice that a significant amount of what they said is not retained. Once the process is complete, the reader may have greater trust that the listener did hear what was said. After the process is reversed and both parties have made the effort to listen with care and accuracy, there may be a new-found respect for each other. However, in the similar process called *focusing* Gendlin (1978) reported that it was often necessary to give participants permission to clarify what was said several times, ensuring them it was “normal” to need clarification, and creating some humor and humility by offering examples of his own lapses and mistakes.

While there is a tendency for some students to return to a more typical unstructured conversation during contemplative interaction, even moderate attention to the instructions may establish the respect and trust needed to slow down the premature tendencies toward persuasion or advocacy. The process leaves more space for each person to reconsider for themselves what they have written in their contemplation response. The inherent openness of the practice makes it easier to reconsider and revise views where honest reflection suggests that change is warranted. Likewise, mindful listening in pairs may lead to flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions, open-mindedness regarding divergent world views, and fair-mindedness in appraising reasoning.

### *Reflective Inquiry*

Having read, listened and reflected back what was said, the next interactive stage is reflective inquiry. Reflective inquiry is the expression of *open-minded curiosity* by the listener, including suspension of one’s initial assumptions about what the reader meant long enough for the assumptions to be challenged. This means asking “innocent” rather than leading questions (Isaacs, 1999; Rosenberg, 2005). For example, “What did you mean when you said \_\_\_\_\_?” By contrast, leading questions of the form “Did you mean to say \_\_\_\_\_,” or “Would \_\_\_\_\_ be a better word?” are discouraged by the instructor. Reflective inquiry is intended to correct mistaken assumptions of the inquirer and increase depth of understanding (Isaacs, 1992, 1999). When the pair are comfortable with the process, reflective inquiry also encourages the writer to look again at what they have written, clarify it, and perhaps go further (Driscoll, Sable, & Van Esch, 2005; Lee, 2004). However, to do reflective inquiry without the inquirer projecting assumptions and preferences is generally challenging for students in the early weeks of practice.

From inquiry, students may begin to generate new meaning derived from their interaction.

### *Dialogue*

Dialogue is a generative interchange or “stream of meaning between” participants (Bohm, 1996, p. 6) as opposed to an exchange of views where individuals simply advocate their positions. All the practices to this point, from mindfulness meditation through reflective inquiry, strengthen the possibility that students will explore each other’s point of view rather than merely defend against each other’s point of view. Dialogue is an interchange where new understanding and insight is developed from the present experience between the partners or within a group. If the interaction moves to dialogue they may generate a third point of view, a synthesis or transcending alternative. “The most important parts of any conversation are those that neither party could have imagined before starting” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 7). Scharmer (2009) and Senge et al. (2008) refer to the conditions that lead to this generative space as *presencing*, emphasizing a similar, preliminary process of recognizing habitual patterns and assumptions leading up to fresh insight and creative dialogue. At this point, all the dispositions for critical thinking should be primed.

### *Facilitated Class Discussions and Critical Thinking*

When paired interactions are finished (generally 15-20 minutes for both students to read, reflect, and inquire) the instructor reassembles the whole class and may begin with a brief period of silence so that students can settle their minds again and refer back to what they originally wrote. The instructor may ask, “Is there anything you would change?” “Has anything shifted now that you have interacted about this question with a partner?” This enables students to “take a fresh look” and reconsider what they wrote. The point is not necessarily to arrive at preconceived conclusions. Rather, the facilitated discussion is an extension of dialogue to the whole group. The “received wisdom” presented in lectures and texts has now been explored and linked to personal meaning. Personal meanings have been shared in pairs. The range of interpretations and insights can now be solicited from the whole group in an atmosphere prepared for critical thinking and kindness. It is here that students are most likely to recognize that they are participating in the construction of meaning not as a competition or argument but as collaboration.

Students are more prone at this point to respond to each other rather than direct all their attention to the instructor. In this final stage, the instructor encourages the students to explore their own language further by paraphrasing, inquiry and dialogue. The cognitive skills of critical thinking may now appear aimed at enriching meaning and defining truth *within contexts*, rather competing to win a point or demonstrating skepticism.

### **Methodology**

The primary research question of this multi-year study was: What are the impacts of contemplative practices on the dispositions for critical thinking in undergraduate



courses? Previous research relied on scholars' models of critical thinking and the reflective dispositions that produce it (Facione, Facione, & Giancarlo, 2001). There is a gap in the literature regarding measures or any evaluative criteria derived from students' experiences of what enhances critical thinking. The recommendations of Brunt (2005), Greenwood (2000), and Ruth-Sahd (2003) called for a more phenomenological account of critical thinking. How do students describe and explain their experience? How can their experience inform standardized measures of the dispositions for critical thinking? Is there any change in students' dispositions over an eleven-week course?

A mixed methods approach of qualitative and quantitative research was chosen in order to develop a comprehensive response to these research questions. From qualitative research (Phase I), theory describing students' experience and possible indicators were derived to serve as the dependent variables in the quantitative phase of the research (Phase II).

#### *Qualitative Methods*

Grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006) were chosen for Phase I because the approach is empirical, data-oriented, and systematic. Grounded theory methods enable the researcher to work from a phenomenological point of view, *building theory from participants' experience rather than preconceiving theory to confirm or disprove*. The data were the transcripts of one-to-one interviews and audio recordings of the one-to-one sessions that yielded the transcripts. Eight former students who informally expressed interest in learning more about contemplative practices were selected from old class lists. They were selected from two types of courses taught by the researcher. The first type was interdisciplinary: *Spirituality and Work* and *Spirituality in the Workplace*. These courses draw on the fields of organizational development, cultural anthropology, history, and religious studies. They cover topics such as meanings of spirituality in the workplace, what motivated various trends and movements historically, and the relationship of modern interpretations of spirituality to corporate social responsibility and leadership development. Four of the students were from these courses.

The second type of course is from within religious studies: *Buddhism* and *The Buddhist Path*. These courses present the classical teachings of Buddhism in a manner relevant to contemporary society and cover topics such as the development of ego, the ontology of being, and the development of compassion. Four of the students were from these courses. Three of the eight had taken courses in both categories. Selection was purposive, aimed at gaining rich in-depth information from students who were familiar with the contemplative practices. This kind of selection process was appropriate because the qualitative research was focused on the meaning of the "lived experience" of the students (Van Manen, 1990) rather than statistical validity (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978).

*Quantitative Methods*

Phase II of the research was designed to test the hypothesis that the application of a particular set of contemplative practices in the classroom will produce significant increases in indicators for reflective dispositions (Table 2) over the duration of an eleven-week undergraduate course. The indicators were developed from previous students' experience as well as the expert consensus established by Facione (1990).

All the contemplative practices were introduced in the first class and used each week in class. The primary quantitative research methods used were content analysis of students' written work, data reduction, data analysis through descriptive statistics, and interpretation of results. The desired number of participants for statistical analysis was at least 40. The total number of participants in the quantitative research was 43.

**Table 2**  
Measurable Indicators

**Does the contemplation response demonstrate that the student is:**

---

1. slowing down; giving more time to understand one's own thoughts and the underlying felt sense?
  2. allowing openness: letting something come without searching or trying to make it happen?
  3. exploring what he or she really thinks?
  4. finding personal meaning in course content?
  5. identifying one's own assumptions, tendencies, habits of thought and feelings?
  6. understanding others' perspectives (intellectual)?
  7. feeling connected with others (affective, knowing others better)?
  8. feeling challenged but willing to work with obstacles?
  9. applying the techniques from the contemplative practices (e.g., listening, inquiry, dialogue) beyond the classroom exercise (e.g., in listening to students in other courses, reading texts critically, learning a language)?
-

### *Data Sources and Data Preparation*

There were four data sources collected from the participants for quantitative analysis:

- 1) 410 written journal entries (allowing for two missed assignments per student) filed each week electronically over eleven weeks (from a few sentences to a whole page when first handwritten in class). Following Angelo (1995), weekly journal entries allowed the researcher to review the development of dispositions throughout the term, not just at midterm and final exams.
- 2) 43 term papers (evidence from work done outside the context of the classroom)
- 3) 56 end-of-term anonymous questionnaires designed to assess the value of reflective practices and other pedagogical features from students' perspectives; and
- 4) Five twenty-minute interviews with six students done after the term was over. (One interview was with two students who asked to be interviewed together.)

The instructor's memos and notes written throughout the course served as a fifth data source.

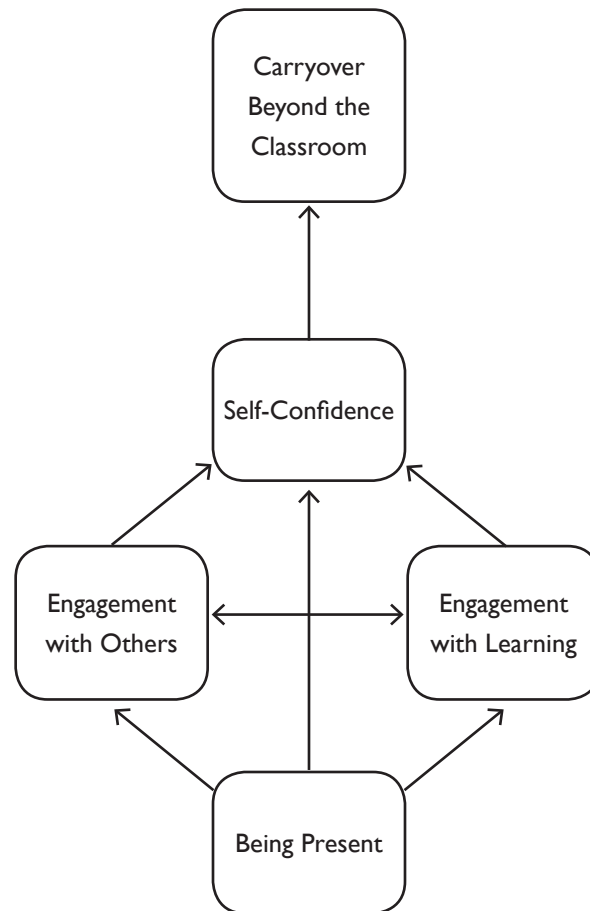
The journal entries (1) provided evidence of in-class contemplative practice outcomes and provided data on their immediate impact. Comparison of results from the journals (1) and term papers (2) provided opportunities for triangulation of data sources produced from in-class and independent learning activities. The end-of-term questionnaires (3) provided some degree of triangulation with qualitative research results and also helped to identify confounding variables—what may have been influencing the students' learning experiences besides the contemplative practices. The interview transcripts (4) provided insight into confounding variables and triangulation with the end-of-term questionnaires. The instructor's memos (5) revealed what the instructor learned in the process about the topic being researched, the research design, and his own thinking processes.

## **Results**

### *Qualitative*

When sunlight passes through a diamond different facets appear to have different colors. In the same way, students' experiences of contemplative practices in the classroom appear distinct but agree at the source: being present. Being Present is the foundational theme or process explaining how students experience the impact of contemplative practices. Figure 1 maps the major themes that emerge.

Three more themes emerged from the foundation as the effects of being present: Engagement with Others, Engagement with Learning, and Self-Confidence.



**Figure 1.** Major themes in students' experience of reflective practices

There was no evidence to suggest a developmental sequence for Engagement with Others and Engagement with Learning. Some students progressed from Being Present to engagement with course content and others became more engaged with the communication process first. Although these two themes are distinct, they are interrelated and create a “virtuous cycle” with Self-Confidence, supporting and increasing each other over time.

One final theme emerged as a kind of fruition: Carryover Beyond the Classroom. The influences of contemplative practices were clearly not limited to the immediate conditions of guided exercises or the familiar cohort of students who were practicing in the same way. What is learned or realized was applicable in other courses, in workplaces, and in personal relationships.

In general, the contemplative practices positively affected students' dispositions for critical thinking. As the excerpts from the data below show, the contemplative practices also deeply affect students' communication skills, understanding of themselves, and understanding others. *One unanticipated outcome was that some students felt more connected to people in the class that they disagreed with than to people they agreed with easily. The mutual exploration of different views, through listening, inquiry, and dialogue gave individuals an unexpected feeling of being heard and hearing others, of being enriched and seeing the world through someone else's eyes.*

For some, finding quick and easy agreement with classmates was a more neutral experience or even a disappointment compared to feeling connected through contemplative interaction. Such outcomes do not develop instantly in the first session of the course. On the contrary, students felt challenged because most have not encountered this type of learning activity before.

On the personal level, the contemplation practices brought knowing with the mind and knowing with the body together. Structured contemplation revealed underlying responses that they may not at first have been aware of or able to articulate. Yet when their attention was open to the feelings and sensations in the body, it added a quality of authenticity and created a kind of confidence to articulate experience in fresh language.

...[W]hat we call the felt sense part, it grows throughout, right. So at first, of course, you're just kind of getting in touch...or just being quiet...but then as I spoke my words out loud to someone else [in interaction] I felt this deepening, the felt sense is deepening, then it's deepening even more as I'm getting their perspective...and then this came up and I never thought about it that way...wow, I would never have thought I could have gone to that extent about this particular topic. – A1

Paying attention to what happens with your body, with the introspective, you have the time to just sit and process it in your own mind. It really helps you to get a better grasp of this [contemplation question] and look at it in a much broader way than you would if you just delved into it. If I'm forced to just take a stance on an issue or whatever, and I don't have time to process it, it's a very narrow focus. But this widens that focus a lot more which opens up room to hear other opinions and to look at it in new ways that you wouldn't have before. – A3

...[I]f someone would say something in class, and I would be instantly agitated and ready to respond about it, instead of just responding I would stop and think, "Okay, why am I so upset by this; what is this

hitting on?” ... [Y]ou know, you have to be aware of your own biases, but you have to be aware of that felt sense and that deeper reaction that you are getting from something. – B2

As trust in their own thinking led to communication, participants demonstrated an increasing understanding of others' perspectives. Using multi-logical perspectives is regarded by critical thinking scholars as a disposition for critical thinking. The quotes below illustrate how different views began to emerge as contextual and multi-layered, but not arbitrary or merely idiosyncratic.

... [T]hat's how you get to more basic stuff behind what they are saying—you ask them what they mean about certain things... I find that is when they give personal examples... I just feel that I can better understand where they are coming from, more personally... it tended to expand my thinking, and think about things I might have missed. – B3

I think to begin with that that the introspective part is done before the interactive part is really helpful because it puts you in a new state of mind where you're ready to hear, to hear another person's opinion. And the interactive part is extremely beneficial for everything. You're forced to look at an issue through someone else's eyes, and you can't, you're not supposed to take on your own assumptions or biases when they're presenting their case. So you're looking at it an entirely new way. And then you can usually see it from their perspective, even though you might have another perspective on it, you can see where they're coming from because of the openness that you found in the introspective part... that in turn influences your own perspective again because you've been able to see it in this new way. – A3

The language difference in one way helped them [ESL students] phrase things in ways I never would have thought of phrasing it; and saying it in ways I never would have thought of saying it. One girl said that “Compassion was a sadness in everyone's heart.” I never would have thought that; it blew my mind. It was really interesting to hear that... So, yes there is a language barrier, but there is also another way of thinking about it that is completely different than I was raised... she thought of the question completely differently. I would go, “Oh wow.” – A1

### *Feeling Connected with Others*

Although the student participants were asked open-ended questions by the researcher in the qualitative research interviews, most of their responses confirmed what the researcher already suspected based on his observations over years of teaching with contemplative practices. The researcher was content to clarify and ground his assumptions in the words of the students. However, this theme—feeling connected with others—took a turn that the researcher did not anticipate. *Many of the students felt more connected to each other based on their exploration of differences than based on holding similar views.*

I'm finding it hard to find words that describe the feeling of hearing other people's perspectives and learning—maybe "connection" is a good one... I find, in a weird way, even though you'd think that's a disconnect because we're all so different, it's almost a connection to people. – A2

[With respect to interaction with someone whose response doesn't agree with yours]...you have this automatic feeling, "Well, they're so different than me, I would have nothing in common with them. I could never interact with them." But if you're led into an interaction, and you're both coming at it in a genuine way, and really attempting to understand, it can really make a huge difference.... I find it really facilitates the back and forth and the discussion and the inquiry a lot more, because you're attempting to understand something that you don't. Whereas if you're very much in agreement with your partner, you don't have that same sense of curiosity because you almost have that feeling of, "I know where they're coming from." – A4

When pairs of students are both "coming at it in a genuine way, and really attempting to understand," something happens that is unexpected even for the students. The sense of connection grows because of understanding how another person arrived at a different point of view. Even when the presupposition is "I could never interact with them" the shared risk of being curious "can really make a huge difference."

Maybe in that vulnerability...feeling so unsure, finding something that backs up or supports your own response or your own beliefs, helps me to relax a little bit because I'm not so strange... I'm just like the other person, so it is okay for me to express it in whatever way I am expressing it. – B1

### Quantitative Research: Analysis and Results

Phase II of the research was designed to test the hypothesis that the application of a particular set of contemplative classroom practices will produce significant increases in the indicators for reflective dispositions over the duration of an eleven-week undergraduate courses.

The quantitative approach undertaken in Phase II of this mixed methods study provided the added value of measuring validity of the hypothesis that contemplative practices have positive impact on the reflective dispositions for critical thinking.

On the first pass through the students' journals, independent inter-rater reliability of the two research assistant (RA) observers' scores was not strongly established. Having first scored participants journal entries independently, the RAs became more experienced at making judgments. By exploring each other's judgments and coming to agreement, the research assistants strengthened each other's understanding of the indicators. It was concluded later that the indicators are not yet discrete enough for two independent observers to strongly agree whether they are present in contemplation responses or not. However, the RAs came to consensus agreement on the presence of indicators found in student journals by working together. The data from their consensus scores was analyzed to test the hypothesis.

The consensus scores for week I and week II were used to see if there was a statistically significant difference in the number of indicators appearing between the first week of the term and the last week of the term for all 43 participants. A 2-tailed, paired t-test was appropriate because indicator totals per week per student can be considered a scale level of measurement and the same participants were in both conditions, week I and week II (a within-groups design). T-test results for weeks I and II (summarizing all participants who submitted journal entries in week I and week II) are shown in Table 3 (below).

**Table 3**  
Paired Samples T-test

**Paired Samples Statistics**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Week 1	3.5161	31	1.69058	.30364
Week 11	2.4516	31	1.33763	.24024

**Paired Samples Test**

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 @1 - @2	1.06452	1.56919	.28184	.48893	1.64010	3.777	30	.001



There was approximately a full point increase (1.06) in the average total of indicators per week comparing week 1 to week 11. The range of weekly averages was approximately 1.5 to 4 indicators over 11 weeks. The full point gain over 11 weeks is statistically significant ( $t = 3.8, df = 30, p < .01$ ). The t-test rejects the null hypothesis at the 99% confidence interval and provided plausible evidence that the contemplative practices increased occurrences of the dispositions for critical thinking in the participants.

### *Limitations*

However, the data required further analysis. Weeks 4 through 10 indicated there were confounding factors influencing the outcomes. The questions used in the contemplative practices varied week to week and it was initially assumed the impact of using different questions would be negligible. The particular questions may have had a larger impact than anticipated. All of the quantitative research participants interviewed after the course reported that some questions were more difficult than others, and that the questions at the start of the term (in both courses) were easier to respond to. Several students responded that the contemplation questions seemed progressive and the earlier contemplations helped to inform their responses to later questions. However, when questions in weeks 4 through 10 included language or referred to experiences that were unfamiliar, the questions became too difficult for some students to respond to with any confidence. Only some of students were able to use difficult questions to develop their own new questions that would clarify the original question. Despite explicit classroom instructions that contemplation responses may legitimately create new, clarifying questions rather than provide answers, many students supposed that an answer was required and lost confidence. The principal researcher's memos corroborate this by recalling several conversations with students in class and after class where students would say "we don't understand the question," but they would not write that or explore it in their submitted responses. Analysis of responses by students with higher than average total indicators per week revealed that they were able to frame their responses with new questions when they were unfamiliar with the language or experiences referred to in original questions.

### *Summary*

Overall, there is evidence that the contemplative practices had a positive influence on the reflective dispositions for critical thinking. T-test analysis of total indicator scores from the first to the last week of the term, triangulated with correlation of total indicators and exam scores, as well as end of term questionnaires, demonstrated a significant relationship between the contemplative practices and the underlying affective dispositions for critical thinking.

## Conclusion

This research addressed the gap in research on students' experience of the underlying dispositions related to independent, critical thinking. Specifically, this study explored the impact of using a specific set of classroom-based contemplative practices to increase students' dispositions for engaged, independent critical thinking. As one research advisor noted, the contemplative practices had a purpose and effect similar to laboratory sections in physical science courses (Duffy, 2012). They established the relevance of principles and theory through repeated, practical demonstration. Like a lab, students saw the outcome of practicing and exploring for themselves. In this case, rather than seeing the heartbeat of a frog or a color change in a Petri dish, students began *to see how their ideas formed, how others' ideas formed, and how mindfulness can lead to contextual understanding, improved communication, and a sense of connectedness.*

The research provided both qualitative and quantitative evidence that a particular set of contemplative practices, used over the course of a whole term, strengthens students' dispositions for critical thinking. T-test analysis of total indicator scores from the first to the last week of the term, triangulated with correlation of total indicators and exam scores, as well as end of term questionnaires, provided plausible evidence of a significant relationship between the contemplative practices and reflective dispositions for critical thinking.

Mindfulness meditation practice is a foundation for improving student engagement with course content as well as with each other. As students developed confidence, many of them reported the benefits of contemplative practices beyond the course, in other courses, and in their personal relationships. From an academic perspective, high occurrence of the indicators for reflective dispositions was associated with higher marks on final essay exams that were graded in part for critical thinking. The contemplative practices themselves could make valuable additions to instructors' pedagogical methods wherever critical thinking is required.

For these students, meaning began to emerge as contextual and multi-layered—it was not arbitrary or merely idiosyncratic opinion. Critical thinking for them included an underlying mindfulness, personal engagement with each other as well as the subject matter, self-confidence, and the transfer of these dispositions to situations beyond classroom exercises.

The deeper awareness encouraged by mindfulness applied to structured contemplation, journal writing, listening, inquiry, and dialogue relates to the primary cognitive skill of self-regulation, or metacognition (Flavell, 1976, 1979). This “monitoring of one's thinking” was extended to the affective domain by the contemplative practices. The subtle or unarticulated meanings of a contemplated question, image, or statement were brought to conscious attention individually and in interaction. It was here that “honesty in facing one's own biases, prejudices, stereotypes,

and egocentric or sociocentric tendencies” permitted the openness and flexibility to consider alternatives (Facione, 1990, p.13).

The qualitative research established a substantive theory with five themes that explain the impact of contemplative practices on students’ dispositions: being present, engagement with learning, engagement with others, self-confidence, and carry-over beyond the classroom. The theory was amply supported by well-articulated experiences reported by students. The qualitative research led to the unexpected outcome that some students feel more connected to those who have different perspectives than those who immediately agreed with them. *This kind of connection is different than mere conceptual agreement. This connection was based on students taking an uncertain journey together, risking the suspension of beliefs long enough to be challenged, and from that risk developing new meaning as well as respect for differences.*

Clear, directive guidelines from an instructor and modeling mindful listening and reflective inquiry in group dialogue were important. But the confidence to express reflective, independent, critical thinking publically came when students felt connected by a challenging journey they took both individually and together. To some extent feeling connected with others in this way was a process that developed unintentionally; it was not an explicit learning objective. It was a kind of natural respect and empathy, knowing that inner work must be behind everyone’s journey: reason in service of the heart.

## RESOURCES

- Angelo, T. A. (1995). “Classroom assessment for critical thinking.” *Teaching of Psychology* 22(1), 6-7.
- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1978). *Organizational Learning: a Theory of Action Perspective*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Arum, R., & Roska, J. (2011). *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1992). *Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-Related Patterns in Students’ Intellectual Development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Beauchamp, C. (2006). *Understanding Reflection in Teaching: a Framework for Analyzing the Literature*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University, Montreal.
- Brunt, B. (2005). “Models, measurement, and strategies in developing critical-thinking skills.” *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing* 36(6), 255-262.
- Buchmann, M. (1988). “Argument and contemplation in teaching.” *Oxford Review of Education* 14(2), 201-214.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

- Chickering, A. W., Dalton, J. C., & Stamm, L. (2006). *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cote, J., & Allaha, A. (2007). *Ivory Tower Blues: a University System in Crisis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Driscoll, C., Sable, D., & van Esch, L. (2005). "Applying transformative learning to ethics education." *Atlantic Universities' Teaching Showcase*. IX, 69-87. Halifax, NS: Dalhousie University.
- Duffy, J. (August 1, 2012). Personal communication.
- Endres, B. (1997). "Habermas and critical thinking." *Philosophy of Education: Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society*, 168-177.
- Facione, P. A. (1990). *Critical Thinking: a Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction*. Research findings and recommendations. Executive Summary. Millbrae, CA: The California Academic Press.
- Facione, P. A. (2007). *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts*. 2007 update. Millbrae, CA: California Academic Press.
- Facione, P. A., Facione, N. C., & Giancarlo, C. (2001). *California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory: CCTDI Inventory Manual*. Millbrae, CA: California Academic Press.
- Flavell, J. H. (1979). "Metacognition and cognitive monitoring: A new area of cognitive-developmental inquiry." *American Psychologist* 34(10), 906-911.
- Frisson, S. (2009). "Semantic underspecification in language processing." *Language and Linguistics Compass* 3(1), 111-127. doi:10.1111/j.1749-818X.2008.00104.x
- Gendlin, E. T. (1978). *Focusing*. New York: Everest House.
- Gendlin, E. T. (2000). "When you feel the body from the inside, there is a door." Presentation at the Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference, May 25-29, 2000. Anaheim, CA.
- Gendlin, E., & Levin, D. M. (1997). *Language beyond Postmodernism: Saying and Thinking in Gendlin's Philosophy*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*. Mill Valley, CA: The Sociology Press.
- Goldberg, N. (1986). *Writing Down the Bones*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Greenwood, J. (2000). "Critical thinking and nursing scripts: The case for the development of both." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 31(2), 428-436.
- Habermas, J. (1990). *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hay, E. (1987). "The critical thinking movement and its implication for the teaching

- of speech communication.” Paper presented at the 73rd Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (Boston, MA, November 5-8, 1987). Retrieved from ERIC database (ED290196).
- Isaacs, W. (1999). *Dialogue: the Art of Thinking Together*. New York: Doubleday.
- Jaison, B. (2007). *Integrating Experiential and Brief Therapy*. (2nd ed.). Toronto: Focusing for Creative Living.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to Our Senses*. New York: Hyperion.
- Kuhn, D. (2000). “Metacognitive development.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 9(5), 178-181.
- Langer, E. J. (1989). *Mindfulness*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Lee, V. S. (2004). *Teaching and Learning through Inquiry: a Guidebook for Institutions and Instructors*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Nelson, T. O., & Rey, G. (2000). “Metacognition and consciousness: A convergence of psychology and philosophy.” *Consciousness and Cognition* 9(2), 147-148.
- Paul, R. W. (1990). *Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive in a Rapidly Changing World*. Santa Rosa, CA: The Foundation for Critical Thinking.
- Rosenberg, M. B. (2005). *Nonviolent Communication: A Way of Life*. Encinitas, CA: Puddle Dancer Press.
- Ruth-Sahd, L. (2003). “Intuition: A critical way of knowing in a multicultural nursing curriculum.” *Nursing Education Perspectives* 24(3), 129-34.
- Sable, D. (2012) *The Impacts of Reflective Practices on the Dispositions for Critical Thinking in Undergraduate Courses*. Doctoral thesis. Retrieved <http://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/15464>.
- Scharmer, C. O. (2009). *Theory U*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Schön, D. (1987). *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Seamon, D., & Zajonc, A. (Eds.). (1998). *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Science*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Senge, P., Smith, B., Kruschwitz, N., Laur, J., & Schely, S. (2008). *The Necessary Revolution*. New York: Doubleday.
- Shapiro, S., Brown, K., Astin, J., & Duerr, M. (2008). “Toward the Integration of Meditation into Higher Education: A Review of Research.” *The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society*. Retrieved from <http://www.contemplativemind.org/admin/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/MedandHigherEd.pdf>.
- Steier, F. (Ed.). (1991). *Research and Reflexivity*. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.

Van Gyn, G., & Ford, C. (2006). *Teaching for Critical Thinking. Green Guide No. 6*. London, ON: Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Zajonc, A. (2003). *Survey of Transformative and Spiritual Dimensions of Higher Education*. Amherst, MA: The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society.

Zajonc, A. (2008). *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*. Herndon, VA: Lindisfarne Books.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

DAVID SABLE, PhD, began teaching at Saint Mary's University in Canada in 2000, bringing with him fifteen years of professional experience in the non-profit sector as a training and education consultant. In 2012, David held a sessional appointment as Assistant Professor in the Religious Studies Department with an equal focus on teaching and research. In the same year, David completed the Interdisciplinary PhD program at Dalhousie University in Halifax. His thesis, "The Impact of Reflective Practices on the Dispositions for Critical Thinking in Undergraduate Courses," was nominated for Best Thesis in the Social Sciences and his work noted in *The National Teaching and Learning Forum* 2012 21(4). He continues to teach part-time at Saint Mary's University and Mount Saint Vincent University and is working on a book for educators documenting the diverse impacts of reflective practices on learning.

David has been studying and practicing meditation and Buddhism in the Shambhala tradition since 1971 and continues to teach at meditation programs throughout North America. He was trained and authorized as a meditation teacher by the renowned Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Chögyam Trungpa, and continues to teach in Shambhala Centers throughout North America. David is a founding member of the Authentic Leadership in Action Institute ([ALIA](#)) and a faculty member of the [Atlantic Contemplative Centre](#).

# A Contemplative Approach to Teaching Observation Skills<sup>1</sup>

**Peter G. Grossenbacher**

*Naropa University*

**Alexander J. Rossi**

---

*Careful observation of one's experience provides access to present-moment information, the foundation for mindfulness practice and contemplative education more generally. Contemplative observation comprises a set of trainable skills, including noticing, slowing, and reflecting. Skillful ways to work with observation, including distinguishing (between observation and interpretation), recalling, and describing, can also be taught, learned, practiced, and applied. Two assignments drawn from a course on the psychology of perception, sensory awareness practice and sensory description, are presented as tandem means for teaching all six observation skills. Several aspects of this contemplative observation pedagogy make it useful in higher education generally, and it is also well suited for content-specific use in or adaptation to courses across a variety of disciplines. The aim is to foster (instructor and) student engagement with discovering lived experience through the refinement and focusing of observation skills.*

*Keywords: contemplative pedagogy, education, mindfulness, observation skills, sensory awareness*

---

Generally speaking, people use two sources of information as the basis for all manner of mental activities such as questioning, understanding, decision-making, planning, etc. One entails recalling that which has been previously learned, and a great deal of educational effort has traditionally focused on cultivating this resource. The other requires cognizance of that which is occurring in the present moment, an ability that has been largely ignored, or at best taken for granted, throughout many higher education enterprises. The growth of contemplative education offers an increasing array of pedagogical theories and methods that can help educators to understand and leverage the relevance of present-moment information to higher education generally, as well as to the learning of subject matter specific to a given discipline.

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors thank Cynthia B. Drake and Jordan T. Quaglia for their helpful comments on drafts of this manuscript. For communication regarding this paper, please contact the first author at [peterg@naropa.edu](mailto:peterg@naropa.edu).

Mindfulness, a prominent component of many contemplative pedagogies, involves the commitment of attention to occurrence in the present moment, which can thereby cultivate awareness of present-moment information. Mindfulness emphasizes observation while de-emphasizing the interpretation of observations. This foregrounded role of observer offers a vantage point well suited for witnessing the arising and passing of moment-to-moment phenomena, whether they appear internally, e.g., bodily sensations, or externally, e.g., sights and sounds. Observation thus plays a central role in making any sort of present-moment information available for use, either in the moment or subsequently. From this perspective, observation plays a foundational role in taking a contemplative approach to experience. Training the powers of observation can equip students with a needed basis for personally informed inquiry: "... questions invariably have their origins in observations. But I have noted, year after year, that few of my students have ever been invited to take the time to quiet themselves and patiently observe their surroundings" (Uhl and Stuchul, 2011, p. 62). Such an invitation can be offered systematically via the methods detailed below.

This paper explains a contemplative approach to the teaching and learning of observation skills to offer a platform that can be used in or adapted to a variety of applications in higher education settings. More specifically, we introduce six observational skills that have served as learning objectives in a course on the psychology of perception. Though training of observational skills can contribute to teaching and learning in a wide range of courses, we focus on this perception course in order to illustrate the use of two assignments for teaching and assessing these observational skills. After doing so, we suggest ways to make use of the presented pedagogy in a broad variety of educational contexts.

### **Observation Skills**

We distinguish between six skills that can be involved in a contemplative approach to observation: noticing, slowing, reflecting, distinguishing, recalling, and describing. The first three skills (noticing, slowing, and reflecting) are themselves ways of observing—becoming aware of something that is happening within the field of one's experience—thereby bringing the present moment more fully into focus. Rather than competing with each other, these three observational methods can mutually support one another, providing synergistic means for developing greater powers of observation. The remaining three skills (distinguishing, recalling, and describing) make precise use of what has been observed. These three can operate independently or combine in ways that support several specific aspects of learning. As with other skills, all six can be trained, learned, practiced, and applied.

*Noticing* refers to explicit awareness of some part of one's subjective experience. This mode of observation includes unelaborated detection (awareness that something is happening now) as well as elementary discrimination of some specific



quality, e.g., smooth, yellow, or large, from its alternatives. Noticing is evident in observers' reports such as "I am outside, lying flat on the ground on my stomach; the pressure of the earth on my stomach, chest, and legs feels soothing and restful" and "I felt the knot in my stomach tighten and expand, engulfing my insides, and it quickly spread to my neck, face, and ears." As evidenced in these examples, noticing has the power to bring innumerable aspects of lived experience into the light of conscious awareness.

*Slowing* provides a less obvious means of observation by emphasizing relaxation as an avenue for inviting greater awareness. To the extent that students' minds are racing with fast-paced thoughts, slowing offers a deliberate respite in which less is more. From a contemplative perspective, mental relaxation readily accords with letting attention stay with whatever is actually happening in experience, rather than making the effort to switch attention to something else. (Upon initial encounter, this reputed combination of relaxation and awareness can appear counter-intuitive, especially to people who are not experienced with contemplative practice.) By slowing, it becomes possible to observe aspects of lived experience that are rarely noticed or that have not ever been noticed previously. Slowing may be evident, for instance, in this student's verbal report: "At the end of a deep exhale, I felt the tight outside edge of my foot roll firmly onto the floor. The tension in my ankle released and a dull pain traveled up the outside of my calf."

In *reflecting*, the observer's own sensory processing, as well as attentional, emotional, and other functions of mind, themselves become objects of observation. Reflecting is apparent in verbal reports such as "My mental focus on the orange comes and goes without my meaning it to." A form of metacognition, reflecting can highlight the occurrence of various subjective phenomena associated with sensory information, including the degree to which something is being experienced as pleasurable or unpleasant (hedonic value), one's own emotional reaction or other personal response, as well as any interpretation regarding the meaning or significance of experience. Reflecting is metacognitive because it involves becoming cognizant of one's own mental activity, e.g., "Seeing the mountain range in the distance, I noticed the thought arising that it must be cold up there."

Once the practice of observation becomes proficient, there are many ways of using the foregrounded present-moment information. Intimate encounter with the rich phenomena of experience affords a personally engaged manner of learning. With regard to application in contemplative education, we identify three skills that work with ramifications of observation now made accessible: distinguishing, recalling, and describing.

*Distinguishing* refers to discernment between observation and interpretation. Importantly, interpretation is broadly construed as any thinking about observed phenomena, such as assigning meaning (or raising questions) based on already established knowledge, belief, or opinion. Observation and interpretation typically mix together, and without training they are difficult to distinguish. For example, the

statement “I saw tall grasses quivering because of a passing breeze” contains an observation (seeing tall grasses quivering) and a theoretical explanation about the cause (a passing breeze). It tends to be difficult at first to distinguish direct experience from the interpretations that naturally arise, but this gets easier and more reliable with practice and feedback.

*Recalling* retrieves observations that were previously encoded, stored, and retained in memory. This cognitive function is necessary to make available any observation that is not current or recent enough to persist in the short-lived buffer of consciousness known as “working memory.” The statement “Last week I was surprised to encounter a big, slow-moving raccoon on my evening walk” implicates the effective retrospection provided by recalling. Without recalling, it would be impossible to discover patterns across observations over time.

*Describing* uses language (or possibly other modes of expression such as artistic rendering) to express one’s observations in a manner suitable for communication to others. When spoken aloud, describing typically offers meaningfully expressive nonverbal components such as gesture, body language, the tonal quality of speech, etc. When written, describing is constrained to the use of words and punctuation to convey what was observed. Mastery of this skill is reflected in listeners or readers feeling that they have a sense of what experience was actually like for the experient (the person who had the actual experience).

### **Psychology of Perception Course**

Now that we have explained six trainable skills involving observation, we introduce a college course on the psychology of perception. This particular lower division course fulfills a science breadth requirement, has no prerequisite, and is open to all students. The first author has taught this course well over a dozen times, twice at American University in Washington, D.C., the rest at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. The second author has served as Teaching Assistant in this course, which has evolved over a 17-year span to engage multiple, complementary ways of knowing, with the objective of developing students’ observation skills.

Three assignments combine in the training and assessment of all six observation skills. Laboratory exercises require careful use of observation in a highly structured context to provide the empirical basis for drawing conclusions and raising questions. Through instruction, modeling, and separation of sections in lab reports (e.g., Procedure, Observations, followed by Conclusions and Questions), the distinction between observation and interpretation is introduced and reinforced throughout the term. Lab reports rely on recalling to various degrees, and are readily assessed with regard to comprehensive reporting of numerous relevant details (facilitated by slowing and noticing), distinguishing between observation and theory, and precise description. Typically, most students improve in all of these skills over the first few laboratory reports. Because the laboratory exercises employed

in this course are specific to the topic of perception, though they readily generalize to all empirical disciplines, they will not be addressed in detail here. Rather, two additional assignments—sensory awareness practice and sensory description—are presented more thoroughly because they are well suited for use (or adaptation) in most or all higher education curricula.

### **Sensory Awareness Practice**

Whereas any psychology course on perception is likely to involve laboratory exercises, this course also provides training in a contemplative technique we coined “sensory awareness practice” which has been introduced previously:

It helps to start simply, such as focusing attention on only one sense modality at a time. Within bodily sensation, for example, students are instructed to place their attention on the sole of their left foot. After a slow, verbally guided sequence of shifting attention from sensations in one body part to another, students realize that paying attention opens up an enriched world of experience. Similar guided observations in other sense modalities such as hearing and sight make it evident that, taken together, our senses supply a vast array of sensory experience each moment that often goes unnoticed. (Burggraf & Grossenbacher, 2007, p. 5)

In the perception course, this sensory awareness practice is guided numerous times during class meetings, often quite briefly (for about two minutes), occasionally lasting for twenty to thirty minutes. It is also assigned as weekly homework. In a sequence spanning an academic term from introductory through more advanced levels, sensory awareness practice can first focus selectively on one single sense modality on its own, and after having sampled multiple modalities in this fashion, advance to combining a pair of sense modalities within a single session (e.g., first one, then the other, then both simultaneously), which can progress to a including even more senses within a single practice session.

Sensory awareness practice trains the learner to notice, slow, reflect, and distinguish amidst the unmitigated perception of bodily sensations, touches, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and any other sensation that may occur in the present moment. Though instructors may find it difficult to obtain sufficient evidence to assess performance in attending to sensory experience during sensory awareness practice, subsequent reports—including sensory description described next—can reveal much about the extent and quality of students’ sensory awareness (sensitivity). Unlike the techniques of lecture, discussion, question and answer, or call and response exchange between teacher and student, sensory awareness practice emphasizes the observation of the sensory data of lived experience. This practice affords opportunities for developing contemplative precision (becoming aware of

detail, discerning between observation and interpretation), sensual appreciation, and greater embodiment.

As an experiential introduction to sensory awareness practice, we invite you—gentle reader—to follow these instructions, pausing for several seconds between steps:

1) sit in an upright posture that is comfortable and allows you to see this page;

>> are you actually following these instructions,  
and not merely reading quickly? <<

2) allow yourself to settle more deeply into this wakeful yet relaxing posture;

<< >>

3) gently focus on the sensation of the breath entering and leaving your body;

<< >>

4) allow your breathing to guide any adjustments to allow your posture to relax further;

<< >>

5) notice where you feel the breathing;

<< >>

6) breathe slowly, noticing any shift in body sensations through several breathing cycles;

<< >>

7) close your eyes for several slow breaths, noticing body sensations, before continuing...

<< >>

Good—now that you have completed the above exercise (indeed, have you?), please consider: What stands out to you from your experience during this exercise? In what ways did your bodily sensations change? Did you notice anything that you had never noticed before? Answers to these questions can reveal what was observed during the exercise.

Though responding to such questions requires words, once it has been learned, the personal practice of sensory awareness need not involve verbal description. Rather, it is the tuning into direct experience as it happens. To effectively facilitate this focus on unfiltered, raw experience, guidance should be provided with a soft voice, with repeated and extensive silent gaps, with occasional offering of encouragement or new directions that avoid undue verbatim repetition by conveying the same gist with varied phrasings. Upon completing the practice session, it can be helpful to prompt reflection by inviting students to jot notes on the experience for a minute or two, and/or invite brief oral reports of their observations.

Over the years, we have found that sensory awareness practice deepens students' dwelling in their sensory fields, and leads to increased sensitivity to specific qualities of sights, sounds, etc. Apparent effects include enhanced ability to tune into one's own body and the world in which we are embedded, with learners reporting increased sense of being grounded, centered, and present, increasing engagement with awareness, and even diminution of self-centeredness—"in that observation, there is no centre as the 'me' looking..." (Krishnamurti, 1983, p. 130).

### Sensory Description

Sensory description could be assigned in any context, though it seems optimal to precede this with some sensory awareness practice (which hones all the observation skills except for recalling and describing—see Table 1). The to-be-described experience can be observed introspectively, in the moment, or recalled retrospectively. Describing (near-) present-moment observations (kept briefly available in working memory) has the potential to bring experientials into more intimate contact with their lived experience, albeit from a verbally mediated point of view.

**Table 1.** Observation Skills Trained and/or Assessed in Two Assignments.

Observation Skill	Sensory Awareness Practice		Sensory Description	
	Trains	Assesses	Trains	Assesses
Noticing	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Slowing	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Reflecting	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Distinguishing	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Recalling	No	No	Yes	Yes
Describing	No	No	Yes	Yes

The sensory description assignment focuses primarily on verbal description of the writer's own phenomenal experience, with particular emphasis on sensory aspects. Each paragraph describes a continuous thread of actual experience, no matter how long (or short) this makes the paragraph. The point of written sensory description is to make it as easy as possible for readers to engage the sensory level of the writer's experience, the raw feel of this person's lived experience. As this assignment has been fine-tuned over the years, several pointers help steer students into the heart of this novel and nuanced form of expression, and are explained next.

Sensory experience involves sensations in one or more sense modalities (e.g., bright orange glow to left of center; cold, damp, evenly distributed pressure across upper back). Our lives also include experience that may not be sensory: "I am wishing for justice"; "I was feeling anxious." These descriptions contain no clear expression of sensory qualities such as bodily pain, visual texture, auditory loudness, etc. While the actual experience referred to may have included sensory components, due to the lack of explicit sensory detail, it remains unclear whether wishing for justice was experienced in a purely abstract way, or involved bodily sensations or visual imagery, e.g., a tightening in the chest or picturing a clenched fist.

When given leeway, some readers easily fill in their own imagined details of what an experience must have been like. However, they might get it wrong! To let them know what the lived experience was actually like for the writer, a complete and detailed description employs explicit language that specifies the sense modality and specific sensory qualities experienced. This goal is clearly accomplished when even readers who have not had such an experience nonetheless "get it."

It is easy to mistake description of events for description of lived experience. For example, "The dog lay down" provides no information regarding how this event became known to the writer—it could be directly witnessed via one or more sense modalities (seen, heard, or felt bodily), or without such witnessing, it could be learned from received communication, be inferred, or even guessed. Even movement of one's own body can be described in event terms without any explicit description of the experience of undergoing physical movement, and indeed this proves to be the most difficult modality for students to describe at the experiential level. For example, "lifting hands up to interlace fingers on top of the crown of the head" describes an event in some detail, but it remains unclear to the skeptical reader where the event information came from. A description that clearly expresses sensory qualities of the experience of the person who moved their hands must include visual and/or somatic details, such as "I saw both arms slowly ascending smoothly in front of my torso" or "toward the end of this movement I started to notice tension growing in my upper back, evenly on both sides."

There is no formula that tells whether specific words or phrases are clearly sensory. Rather, this is a more nuanced difference that hinges on context and

level of detail. Many words, by themselves, are ambiguous as to whether they describe sensory experience. The word “pain” may refer to painful bodily sensations, though “It pained me to admit that I was wrong” refers to experience that may not involve painful bodily sensations. Inherently ambiguous terms (e.g., discomfort, feeling good, electrified) do suffice when accompanied by phrases that clarify their meaning, and can be further bolstered by providing lots of details.

Sensory description works well both as a brief, in-class assignment, as well as a more extended homework assignment. It is helpful for learners to be presented with small portions of other students’ sensory description—we have requested students to read aloud small, self-selected excerpts for this purpose. At a minimum, this offers helpful exposure to others’ range of experience and expressive style. At times it can be leveraged to focus on a particular aspect of sensory experience or description that would benefit from collective scrutiny. Regardless, it helps when the instructor raises questions or provides other feedback about the experiential descriptions voiced in class. This serves to point out ambiguous or possibly non-sensory descriptions as described above, and prompts students to reflect further on their own and others’ lived experience.

Despite recurring requests from students, we have chosen not to provide sample sensory descriptions for students to use as models. Though other instructors might justifiably choose to do so, this decision guards against the risk of model assignments having the undesirable effect of limiting the range of approaches taken by student writers. Though often experienced by students as including a sense of struggle, this tactic supports each student in their authentic expression of their own idiosyncratic experience. (Over time, the valid need for exposure to others’ sensory descriptions gets largely met through the alternative process of students reading them aloud.)

Learning objectives targeted and addressed by sensory description include noticing specific aspects of sensory experience, noticing one’s own mental processing of sensory information (e.g., which sense modalities are customarily favored in which contexts?), slowing, reflecting, complete and precise description, unambiguous expression, and distinguishing between observation and interpretation.

In support of students attaining these objectives, we provide feedback on sensory descriptions by highlighting (on paper) or converting font to bold (in electronic documents) the clearly sensory portions of text, as well as writing specific margin notes and more global comments. On paper, we use a highlighter to draw a thick color line through each word that forms part of any clearly sensory description, and to merely underline each word that is part of description that is ambiguous with respect to sensory content. Students quickly catch on to the ideal of receiving assignments back with all text being marked as clearly sensory.

Margin and end notes focus on a variety of topics, some pertaining to the task of sensory description, such as appreciating the writer’s accomplishment and suggest-

ing ways to improve. Examples include: “more details needed” / “please elaborate,” “Excellent narrative with several sensations—next time, emphasize even more sensory details!”, “Helpful specifics about location and timing of sensations,” “Too much interpretation, not enough sensory description.”

We also offer feedback on important issues that extend beyond the rather specific aim of sensory description per se, such as personal insights, advancing theoretical understanding, or raising thoughtful questions. Examples include: “Good description of how pain changes your perception,” “Interesting theory—how would you test it?”

To earn the highest possible grade (A, Excellent) on this assignment, a majority of text must contain clear sensory description, such that the reader confidently knows something of what the writer’s lived experience was like. If sensory description is assigned repeatedly throughout the course, it may be helpful to adjust the evaluative criteria for this and other grades to increasingly demanding levels over the course of the academic term. Students report that sensory description is personally meaningful: it enhances appreciation of their own experience and contributes to effective writing that gets lauded by instructors of other courses.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Sensory awareness practice and sensory description afford important opportunities for training and assessment of observation skills. Either may be used in isolation, though in combination they work synergistically, deepening sensory awareness and fostering more complete and accurate sensory description. The point of this form of active learning is to engage the unpredictable process of discovery, which comes alive when the learner’s own experience is reflected in or recognized as pertinent to the subject matter.

Integrating sensory assignments into a course can strengthen the student’s observational skills, regardless of discipline or course content. This contemplative pedagogy helps to personalize the content of a given course for each student, which can deepen their experience of the material. Embodied engagement with course material empowers students as active learners through valuing their individual subjective experience, which provides an important source of relevant information, and can facilitate students’ attentiveness toward instruction and learning. Moreover, the ability to notice currently occurring bodily feelings and sensations in other sense modalities is also useful to teachers, providing a pivotal means for discerning between events in the classroom and the instructor’s own personal response to them, thereby opening up more options regarding what to say or do in the next moment (Brown, 1999).

This promotes personal contact with any subject matter, as well as strengthening the student-teacher relationship; it could be a great way to introduce students to a course by inviting students to notice bodily sensations while contemplating the central topics of the course. Keen observation provides a person with the



inputs needed for engaging a wide range of intelligences, from evidence-based decision making to aesthetic appraisal, as well as becoming more intimately familiar with one's own mind and experience. Therefore the training of observation skills can contribute to education in laboratory sciences, field sciences, education, law, the arts, creative writing, and other areas of inquiry that can be deepened through more engaged, embodied, and integrated learning.

## REFERENCES

- Brown, R. C. (1999). "The teacher as contemplative observer." *Educational Leadership* 56(4), 70-73.
- Burggraf, S. A., & Grossenbacher, P. G. (2007). "Contemplative modes of inquiry in liberal arts education." *LiberalArtsOnline* 7(4), 1-9.
- Krishnamurti, J. (1983). *Mind Without Measure*. Chennai: Krishnamurti Foundation India.
- Uhl, C. & Stuchul, D. L. (2011). *Teaching as if Life Matters*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

PETER G. GROSSENBACHER, PhD, is Associate Professor in Contemplative Psychology and Contemplative Education at Naropa University. After training in mathematics and cognitive science at UC Berkeley, his experimental psychology doctorate at the University of Oregon focused on electrophysiology and attention to vision and touch. After researching multisensory attention and synesthesia at the University of Cambridge and the National Institute of Mental Health, he joined the Naropa faculty in 2000. His book, *Finding Consciousness in the Brain: A Neurocognitive Approach*, offers insights into the brain's involvement in conscious experience. His scholarship and research focus on neural function and information processing during meditation, and the instruction of contemplative practice. In curricula that meld scientific and contemplative modes of inquiry, Peter teaches both graduate and undergraduate courses in mindful teaching, the neuroscience of meditation, Buddhist psychology, mindfulness meditation, perception, cognitive psychology, research methods, and research practica. A meditator since 1980, he teaches meditation and trains teachers in a variety of settings.

ALEXANDER J. ROSSI earned his MA from Naropa University in Transpersonal Counseling Psychology. His graduate research examined a therapist's level of embodiment and its impact on somatic countertransference within the therapist-client relationship. As part of a research team in the Naropa University Conscious-

ness Laboratory, Alex's research focused on presence, embodiment, and world view. Before attending Naropa, he counseled adolescents at The Academy at Swift River in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts and facilitated a service learning program in Costa Rica. There he provided emotional growth programming and psycho-educational workshops to students and their parents. Following continued study in Somatic Psychology, Alex investigated body mechanics and embodied movement practices in everyday activities. Alex's other interests include private practice, yoga, meditation, and philosophy of mind. He currently brings his present-focused sensory awareness practices to bear in a professional capacity as a connoisseur of craft beer and fine wine in MetroWest Boston.

# Responding to the Challenges of a Contemplative Curriculum

**Charles Burack**

*John F. Kennedy University*

---

*The undergraduate Psychology program at John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, California, is one of a small number of undergraduate programs that offer a holistic, transformative, and integrative approach to psychology. One important dimension of the program's educational approach is the use of contemplative practices in the classroom. Drawing on the teaching experiences of four experienced faculty members, the author discusses the multiple educational purposes that contemplative pedagogies serve as well as the various strategies used to introduce and integrate these transformational pedagogies into the classroom. The author also discusses ways to maintain students' psychological safety, ensure instructors' contemplative competence, and maintain the separation of church and state.*

*Keywords: contemplation, meditation, mindfulness, higher education, undergraduate psychology, transformative learning, student-centered teaching, whole person pedagogy, curriculum development, course design, teacher training, church and state, transformation, consciousness, spirituality, creativity, interdisciplinary, holistic, integral, mind-body, experiential, sacred, soul, religious experience, literature, transpersonal studies*

---

**T**he undergraduate Psychology program at John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, California, is one of a small number of undergraduate programs that offer a holistic, transformative, and integrative approach to psychology. Established in 2003, the program grew out of a liberal arts curriculum created in 1994 and benefitted from the pioneering work of JFKU's Graduate School of Holistic Studies. I have been teaching in the program since 2003 and was its director for three years. One important dimension of our holistic approach is the use of contemplative practices in the classroom. We have had tremendous success with these practices, and our students have consistently reported significant benefits. This success can be attributed, I believe, not only to the power of the practices, but to our faculty's collective experience, knowledge, and skill in meeting the challenges that these practices pose. In this article I discuss the challenges we have faced and how we have responded to them. The main challenges include: when and how to introduce contemplations; how to integrate contemplations with more conventional pedagogies; how to maintain safety; how much instructor experience, knowledge, and skill are needed; and how to maintain separation of church and state.

Before addressing the challenges, I will define what we mean by the terms *holistic*, *transformative*, and *integrative*. By *holistic* we mean that we value the whole person—body, mind, heart, and spirit—and that we seek to understand and support individuals within the various relational contexts in which they live. We also study psychological phenomena, concepts, theories, methods, and findings within their diverse social, cultural, and epistemic contexts. Systems theory is one contemporary expression of our holistic approach, but so are different religious, spiritual, and postmodern philosophies that emphasize contextuality, relationality, and interdependence (see Ferrer & Sherman, 2009). By *transformative* we mean that our program seeks to catalyze profound learning, growth, and development in our students so that they can live to their fullest potential and can contribute in life-enhancing ways to their families, communities, workplaces, and the larger world. Because of our emphasis on holistic transformation, our approach to education is similar to that of Cranton (2000, 2006), Dirkx (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006; Dirkx, 2009, 2012), Ferrer (Ferrer, Romero, & Albareda, 2010), Gunnlaugson (2009), O’Sullivan (1999, 2012), Palmer (1983; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010), Taylor (2009), Torosyan (2010), and Zajonc (2006; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010), all of whom emphasize modes of transformative learning that include but go beyond the rational. Although the terms *holistic* and *integrative* are sometimes used synonymously, we often use them separately and distinctively (see Gunnlaugson, 2010, for a similar distinction). Generally, we use *integrative* to indicate that we teach multiple perspectives, including those that are not explicitly holistic or that critique holism. Our integrative program is pluralistic: we value mainstream as well as alternative and complementary approaches, such as somatic, transpersonal, humanistic, and planetary approaches. We are aligned with the *APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major* (2007) and are currently reviewing our program in light of the new guidelines released in August 2013.

The triad of holism, transformation, and integration informs the overall curriculum and many of the individual courses, to a greater or lesser extent. Many of our instructors use a wide range of teaching methods: from lecture, discussion, and debate, to experiential exercises, creative projects, oral presentations, and field work. About half of the instructors at our Pleasant Hill campus use contemplative exercises in their classes. I will discuss some of my own experiences with contemplation in the classroom and also convey the related and contrasting experiences of three other teachers in our program. Although I will be focusing on my experiences at JFKU, I will also draw on my experiences using contemplative practices at other schools, including UC Berkeley, St. Mary’s College of California, Naropa University, Oakland, and California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. Because my academic training is interdisciplinary, I have used contemplation in courses on psychology, literature, creativity, and religion, and it has been highly effective in all of

these disciplines (see Burack, 1999). I have been working with contemplative and meditative pedagogies for nearly two decades; two of my colleagues, Vernice Solimar and Susanne West, have each been using these pedagogies for 27 years; and a third colleague, Craig Chalquist, has been using them for eight years.

### **Multiple Purposes**

To fully understand the challenges posed by pedagogical uses of contemplative practices, it is important to understand the purposes for such use. These purposes are generally of three types: those that focus on the specific course learning outcomes; those that seek to cultivate particular cognitive, affective, and spiritual qualities in students; and those that aim to improve students' overall growth, well-being, and development. The purposes related to course learning outcomes include:

- increasing understanding of and insight into the subject matter;
- exploring particular issues or solving particular problems raised in the course;
- providing a holistic experience of course concepts, theories, methods, and findings;
- demonstrating the limits of a strictly rationalist, empirical perspective;
- exploring nondual philosophical, religious, and spiritual views as well as nondiscursive forms of knowing;
- relating the subject matter to the students' life experiences; and
- creating class solidarity through shared silence and reflection.

Purposes that aim at cultivating particular cognitive, affective, and spiritual capacities include:

- expanding and deepening consciousness and awareness;
- enhancing perception, attention, memory, reasoning, imaging, empathy, compassion, intuition, and creativity;
- consciously integrating the various forms of knowledge gained from the different faculties;
- accessing body-based sources of knowing and valuing; and
- clarifying and modulating emotions.

Broader purposes include:

- promoting overall growth and development;
- promoting overall health, well-being, and vitality;
- encouraging ecological consciousness and social conscience;
- enhancing self-awareness, knowledge, and confidence;
- supporting the quest for self-actualization, realization, and transcendence;
- developing effective approaches to life/work challenges;
- clarifying life direction and vocational path; and
- encouraging the contribution to local, national, and global transformation.

All of these purposes are student-centered. They are aimed at enhancing the student's learning and life (see also Duerr, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003; Robinson, 2004; Zajonc, 2006; Zajonc, 2009; Hart, 2004; Hart, 2008; Shapiro, Brown, & Astin, 2008).

But there are also teacher-centered purposes which emerge from the instructor's vision and values. Among our faculty, the most important teacher-centered purpose is that we consider contemplative practices to be a necessary and powerful means of expressing our holistic or integrative orientation. Contemplative practices—as well as other experiential and creative practices and projects—are needed to engage the whole student. Throughout this essay, I will use the terms “contemplation” and “meditation” interchangeably. Walsh and Vaughn (1993B) define meditation as “a family of practices that train attention in order to bring mental processes under voluntary control and to cultivate specific mental qualities such as awareness, insight, concentration, equanimity, and love” (pp. 52-53). Some meditations focus and sustain attention on an outer or inner object (e.g., a thing, word, image, organ, etc.), while others direct attention more diffusely and flexibly to an outer or inner event (e.g., ambient sounds, inner stream of consciousness, dynamic process, etc.). The former are sometimes called “concentration” practices, while the latter are called “awareness” practices (Walsh & Vaughn, 1993B, p. 53; Kornfield, 1993, p. 56). Meditative attention can be fixed or fluid, focused or diffuse, hard or soft. I am aware that some communities do not use the words *contemplation* and *meditation* interchangeably. For example, some Buddhist communities consider contemplation (*samapati*) to be an early phase of meditative practice (*bhavana*), while some Christian communities consider contemplation (*contemplatio*) to be the last and final phase of meditative practice (*meditatio*) (Fischer-Schreiber, Ehrhard, & Diener, 1991, p. 20; Underhill 1910, pp. 314, 328-357).

At JFKU, we see it as our responsibility to not limit higher education—whether public or private—to a strictly cognitive-intellectual enterprise. Higher education at its best necessarily promotes the development of students' perceptual, emotional, imaginative, intuitive, rational, ethical, and social capacities and engages the full range of their experiences and relationships, from the mundane to the extraordinary (see also Esbjorn-Hargens, 2010). Thus, higher education must include contemplative approaches. While contemplation is not a panacea, my colleagues and I have observed that it contributes significantly to meeting the educational purposes I mentioned. In my own course evaluations, students have consistently mentioned the integration of contemplative practices as one of the most valuable aspects of the courses. In our senior capstone course, nearly all of our students tell us they have been profoundly transformed at all levels by their educational journey.

### **When and How to Introduce Contemplations**

One of the most important challenges that I and my colleagues face is determining when and how to introduce contemplations in the classroom. We agree that the

key is to be mindfully flexible. No one contemplative approach or set of contemplative approaches fits all students, all classes, or all subject matters (see also Brady, 2007). My own decisions about what practices to use, when and how to introduce them, and when and how to modify them always depend on the subject matter and the particular group of students in the class. This ability to be flexible requires an intuitive sensitivity to students and a willingness to spontaneously modify one's pedagogical approach. I generally teach from a detailed outline but allow myself to modify it in accordance with student needs and interests. Many of our faculty also say that they are prepared to spontaneously drop, add, or modify a contemplative practice depending on class needs and dynamics.

At this point in my teaching career, I use some type and degree of contemplative practice in all my classes. I also try to introduce some form of reflection in the very first class session. After reviewing the syllabus, I invite students to silently reflect on what drew them to the class, and what they hope to get out of it. If it is a small class, I ask each student to introduce herself or himself and to say what drew them to the class and what they hope for. In a large class, instead of going around to every student, we break into smaller groups, and students introduce themselves to the members of their group.

Even if I only lead a 1-minute silent reflection on student aspirations for the course, the practice establishes the value of silence, solitude, and contemplation in the classroom. Almost inevitably, the silence deepens the felt sense of connection in the class and opens students' hearts and minds to one another and to the educational journey they are commencing together. An implicit message is also conveyed: there is value in connecting deeply with your own thoughts, feelings, and perceptions before sharing with others. A secondary message is that solitude can be achieved even in a group setting.

### **How to Integrate Contemplation with More Conventional Pedagogies**

In all of my university classes I integrate contemplative practices with more conventional pedagogies such as lecture, discussion, debate, oral presentation, and creative exploration. I accomplish this blending mainly through oscillation, moving back and forth between these different teaching modes. Sometimes, I begin with a more didactic approach and then invite students to contemplate one of the ideas or images that were discussed (see Burack, 1999). Other times, I invite students to first discover, through contemplation, their own view of an issue, and I then build the discussion or adapt the lecture around those initial insights.

Regardless of whether the contemplation precedes or follows a lecture or discussion, I often employ the following sequence. I begin with a silent meditation, usually on a question, a concept, an image, a text, or a personal experience. After the silent contemplation, I encourage students to do a minute or two of silent freewriting or freedrawing to record what they experienced during the contem-

plation. Next, I ask students to break up into pairs or small groups and to share, if they so choose, any aspect of what they experienced or the insights they gained from those experiences. Once the pairs or group sharings have concluded, I ask if anyone wants to share with the full class. This movement from inner experience to silent expression to various levels of interpersonal communication mirrors and reinforces the creative process of students. It also follows the trajectory of spiritual manifestation (or emanation) that is discussed in many traditions: the movement of silent, formless Spirit outward into, and as, the world of forms (see Burack, 2005A and 2005C; Wilber, 1977, 2006). Several of my colleagues also use this inside-out approach.

In more mainstream psychology courses, such as Social Psychology, I mainly use contemplative practices to help students connect course concepts, theories, methods, and findings to their own lives. Thus, in each Social Psychology class session I invite students to contemplate an experience that reflects the topic under consideration, e.g., cognitive dissonance, social attributions, or stereotypes. That experience can be their own personal experience, their observation of others' experiences, or their observation of broader societal phenomena. Inevitably the contemplation yields deeper and more surprising insights than if I simply asked the question in class and waited for responses. Often, students will report epiphanies that produce a significant shift in understanding or outlook. For example, in the unit on prejudice, many students are more able to see and own some of their prejudices and to notice the subtle ways in which their beliefs and biases enter into their perceptions and behavior. Many also decide to be more mindful about the attitudes and judgments they form of others—and to be more respectful toward individuals and groups who do not share their views and values.

In some courses I lead a contemplative exercise in the first session to find out students' initial holistic understanding of the course subject matter. This exercise produces a brief survey of the spectrum of perspectives present in the room, as well as a baseline from which to examine the subsequent impact of the course material on that spectrum of perspectives. In the first session of my course on humanistic psychology, for example, I invite students to reflect on their understanding of what it means to be a human being. I then lead a second contemplation to evoke their understanding of what it means to be a person. The nature of "human being" and of "person" is a central issue in the course. At the end of the course, I repeat the two contemplations, and students have a chance to discuss how their understandings of these concepts have evolved.

In my Transpersonal Psychology class I lead a wide variety of contemplations because one of the key course learning outcomes is understanding the nature of nonordinary experience. The more holistic the learning outcomes, the more that contemplative practices are needed. It also works the other way: teachers who



are inclined to use contemplation in their classes are also more inclined to include holistic course learning outcomes. In the Transpersonal Psychology course I introduce the following practices: breath meditation, body scan, mindfulness of sound, mindfulness of thoughts, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of sensations, mindful inquiry into one's field of awareness, visualizations, contemplation of dreams, contemplation of one's nonordinary experiences, as well as mantra meditations and chants (using sacred sounds, words, and phrases from different traditions). The practices often evoke nonordinary experiences, so the students gain a holistic understanding of the subject matter. At the beginning of the course I lead two different contemplations: one on the word "religious," and the other on the word "spiritual." Students discover and write down their personal associations (thoughts, sensations, images, feelings) with these words. I repeat these contemplations at the end of the course, so students can discover how their associations have changed.

In my course on sacred poetry, after a general discussion of a poem, students are invited to contemplate a related experience in their own lives. I have used such poems as William Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud," Mary Oliver's "The Ponds," and Derek Wolcott's "Love After Love." We also contemplate key words, images, and symbols in the poems (see Burack, 1999). I illustrate the power of meditation to produce mental imagery by asking the students to close their eyes and simply listen to the poem being read aloud. Most discover that they can see and understand the poem better when they listen with their eyes closed as compared to reading along as the poem is read aloud. I also invite at least two readings of most poems to demonstrate that each person brings his or her own unique breath, understanding, experience, and voice to the poem and so makes the poem come alive in a unique way. The poem is not alive until it has been breathed—aloud or subvocally—into life. Leading a brief meditation before reading the poem aloud can deepen and diversify the ways the poem is then read and understood.

### **How to Maintain Safety**

Contemplative practices are powerful: they can create significant transformations—for good and for ill. It is of utmost importance that they be thoughtfully, sensitively, and skillfully introduced and that the safety and well-being of students be of paramount concern. My colleagues and I are in agreement that while brief, simple contemplations of ideas, texts, questions, or images can be effectively conducted by many teachers, the extensive use of contemplation in the classroom should be reserved for those teachers who are not only skilled in contemplation but who also have done extensive personal psychospiritual work and who have extensive psychospiritual knowledge. If contemplative practices are mishandled, damage can be done to students' psyches (see Wilber, 1993). That damage can be minor or major, temporary or permanent. Disturbing reactions can be triggered

when students have loose psychological boundaries or insufficient ego strength, or when the contemplations are too deep and prolonged or focus too intensively on students' unconscious material.

My colleagues and I have experienced no severe disturbances in our classrooms—and very few minor disturbances. This is probably because we take various measures to minimize the likelihood of such disturbances. The first measure is that we tell our students that all contemplations are voluntary. None is ever required. Indeed, before every contemplation that I lead, I tell the class that “As always, this practice is completely voluntary. Only participate if you feel comfortable and prepared to do so; there is no problem at all with not participating.” Students who do not participate are often encouraged to do some freewriting or to do whatever silent reflection they find beneficial. No student should ever feel compelled or subtly pressured to participate. Some instructors include in their syllabi a sentence stating that voluntary contemplations and other experiential exercises will be used to enhance student learning, exploration, and growth.

We encourage our students to rely on their own discernment, comfort, and values when deciding whether or not to participate. To minimize the sense of compulsion, I frame my contemplative instructions as invitations, not as commands. For example, instead of saying, “Close your eyes and take a few slow deep breaths,” I say, “I invite you to close your eyes and take a few slow deep breaths.” During the pairs and small group sharings, I tell students that they don't need to share at all and that if they want to share, they should only share what they feel comfortable sharing.

The question has been raised why we make contemplative exercises voluntary when university instructors regularly require students to participate in other emotionally challenging learning exercises, such as debates, field studies, and self-reflective papers. To begin with, I and most of my colleagues consider meditation to be, in part, a practice of freedom: one that is freely engaged in and that helps to liberate the practitioner (Goldstein, 2003). It would be contradictory to compel such a practice. Second, we do not want to override our students' sense of their own psychological limits. Contemplation has the power to create a level of self-intimacy that is greater than can be achieved through many conventional pedagogies. Some students may be intuitively aware that they are not emotionally prepared to enter the vast terrain of their inner landscape, so it would be both psychologically and ethically problematic to impel them to do so. Third, mandating contemplation would incite resentment and defiance in some students and perhaps permanently sour their openness to contemplative practice. If, instead, these students are given the unpressured opportunity to not participate, they might discover from their peers that they missed out on a valuable experience and so decide to participate in future contemplations. In fact, we often see this happen.

A second safety measure is the instruction to “stop doing the contemplation if you experience discomfort or agitation that you feel you cannot handle—and immediately open your eyes.” I also tell students that if they are having an especially difficult time to let me know right away. Although meditation is a powerful technique for working with difficult emotions (Bennett-Goleman, 2001; Goldstein, 2003; Goleman, 1997), the classroom setting generally does not permit an instructor to give the kind of personal attention needed to steer a student through a particularly troubling experience, so it is better for the student to simply come out of the meditation. When individual students tell me they want to attempt longer and more challenging meditations, I invite them to come to my office hours where I can give them the individual time and attention they deserve.

Some years ago Professor West had a student who became quite agitated. Professor West engaged the student in a calming and grounding conversation that helped the student regain her equilibrium. I have experienced only a few situations in which students were agitated to the point where they needed to stop the practice. The priority is usually to help the students to calm and ground themselves. Bringing them outside into nature or asking them to recall their phone number and address (and other mundane information) or inviting them to focus on familiar objects in their environment can help them to reconnect to their ordinary sense of self and world. There is great value in instructors sharing with one another their approaches for dealing with difficult contemplative experiences.

A third safety measure has to do with limiting the frequency, length, and type of contemplation. Our teachers are careful to balance contemplative practices with other pedagogical practices and not to allow the former to dominate classroom time. Generally, our face-to-face class sessions are 2.5 hours, and we almost never lead a contemplation for undergraduates that lasts longer than 15 or 20 minutes. The typical contemplation ranges from 2 to 10 minutes, and most are under 5 minutes. Even a one-minute breath meditation can do wonders to calm, clarify, and center students' minds and relax their bodies. Professor Chalquist usually does not introduce a contemplative practice until the third class session so that he can get to know students and see where everyone is at.

While our faculty members agree that we need to be careful not to trigger psychospiritual disturbances in class, we disagree as to what types of practices to exclude. Professor West, for example, refrains from doing any contemplations with undergraduates that focus on shadow material. All contemplative explorations of self are focused on positive dimensions of the students' personalities. In contrast, I and other instructors have found it safe and effective to work with less positive dimensions of students' psyches, including their inner critics. We concur with the growing body of literature that emphasizes the transformational value of students contemplating difficult emotions—their own and others (Baugher, forthcoming;

Dutro, 2008; Johnston Hurst, 2010; Konrad, 2010). Indeed, one could argue that many significant transformations arise from a willingness to bring the light of consciousness to difficult emotions and shadowy impulses. It is important, however, to recognize that some courses—such as those in the social sciences and humanities, and especially graduate courses in counseling, social work, and ministry—tend to draw students who are more interested in and prepared to engage in deep transformative work.

One of the ways I prepare students to meet their inner critic is to discuss the origins of the inner critic as well as lead a protective meditation. First, I explain the original protective intent and function behind the inner critic: it was a suffering and alienated part of the self that emerged to protect the self from external attacks by parents, siblings, or other significant others. Its “logic” was: “I’ll mimic and internalize their criticisms and keep you in line so that you don’t get hurt even worse by their attacks.” I suggest that one of the best ways of working with the inner critic is to bring compassionate awareness to it and try to see its original protective aim. Through compassion, understanding, and love, the critic can be tempered, transformed, and consciously integrated into the self. After explaining the dynamics of the inner critic, I introduce a protective meditation, inviting students to visualize themselves surrounded by a protective sphere of golden light. I suggest that they visualize the voices of the inner critic as arising from within but immediately passing through the protective shield of light—the shield lets out negative energy but doesn’t let it back in. They can then attend to the voices at a safe distance where the voices are unable to hurt them. Both Professor Chalquist and I invite our students to dialogue with their inner critics.

Occasionally, I also invite students to contemplate a difficult experience and see if the contemplation reveals any lessons or transformations that resulted from it. By inviting this reframing of the experience, students are frequently able to discover some positive life-enhancing benefit of the negative experience. Finding the positive in the negative is a little like the alchemical transmutation of lead into gold. To ensure student safety, I encourage them to not choose a very difficult or upsetting experience—only one that they feel prepared to work with in class for a few minutes. These contemplations have consistently been effective for helping students find the wisdom and compassion in their experiences of suffering, failure, despair, disillusion, illness, and loss.

Another measure used to promote safety is preceding a contemplative exploration with a brief grounding practice: inviting students to attend to their breath and body, or to sense their hands and feet, or to feel their connection to the ground through their feet. Professor West often follows a contemplative practice with a more discursive process—dialogue in dyads—that brings students into their prefrontal cortex and so returns them to the everyday experience of themselves and the world (see Hanson & Mendius, 2009; Hart, 2008).

A potential source of discomfort for students is the feeling that “this practice seemed to work well for everyone else but not for me.” I always tell students that responses to particular practices vary greatly, and that no one practice works well for everyone. I encourage them to give each practice their best effort, and if after trying the practice several times, they still don’t find it useful, to just let it go. The key thing is to discover what works and what doesn’t work for oneself. This pragmatic approach has proven effective for my students—and for me!

A final and very important safety measure is creating ground rules for sharing. I use the following rules:

- Everything personal that is shared should remain confidential and not be discussed outside of class.
- Whatever your dialogue partner or group members shared with you in confidence should not be shared with others in the class unless the person gives you permission to do so.
- Only give feedback to someone if he or she requests it.
- Try to be sensitive, supportive, and constructive when you are invited to give feedback.

### **How Much Instructor Experience, Knowledge, and Skill Are Needed**

All of these suggestions imply that instructors should have adequate experience, knowledge, and skill to effectively lead contemplations in the classroom. The issue of how much experience, knowledge, and skill are needed is subject to debate. My experience at JFKU and at other schools has been that instructors generally do not attempt to introduce contemplative practices unless they have adequate background. But if we are going to encourage wider use of contemplative practices in the classroom—which I am strongly in favor of—it is important that guidelines and training programs be established. For many years The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (I have been a member since 2010) has been offering retreats and training sessions to educators ([www.contemplativemind.org](http://www.contemplativemind.org)). I encourage the Center to develop guidelines on this important matter.

I believe that the best preparation for leading contemplation is having one’s own contemplative practice and being committed to one’s own holistic growth and transformation. I recommend that instructors have at least two years of experience as regular meditators before leading classroom meditations that 1) tap deep personal issues, 2) are mentally complex or taxing, or 3) exceed a few minutes. It is probably okay for instructors with less experience to lead brief, simple contemplative exercises like those that focus for a couple minutes on the breath or on a concept, word, image, or text. Second, I recommend that instructors only lead contemplations that they understand and value; otherwise, they will not be able to lead them effectively. Third, instructors should genuinely value the contemplative

growth and holistic transformation of their students. Fourth, I recommend that instructors become as knowledgeable as possible about meditation, the psychological difficulties that can arise in meditative settings, and the various ways to address these difficulties. Although instructors are not expected to be therapists, our having some knowledge of the psychological dimensions of contemplation is quite useful and probably necessary. Fortunately, most of us have access to other campus resources, such as student support services. When difficulties arise in our classrooms that we cannot handle, we can and should reach out to professional staff in our campus counseling center, health clinic, or chaplaincy office. We need to be aware of the psychological and spiritual services available to our students, perhaps even identifying and getting to know professional staff who know how to work effectively with the kinds of spiritual emergencies that meditation can sometimes catalyze (S. Grof & C. Grof, 1989). Fifth, in order to create classroom environments that are open, safe, and supportive enough for our students to engage in contemplation and share their contemplative experiences, we need to develop strong emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills and become highly skilled group facilitators. In many ways, I agree with Carl Rogers (1980), who thought that three essential educator attitudes—genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard—powerfully facilitate the holistic growth of students.

### **How to Maintain Separation of Church and State**

One of the hot buttons around the use of contemplative practices in public universities is whether or not it infringes on the separation of church and state. This issue arises from the fact that most contemplative practices initially arose out of religious traditions. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution has two “religion clauses”: 1) the establishment clause (“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion”); and 2) the free expression clause (“Congress shall make no law . . . prohibiting the free exercise thereof [religion]”). The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that First Amendment does not bar the teaching of diverse religions when “such study” is “presented objectively as part of a secular program of education” (cited in Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006, pp. 100-101). I recently contacted two constitutional law scholars—Erwin Chemerinsky, University of California, Irvine; and Geoffrey Stone, University of Chicago—and asked them if it is a violation of the First Amendment to experientially expose university students to a variety of religious practices—such as meditations, chants, prayers, and healing rituals—when the pedagogical intention is to give students an experiential understanding of these transformative practices, not to indoctrinate them. Chemerinsky and Stone said there is no violation of the First Amendment as long as 1) the purpose is nondenominational and 2) the approach is truly comparative and noncoercive (personal communications, October 24-30, 2013). JFKU law professor Peter Gabel expressed a similar view (personal communication, October 31, 2013).

Of course, a serious violation does arise when university teachers use contemplation or other transformational techniques to inculcate a particular religious, spiritual, or secular worldview. Of paramount importance is maintaining a pluralistic classroom free of coercion, indoctrination, dogmatism, and conversion (see Bryant, 2006; Bryant & Schwartz, 2006). This approach requires that the teacher be open, honest, fair, and self-aware. It also requires that diverse perspectives are considered with a sensitive and intelligent blend of appreciation and critique. In a contemplative, pluralistic classroom, no position should ever be the sole object of critique or appreciation. Every position has its strengths and limitations. Because students' worldviews—whether religious, spiritual, or secular—are so central to their sense of self, belonging, and well-being, the strengths and limits of various worldviews should be examined with care.

Most of the teachers in our B.A. Psychology program honor the separation of church and state by stressing to students that they are using contemplation for the various purposes I mentioned at the outset—none of which are aimed at inculcating a particular religious view, belief, practice, or life. Professor Solimar said she tells students that the practices are for exploring self, consciousness, and experience, particularly the various universal qualities of being, such as love, compassion, and insight. She favors contemplative inquiry and often invites students to reflect on their values, how they manifest those values in the world, and what blocks them from manifesting those values. She generally avoids using contemplations or chants that have divine names in them. However, when she teaches World Religions, she invites students to participate in practices from those traditions but modifies the meditation to make it available to more students. For example, when leading a meditation on unconditional love derived from Christianity that has Jesus as its focus, she invites students to substitute for Jesus whatever figure, image, or symbol of unconditional love resonates for them.

I teach courses on Jewish mysticism at a variety of universities—including public universities like UC Berkeley—and do lead contemplations and chants with divine names. I choose practices that are aimed at developing particular qualities of being, such as lovingkindness, forgiveness, healing, and sense of oneness, and I explain that these practices give students the opportunity to explore the experiential impact of key Kabbalistic methods of self-transformation and transcendence. I have never received a complaint about any of these practices. To the contrary, many students have found them profoundly beneficial, even life-transforming (Burack, 2008). For some of these students, the practices have brought them closer to their own religious tradition or have helped them pursue their unique spiritual path. In some cases, students have integrated Kabbalistic practices into their Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, or nontraditional path.

One way that I maintain openness is using different languages to talk about and interpret contemplative experiences. Many others have also emphasized the

importance of deploying a range of terminologies when discussing contemplative, religious, and spiritual issues with different audiences (e.g., Astin, 2010; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). I encourage students to use whatever words and images they feel comfortable with. We discuss the fact that different cultures and individuals use different words and symbols for talking about their nonordinary experiences. One person might call the experiences *religious* or *godly*, while another calls them *spiritual*, while others call them *epiphanies*, or *moments of deep connection*, or *experiences of heightened vitality*. We also discuss the unfortunate fact that wars are waged over what to call these experiences and how to understand and value them. The history of religion reveals that nonordinary experiences which are considered fraudulent or heretical in one age may be considered authentic and even exemplary in another age—by the very same religious tradition (Armstrong, 1994). My students enjoy exploring the diverse concepts and values in particular word choices as well as examining how the interpretation of nonordinary experience is rooted in history, culture, and language even when the experience seems to largely transcend these worldly matters. We also consider premodern, modern, and postmodern interpretations of religious experience (e.g., Eliade, 1959; Lyotard, 1984; Griffin & Smith, 1990; Smith, 2003; Wilber, 2006). Professor Solimar said that she tries to use postmodern and transideational language that brings values back to the classroom and that refrains from religious terminology.

One important question is whether or not an instructor who is knowledgeable about and perhaps committed to one contemplative tradition can effectively, fairly, and legitimately present contemplative practices derived from other traditions. As I indicated, I believe that instructors need to both understand and value the contemplations they introduce in their classrooms. I do not present any contemplative practices that I am not knowledgeable about and competent with. Because I have immersed myself intellectually and experientially in the world's religions for two decades, I feel comfortable and able to lead a variety of meditations. In my Transpersonal Psychology class, for example, I lead one or two contemplative practices from each of the Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. Of course, I do not have expert knowledge in all of these traditions, but I value and am experienced with the contemplative practices I do lead. The issue of legitimacy is even more complex and problematic. I am aware that some religious, spiritual, or contemplative communities do not want "outsiders" or "non-members" to use or teach their practices. These communities often have legitimate concerns that their practices will be misunderstood and misappropriated. In any one community, there may be intense disagreements about whether or not to share spiritual practices with individuals who are not community members. These issues have become even more salient in light of the growing trend in America of individuals who practice nontraditional, nondenominational, interfaith, and integrative forms of spirituality



(Burack, 2005B, 2007; Roof, 1999; Wuthnow, 1998). Many practitioners of these new forms not only face the challenge of justifying the borrowing of practices from multiple traditions but also the challenge of integrating these practices in authentic, deep, and responsible ways (see Burack, 2005B, 2007).

Despite these and other challenges, I am hopeful that more and more teachers will come to see the value of using contemplative practices to facilitate not only the academic development and success of their students but also their holistic growth, well-being, and contribution to the world. The ancient Greeks believed that education was a bringing out (*educare*) of the soul. I believe that a holistic approach is needed to fully bring out the body-heart-mind-spirit of today's students—and I am convinced that such an approach must include a blend of conventional, creative, and contemplative methods.

## REFERENCES

- “APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major.” (2007). *American Psychological Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/about/psymajor-guidelines.aspx>.
- Armstrong, K. (1994). *A History of God*. New York: Ballantine.
- Astin, A. & Reams, J. (2010). “Spirituality and integral thought in higher education.” In Esbjorn-Hargens, S., Reams, J., & Gunnlaugson, O. (Eds.), *Integral Education: New Directions for Higher Learning*, 331-343. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Baughner, J. E. (forthcoming). “Contemplating uncomfortable emotions: Creating transformative spaces for learning in higher education.” In Gunnlaugson, O., Bai, H., Sarath, E., & Scott, C. (Eds.), *Contemplative Approaches to Learning & Inquiry Across Disciplines*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Benjamin, L. T. (2009). *A History of Psychology* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Bennett-Goleman, T. (2001). *Emotional Alchemy: How the Mind Can Heal the Heart*. New York: Harmony.
- Brady, R. (2007). “Learning to stop, stopping to learn: Discovering the contemplative dimension in education.” *Journal of Transformative Education* 5(4), 372-394.
- Bryant, A. N. (2006). “Exploring religious pluralism in higher education: Non-majority religious perspectives among entering first-year college students.” *Religion & Education* 33(1), 1-25.
- Bryant, A. N. & Schwartz, L. M. (2006). *Integrating Spirituality into the Campus Curriculum and Co-Curriculum*. Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

- Burack, C. (1999). "Returning meditation to education." *Tikkun* 14(5), 41-46.
- Burack, C. (2005A). *D. H. Lawrence's Language of Sacred Experiences: The Transfiguration of the Reader*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burack, C. (2005B). "Facing the challenges of integral spirituality." *Interreligious Insight* 3(1), 55-61.
- Burack, C. (2005C). "Speaking silence: poetry, mysticism, and meditation." *Interreligious Insight* 3(3), 8-14.
- Burack, C. (2007). "Overcoming the fear of mixing faiths." *Interreligious Insight* 5(3), 19-27.
- Burack, C. (2008). "Kabbalah for all people." *Interreligious Insight* 6(2), 72-81.
- Chickering, A.W., Dalton, J.C., & Stamm, L. (2006). *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cranton, P. (2000). "Individuals differences and transformative learning." In Mezirow, J. & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, 181-204. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dirkx, J. (2012). "Nurturing soul work: A Jungian approach to transformative learning." In Taylor, E.W., Cranton, P. & Associates, *The Handbook of Transformative Learning*, 116-130. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dirkx, J. (2009). "Facilitating transformative learning." In Mezirow, J., Taylor, E., & Associates (Eds.), *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, 57-66. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dirkx, J., Mezirow, J., & Cranton, P. (2006). "Musings and reflections on the meaning, context, and process of transformative learning: A dialogue between John M. Dirkx and Jack Mezirow." *Journal of Transformative Education* 4(2), 123-139.
- Duerr, M., Zajonc, A., & Dana, D. (2003). "Survey of transformative and spiritual dimensions of higher education." *Journal of Transformative Learning* 1(3), 177-211.
- Dutro, E. (2008). "'That's why I was crying on this book': Trauma as testimony in responses to literature." *Changing English* 15(4), 423-434.
- Eliade, M. (1959). *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. (Trans. Willard R. Trask). New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Esbjorn-Hargens, S. (2010). "Integral theory in service of enacting integral education: Illustrations from an online graduate program." In Esbjorn-Hargens, S., Reams, J., & Gunnlaugson, O. (Eds.), *Integral Education: New Directions for Higher Learning*, 57-78. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Ferrer, J. N. & Sherman, J. H. (2009). *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ferrer, J., Romero, M., & Albareda, R. (2010). "Integral transformative education: A participatory proposal." In Esbjorn-Hargens, S., Reams, J., & Gunnlaugson, O. (Eds.), *Integral Education: New Directions for Higher Learning*, 79-104. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Goldstein, J. (2003). *Insight Meditation: The Practice of Freedom*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Goleman, D. (1997). *Healing Emotions*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Griffin, D. R., & Smith, H. (1990). *Primordial Religion and Postmodern Theology*. New York: New York University Press.
- Grof, S. & Grof, C. (Eds.). (1989). *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis*. New York: Tarcher/Putman.
- Gunnlaugson, O. (2010). "Opening up the path of integral education: Reflections on a case study in changing from a holistic to integral college." In Esbjorn-Hargens, S., Reams, J., & Gunnlaugson, O. (Eds.), *Integral Education: New Directions for Higher Learning*, 303-316. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hanson, R. & Mendius, R. (2009). *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love and Wisdom*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.
- Hart, T. (2008). "Interiority and education: Exploring the neurophenomenology of contemplation and its potential role in learning." *Journal of Transformative Education* 6(4), 235-250.
- Hart, T. (2004). "Opening the contemplative mind in the classroom." *Journal of Transformative Education* 2(1), 28-46.
- Johnston Hurst, R. A. (2010). "What might we learn from heartache? Loss, loneliness, and Pedagogy." *Feminist Teacher* 20(1), 31-41.
- Konrad, S. C. (2010). "Relational learning in social work education: Transformative education for teaching a course on loss, grief and death." *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 30, 15-28.
- Kornfield, J. (1993). "The seven factors of enlightenment." In Walsh, R. & Vaughan, F. (Eds.), *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, 56-59. New York: Tarcher/ Putnam.
- Lindholm, J. A. & Astin, H. S. (2008). "Spirituality and pedagogy: Faculty's spirituality and use of student-centered approaches to undergraduate teaching." *The Review of Higher Education* 31(2), 185-207.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1984/1979). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

- O'Sullivan, E. (2012). "Deep Transformation: Forging a planetary worldview." In Taylor, E. W., Cranton, P., & Associates, *The Handbook of Transformative Learning*, 162-177. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- O'Sullivan, E. (1999). *Transformative learning: Educational vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York: Zed Books.
- Palmer, P. J. (1983). *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Palmer, P. & Zajonc, A. (2010). *The Heart of Higher Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Robinson, P. (2004). "Meditation: Its role in transformative learning and in the fostering of an integrative vision for higher education." *Journal of Transformative Education* 2(2), 107-119.
- Rogers, C. R. (1980). *A Way of Being*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Roof, W. C. (1999). *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Astin, A. A. (2008). "Toward the integration of meditation into higher education: A review of research." *The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society*. Retrieved from <http://www.contemplativemind.org/admin/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/MedandHigherEd.pdf>.
- Smith, H. (2003). *Beyond the Postmodern Mind: The Place of Meaning in a Global Civilization* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Wheaton, IL: Quest.
- Taylor, E. (2009). "Fostering transformative learning." In Mezirow, J., Taylor, E., & Associates (Eds.), *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, 3-17. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Torosyan, R. (2010). "Teaching integratively: Five dimensions of transformation." In Esbjorn-Hargens, S., Reams, J., & Gunnlaugson, O. (Eds.), *Integral Education: New Directions for Higher Learning*, 127-148. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Underhill, E. (1910/1990). *Mysticism*. New York: Image/Doubleday.
- Walsh, R. & Vaughan, F. (1993A). "Introduction." In Walsh, R. & Vaughan, F. (Eds.), *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, 1-10. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Walsh, R. & Vaughan, F. (1993B). "Meditation: The royal road to the transpersonal." In Walsh, R. & Vaughan, F. (Eds.), *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, 46-55. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Wilber, K. (1977). *The Spectrum of Consciousness*. Wheaton, IL: Quest.

- Wilber, K. (1993). "The spectrum of therapies." In Walsh, R. & Vaughan, F. (Eds.), *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, 156-159. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Wilber, K. (2006). *Integral Spirituality. A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Wuthnow, R. (1998). *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Zajonc, A. (2009). *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*. Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne.
- Zajonc, A. (2006). "Love and knowledge: Recovering the heart of learning through contemplation." *Teachers College Record* 108(9), 1742-1759.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

CHARLES BURACK, PhD, is Professor of Psychology and Liberal Studies (English) at John F. Kennedy University, where he specializes in integrative approaches to psychology, literature, creativity, and spirituality and received the Outstanding Faculty Award. He has pioneered contemplative, creative, and integral approaches to education at UC Berkeley and Naropa University, Oakland, created the undergraduate Liberal Studies program at JFKU, redesigned the undergraduate Psychology program at JFKU, and developed foundational courses for the Graduate Liberal Studies program at St. Mary's College and for the Interfaith Chaplaincy program at The Chaplaincy Institute. An award-winning scholar and poet, and widely published writer, Burack has published two books—*D. H. Lawrence's Language of Sacred Experience* and *Songs to My Beloved*—and dozens of articles, essays, stories, poems, and meditations. A former rabbinical student, he was trained as an interfaith spiritual counselor and lay hospital chaplain and is active in interfaith education, counseling, and the arts.



# Contemplating the Effects of Oppression: Integrating Mindfulness into Diversity Classrooms

**Beth Berila**  
St. Cloud State University

---

*This article argues that contemplative practices are particularly important additions to university courses that deal with issues of oppression and diversity. Mindfulness can help students learn how their identity locations shape their reactions to course content; as such, they help participants do the work of unlearning the effects of systems of oppression. Students can then learn to recognize, understand, and be accountable for their responses. The article also argues that faculty who integrate contemplative practices in the classroom (in any discipline) need to be prepared for a myriad of responses from students, including reactions that result from being a member of marginalized groups in society. Contemplative practices can unintentionally trigger disturbing responses for students, so the article concludes with useful principles rooted in feminist pedagogy to help faculty address those unexpected reactions.*

*Keywords: feminist pedagogy, mindful education, diversity, self-reflection, yoga, diversity education, embodied learning, oppression, anti-oppression education, oppression-based trauma, mindfulness practices*

---

## Educating the Whole Student

Over the past ten years, mindfulness initiatives have become more common, more visible, and more coordinated throughout U.S. colleges and universities (Shapiro, Brown, & Austin, 2008, p. 6). Increasingly, higher education is recognizing the value of what the University of Massachusetts calls “integrated student learning.” Others call it holistic education, or the idea of educating the whole student. Mark Nepo, former Program Officer at the Fetzer Institute, uses the term “transformational education,” which is

understood as educating the whole person by integrating the inner and the outer life, by actualizing individual and global awakening, and by participating in compassionate communities—[it] has become a quiet but sturdy movement that encourages the recovery and development of the academy as a liberating and capacity-building environment. (Nepo, 2010, p. vii)

Though each concept has its nuances, all are efforts to develop resiliency and well-being in the whole student. Rather than assuming that a student's personal life is separate from the academic portion of her college experience, this vision of education facilitates the two components working more closely together. As Diana Chapman Walsh, President Emerita of Wellesley College, noted in her 2005 keynote address to the Dalton Institute on College Student Values at Florida State University,

The issues facing the next generation globally demand that we educate our students worldwide to use all of their resources, not just their mind or their heart. The hour is late, the work is hard, and the stakes are high, but few institutions are better positioned to take up this work than our nation's colleges and universities. (qtd. in Nepo, 2010, p. v)

More and more educators are integrating various contemplative practices into the university classroom in order to help students cultivate presence, self-reflection, and what Brown University calls "critical first person inquiry," or the ability to experience something with an open mind and then step back and study the experience ("The Rationale," 2013). This kind of engagement recognizes that learning is not merely intellectual and knowledge is not something "out there," removed from us. Instead, learners engage in the process of knowledge production. Contemplative practices, when integrated into the college classroom, can help students develop this ability to critically self-reflect. It can also offer them tools to remain present—and *embodied*—in the classroom.

This skill is critical, I will argue, for classrooms that teach about diversity issues, such as women's studies, ethnic studies, sociology, LGBT studies, and peace studies. These disciplines teach their subject matter not just as objects of study, but also as social systems in which we all *participate* in various ways. If students are to really reflect on their roles in these systems, they need to cultivate the tools for recognizing and understanding their internal and external reactions to that realization. Moreover, this learning process usually produces some intense discussions, which can flow more effectively if participants are able to recognize, understand, and be accountable for their own reactions. Contemplative practices offer precisely those tools. When learned and practiced effectively, mindfulness also offers more compassionate alternatives to the ways that people often engage the challenging conversations about diversity. As such, I believe they are a necessary addition to diversity classrooms because they enable what bell hooks calls an "engaged pedagogy" that emphasizes well-being through integrated, holistic, and progressive education (hooks, 1994, p. 14).

My experience as a women's studies professor has taught me that students bring a variety of complex histories into the classroom that can deeply shape their experiences of contemplative practices. If, as feminist theory suggests, who we are shapes both how we experience things and what we know, then our histories, our



experiences, and our positionalities in society will shape how we meet contemplative practices. While it is common for meditation teachers to prepare students for our minds to wander and for yoga teachers to warn students that poses will be more challenging for some people than for others, there may be deeper reasons for a student's responses to particular practices. In particular, being a member of a marginalized group means being a survivor of oppression, and that history will likely emerge as we sit and turn inward. Teachers who use these practices in the classroom need to be prepared for what might come up for marginalized students in these practices.

By women's studies and feminism, I mean an analytical lens that foregrounds issues of gender within its intersectional matrix with race, class, sexual identity, and nation. The form of feminism I invoke here is a way of asking questions and a set of values, rather than a set of foregone conclusions. It does not see women and men as monolithic categories, but instead studies how other aspects of identity (race, religion, sexuality, class, national location, ability) shape the gendered experience. By mindfulness or contemplative practices, I mean activities such as yoga, meditation, *pranayama* (breath work), and others, that are designed to cultivate self-awareness, embodiment, balance, and clarity with compassion.

This article examines two interrelated ideas: 1) that these tools are particularly important for classes that deal with issues of diversity; and 2) that faculty who integrate contemplative practices in the classroom (in any discipline) need to be prepared for reactions that result from being a member of marginalized groups in society. I will offer some useful principles rooted in feminist pedagogy to help faculty address those unexpected reactions.

### **Why Mindfulness is Critical in Courses that Teach about Diversity**

Courses that deal with oppression and diversity can greatly benefit from contemplative practices, because they can help us unlearn the conditioned responses that uphold or result from systems of oppression. Women's studies classes, for instance, teach students to understand socioeconomic power dynamics and their positions within them. Like holding a camera, our positionality frames what we can and cannot see. The critical self-reflection tools cultivated in mindfulness, combined with a feminist analytical understanding, help us see that who we are shapes what we know. And this helps us expand the lens of what we can see.

The classes, then, are not just objective studies of content. They also teach self-reflective processes that invite students to examine how these systems affect them and what their roles might be within those systems. In traditional higher education, learning is often seen as content to be known, rather than as a process in which we engage. Feminist classrooms counter this one-dimensional privileging of cognition to highlight an "embodied reflexivity" in which participants reflect on their ideologies and experiences. Diane Gustofson describes this embodied reflex-

ivity as a “self-conscious, critical, and intense process of gazing inward and outward that results in questioning assumptions, identifying problems, and organizing for change” (1999, p. 249). Feminist pedagogy attends not only to the content that is learned but also to the learning process itself. According to Gustofson,

Embodied learning blends two parallel and complementary ways of knowing: the knowing that is discoverable in and mediated by concrete texts, and the knowing that is discoverable in our experiences as embodied beings.... Because embodied learning recognizes and values embodied experiences, student and teacher can explore the social organization of knowledge and how their identities are ‘created’ by the dominant discourse of ‘power knowledge’ while at the same time they can create themselves in opposition to that discourse. (Ferguson qtd. in Gustofson, 1999, p. 250)

By developing critical first-person inquiry skills through contemplative practices, students learn to see and feel how gendered or racialized power dynamics affect them. They can become more mindful of their reactions to intense discussions and learn to process them rather than merely react to them. They can then more effectively learn the tools to cultivate oppositional, more empowered narratives.

### **Bringing Mindfulness to Layered Discussions in the Classroom**

In order to understand how contemplative practices might be both crucial and complex in the classroom, let’s look at two scenarios that underscore some situations that might arise from incorporating contemplative practices in the classroom. These scenarios are hypothetical composites of my own experiences with students over the years and my research in feminist pedagogy. I will first outline the two scenarios and then analyze how mindfulness can transform these situations into invaluable teaching moments for diversity classrooms.

#### *Scenario #1:*

*Ted is taking an Introduction to Psychology class to fulfill a general education requirement. He is one of two students of color in the class, which is not unusual for his experience at the predominantly white institution that he attends. He often feels either invisible or hypervisible in the class. Sometimes, the teacher will make a comment about African Americans and then look to him to confirm the statement, as though he can speak for the entire African American community. His classmates are friendly enough, but he often overhears comments that he takes to be offensive—statements about Black men in hip hop, for instance, or disparaging remarks about President Barack Obama that imply that he is less capable because he is biracial. Some days, Ted notices halfway through*

*the class that he has tuned out the lecture as he mulls over a comment that he heard. Today, the professor tells the students that they are going to practice a mindful listening exercise, something Ted has never done before. When he is told to turn to the student to his right and begin the exercise, Ted realizes that he has landed next to a student whom he heard make a racially disparaging comment about Ted's favorite African American professor on campus. Ted was so angry when he heard that comment, and as he turned to the student next to him, he felt that rage and hurt well up again inside him. He wanted to be anywhere but there, but couldn't discreetly move at this point. He determined to push through the exercise, though because he wasn't very open, he got nothing out of it. He left class with no interest in trying contemplative exercises again.*

**Scenario #2:**

*John is a white man and a veteran of the Iraq war who comes from a working class background. He has been on two tours and is now taking advantage of the GI Bill to get his education. He feels out of place on campus—he is older than most of the students and no one else in his family has gone to college. The things his classmates talk about before class seem so unimportant to him given the things he has seen and experienced in Iraq. He knows he suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), but he thinks he has it pretty under control with his counseling. He makes an effort to engage with his classmates and works hard in class, but he is having a hard time in his ethnic studies class, which studies race relations in the U.S. He understands that racism exists and that whites have done awful things to people of color, but feels that much of that is in the past. His platoon included many men of color and they got each others' backs; he knows he wouldn't have made it back without the bond they all had. So when his teacher tells him that white men have power over everyone else in society, he feels his confusion rising. He doesn't feel like he has much power. He joined the military because it was the only way to escape the town he grew up in, and he never would have been able to afford college without the GI Bill.*

*His teacher, who is also a yoga teacher, asks them to do a beginning yoga class as part of the ethnic studies class. Maybe he was feeling particularly sensitive that day because he just heard word that one of his buddies was killed by a roadside bomb. On the way to campus, a motorcycle backfired and he had a flashback. His anxiety was high when he came to class, but he figured yoga could maybe be good for him. He tried to settle in.*

*However, the teacher kept moving around the room, so he never knew where she was and often jumped to find her too close behind him. When she touched him to give an adjustment, he tensed up and had to resist the gut reaction to lash out in self-defense. He couldn't lie still in savasana and hurried out of the room when the class was finished.*

These two scenarios are composites of situations that are all too common in the classroom. Students bring these layered experiences to any discussion of oppression, and unless we learn how to reflect upon those reactions, our teachings about diversity will remain on a superficial level. The reactions that both Ted and John exhibited are the rich ground of diversity work—they are what we need to explore. But there are some things the teachers could have done to make the situations more productive and less threatening for the students.

For instance, Ted's situation was partly unsettling to him because it came as a surprise. The professor could have forewarned students that the activity was going to take place, so that students could sit next to students with whom they feel more comfortable. Whether the professor knows it or not, Ted faces incremental racism everyday on campus that shapes his learning experience (“Internalizing Racism,” 2013). He has developed certain survival mechanisms: in this case, shutting down and missing out on the full effect of the activity. Mindful listening requires both trust and openness, neither of which was possible for Ted, given the acts of racism he experiences.

John, too, has very complex histories that shape his experiences on campus. As more and more veterans return to school, universities have to better understand the unique needs of this population of students in order to effectively ensure their success on campus. While contemplative practices such as yoga and meditation can be incredibly effective for working with veterans struggling with PTSD, those practices are often significantly modified in a way that did not happen in John's situation (Emerson, 2011). In addition, most college classrooms consist of people with a variety of experiences, so adapting the practices may be more difficult (particularly if the professor is unaware of the particular situations of each student).

In the next section, I will speak more specifically to how the teachers need to be aware of these types of responses in the students, and I will offer some principles for addressing them. In this section, I want to focus on how these scenarios illustrate the rich ground for integrating contemplative practices in diversity classrooms, if they are done thoughtfully.

The learning process in courses that teach about diversity often invokes a variety of intense emotions. People whose identities are marginalized by the systems may feel frustration, anger, sadness, or powerlessness. Sometimes, oppression works through significant acts of violence, such as hate crimes. More often, it works through daily micro-aggressions that accumulate over time with significant effect,

often resulting in what can arguably be called oppression-based trauma (Williams, 2013; “Internalizing Racism,” 2013). The effects of this trauma can be very similar to PTSD, and so any activity that asks participants to turn inward and reflect is likely to bring these reactions to the surface.

Students from marginalized groups may also experience internalized oppression, such as when a gay man struggles accepting his own gay identity. Internalized oppression results when a person believes the negative messages about his group that pervade dominant culture. The result can be denial of the identity, self-hatred, negative body image, depression, low self-esteem, and/or a disconnection from one’s emotions. I have, for instance, had a lesbian student, who performed more masculine gender performance, skip a class in which we were going to do meditation because she was so uncomfortable in her body that fifteen minutes of a body scan seemed unbearable to her. This kind of reaction is not uncommon. The usual guidance from meditation teachers to “accept your reactions without judgment” or to “drop the storyline” or to “let them pass” will likely not be enough if we don’t give the students a language with which to make sense of the overwhelming feelings that might arise. This student’s reaction, like Ted and John’s, are not just the run-of-the-mill mind-wandering that is normal for meditation. They are actually deeply-embedded coping mechanisms and wounds from oppression.

Ultimately, the meditation tools can become a compassionate way of sitting with and even healing those responses, but not before the student has learned to recognize that the overwhelming reactions that arise are the result of living in an oppressive society. That lesbian student’s response to contemplative activities will likely be different from the student sitting next to her who does not have the same marginalized identity location, and it is likely that the coping mechanisms that she has developed to survive will kick in (as they did—she avoided the situation by skipping class). This moment offers an invaluable teaching opportunity *if* the classroom is a safe enough space to discuss these reactions. The teacher has the opportunity to help students frame their reactions, learn to sit with them, and develop alternatives to them. This analysis is crucial if we are to understand how deeply oppression works, but can be tricky to get at since the classroom is often not considered a fully safe place for members of marginalized groups.

Alternatively, like John, students who are characterized as members of the dominant group may feel frustration, anger, or resistance to the idea that they have privilege in a society, especially if they do not feel that they have benefited much in their lifetimes. Women’s studies classrooms often talk about how members of the dominant group (white, heterosexual, male, upper class, Western) often receive benefits that are denied members of marginalized groups. Not only are people taught not to see those benefits if they receive them, but they may not be very tangible to people, especially if they are marginalized in some ways. Moreover, intersections of oppression mean that someone may gain privilege in some ways but be

marginalized in others. John, remember, is white and male, but he is also working class and a veteran. The feelings of confusion he experiences are pretty common among the students I teach who are privileged in some ways.

Rather than characterizing their reactions as merely “resistance” that must be overcome or as a kind of clinging to oppressive systems (as their reactions are sometimes framed), I argue that these reactions are precisely the complex terrain that must be explored if we are truly to learn the self-reflection that is critical to un-learning the effects of oppression. Too often, students’ reactions are talked about in terms of “resistance,” but it would be a much more productive strategy to offer the students ways to learn to meet and process their reactions as *inevitable byproducts of systems of oppression*. Contemplative practices offer valuable tools for moving the study of oppression from a mere object of study to a deeper process that is both internal and external. They offer the tools through which to recognize, understand, and come to terms with the layered reactions students often feel when learning about these subjects. Mindfulness can help students learn to understand their own reactions and see why theirs might differ from others in the room, which is a critical step toward learning more compassionate ways to relate to one another.

Students are so often disconnected from their bodies that it is not easy to reverse the messages that we have learned from childhood. Mindfulness practices can become a valuable tool to help students more fully cultivate a sense of embodiment. This embodied learning adds another angle to what Elizabeth Ellsworth calls “new pedagogies of sensations.” She writes:

Pedagogy as ‘sensation construction’ is no longer merely representational. It is no longer a model that teachers use to set the terms in which already-known ideas, curriculums, or knowledges are put into relation; rather to the extent that sensations are ‘conditions of possible experience,’ pedagogy as sensation is a condition of possible experiences of thinking. (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 27)

While Ellsworth focuses her work on architecture and media, the argument could also apply to our embodied experiences in a diversity classroom. Embodied learning is generative: students become co-creators of knowledge by recognizing the body as a dynamic epistemological site. Thus, as the various reactions emerge during meditation or yoga, teachers can help students make sense of them in the context of oppressive systems that have helped produce them. We can begin to see the reactions as more than just the typical “monkey mind,” but instead as inevitable byproducts of living a particular identity in an inequitable society. The combination of students with differently positioned identities and bodies in any given classroom is a vibrant and dialectical opportunity for co-creation (if a classroom is safe enough for them to have an open and honest discussion about such intense subjects—more on that in the next section). Students can then take the next step to befriend that

experience and begin to unlearn the harmful cultural messages that so often barrage them. Contemplative practices can offer invaluable tools for learning, not merely intellectually, but also in an embodied way, how oppression works, what its effects are, and, ultimately, how to work toward dismantling them.

### **When Contemplative Practices Trigger**

As valuable as these tools can be to a classroom that teaches about diversity, the scenarios of Ted and John also illustrate that they are not so simply integrated. Indeed, regardless of the discipline, educators need to incorporate contemplative practices carefully. We do not know what histories our students have, nor can we predict their responses to various exercises, so we need to be prepared. My experience teaching women's studies has taught me that certain subject matters will hit very close to home for some students, and those responses will likely become more visceral if we ask students to sink into their embodied, emotional experiences with meditation, yoga, or other mindfulness practices.

Consider the following scenarios, which again are composites of various students with whom I have worked over the years, both in academic and yoga classes. Imagine how we, as teachers who are integrating contemplative practices into our classrooms, would have to adapt our practices to more effectively and safely meet their needs. I will discuss how I integrate feminist pedagogy and mindfulness practices after I trace out the scenarios.

#### *Scenario #3:*

*Bethany is a white woman who enrolled in a women's studies course to fulfill a diversity requirement. She was unfamiliar with gender studies and with the teacher, and had no idea that contemplative practices would be a part of the curriculum until the first week of class. She felt some discomfort, though she wasn't sure why. Still, this class was the only one that fit into her schedule, so she stayed in the class. In the third week, she came to class expecting to talk about the readings for that day, and was surprised to find out that the class was going to do a mindful eating practice in class that day. Immediately, Bethany's anxiety rose, because she doesn't eat in front of people and carefully monitors her calorie intake. She already has to go to the gym for an extra hour to make up for the yogurt she ate that morning. She doesn't feel like she can leave the class without making a scene, but she feels waves of fear, self-hatred (though she doesn't yet know to call it that) and powerlessness overwhelm her as the teacher explains the mindful eating exercise. She decides that since she is trapped in the classroom, she will just numb herself to get through the activity and will go purge in the bathroom after. It will be months before Bethany acknowledges that she has an eating disorder and begins to heal from it.*

## Scenario #4:

*Jennifer is an Asian American woman who was recently sexually assaulted by a male student with whom she went out on a date her second week on campus. She has not told anyone about it because she feels so ashamed. No one notices that she has gotten more withdrawn and quiet since the event, because few people on campus knew her before the incident. She has simply shut down, keeping her eyes downcast and wearing baggy clothing. In the seventh week of her sociology class, the teacher begins to lead them through a body scan, saying that this meditation practice can be a helpful way of handling the stress of the upcoming midterms. The professor turns out the lights, which makes Jennifer suddenly feel afraid. But she decides to give it a try, figuring she could use some help with stress. As she listens to the professor's voice and begins to drop into her body, the fear gets stronger. Her heart rate increases, she begins fidgeting, and her body tenses up. By the time the professor has moved to the hip and pelvic area, Jennifer wants to crawl out of her skin. His voice grates on her and she wants to run from the room. When the exercise is over, she is shaking, and though the professor says goodbye to her when she leaves, he doesn't notice that she shies away from him and doesn't come to class the next day. She spends the rest of the day in her darkened dorm room.*

Though this is a hypothetical composite of many students with whom I have worked over the years, the experience is all too common. In the United States, an estimated 20 million women and 10 million men have eating disorders (National Eating Disorders Association, 2011). One in four college women report surviving rape or attempted rape (One in Four, n.d.). Often, students who struggle with both situations suffer for some time before they seek out help. Each semester, students in my women's studies classes tell me that they have an eating disorder or have been assaulted and ask me for help. Whether or not these students talk to their other professors about their situations, they are in classes throughout campus. Their struggles can negatively affect their coursework and their overall health. They might also be unexpectedly highlighted by certain contemplative practices.

A student like Bethany would obviously have a complex response to a mindful eating exercise. As the scenario suggests, having to work with food unexpectedly in front of her peers might trigger multiple responses. At best, she may not be able to get the desired effect from the exercise. At worst, the activity can provoke overwhelming emotions and physical responses of which the professor may remain unaware. Similarly, a student like Jennifer has likely survived the sexual assault by disassociating, so it may be impossible for her to experience her body in a body scan meditation. If she does manage to reconnect with her body, the result might



be intense trauma recollections that she is not yet ready to handle. In the case of both students, these deeply unsettling responses might occur unbeknownst to the professor, who likely thinks the contemplative practices are safe and beneficial. To the students, however, the practices might have the opposite effect.

Of course, mindfulness practices can be a powerful healing tool and many treatment centers and counselors are integrating them into their programs. But to encounter an exercise unexpectedly in an academic setting when the professor has no idea that the student is struggling with disordered eating or sexual assault makes the situation much more loaded. Moreover, the professor may very well be unaware of the responses the activity triggered and wouldn't feel qualified to deal with them anyway. Nevertheless, statistically, there is a strong likelihood that an average-sized college classroom is likely to have such a student in it.

### **Tips for More Intentionally Integrating Contemplative Practices**

This does not mean that contemplative practices should be avoided. In fact, as I have already argued, they can be deeply valuable additions to many different classrooms. But we do need to be more mindful about how we use them. So what could the professor have done in these situations? Here are five principles I follow whenever I teach contemplative practices in the classroom. All of them are informed by feminist pedagogy.

1. *Assume that someone in the room has suffered from trauma.* I have worked with college students for over ten years, and in any given group, it is almost inevitable that there will be survivors in the room. Rather than assume these are anomalies, I start with the assumption that they *will* be in the room and behave with the requisite compassion and calm. I always hope I am wrong about that assumption, but unfortunately, I rarely am.

2. *Prepare the students for these possible reactions beforehand.* Preface the exercises with some introductory remarks that let students know that if they have histories of any of these issues, they may experience some aftereffects of those issues in their meditation or yoga practice. Even a simple warning can help prepare students for their reactions—which can be far more distressing if they arrive unannounced.

Obviously, in-depth discussions of these sorts of issues may be more appropriate in a women's studies classroom than they would be in an economics or engineering classroom. But remember, the students who are talking about these experiences of violence in my classroom are also in other classes across campus; it's just that in women's studies, we offer a language for it. These students might be manifesting these experiences in other classes by sudden plummets in grades, excessive absences, sullen behavior, or unusual withdrawn isolation. My point is that

these experiences *do* affect their performance in *all* of their classes; we just might not be attributing the proper reason for the behavior. One doesn't have to go into a lengthy diatribe about the possible reactions to historical trauma that can arise in mindfulness, but it can be helpful to briefly name them so that students are not totally taken by surprise.

3. *Offer the option of opting out.* People heal at their own paces. It is important to allow students to self-select out of a mindfulness activity if it is necessary for them to do so. I offer an alternative assignment if the student chooses not to participate. I typically let them know before the class period where we will be doing yoga or meditation so that they can make other arrangements inconspicuously. If it's an activity that we will be doing regularly throughout the semester, or even everyday, I let them know the first week of classes and ask them to talk with me if they need to make alternative arrangements. I am a firm believer that meditation and yoga can be healing activities, but students need to be ready to do so. They may not feel comfortable doing so in an academic classroom. I prefer to let students be informed and active agents in their lives and make the choice about when it is healthy for them to participate in these activities.

4. *Provide support resources.* When I do mindfulness activities or when I teach about sexual assault, eating disorders, or other sensitive topics in my women's studies classes, I always warn students that these are sensitive topics that may hit close to home. I ask them to pay attention to their responses during the class session (itself a mindfulness exercise) and to take care of themselves. Connecting them with campus resources is a crucial part of this process. While we, as professors in the classroom, often do not have the skills to help students with the psychological responses that might arise from mindfulness exercises, we can and should connect them with those who can, including campus counseling services, women's centers, multicultural student services, LGBT resource centers, veteran's centers and/or health centers.

5. *Hold the space.* As professors, we probably know how to claim students' attention when we want to start class and how to hold our authority as we teach. But when engaging in mindfulness practices that might create unintended triggers, we need to also hold the space with compassion, kindness, and nonjudgmentalness. Students might be startled by what can arise in mindfulness reflections, so it's particularly important for us as teachers to remain grounded and to meet students' reactions—whatever they may be—with a calm compassion and to guide the student to the proper resources on campus. Holding the

space means doing our own work to maintain our center, so that we can respond as wisely as possible. Like mindfulness itself, this gets both simpler and deeper with practice.

I don't want to suggest that incorporating any meditation or yoga in the classroom will result in psychological breakdowns of our students. Of course they won't. For many of our students, it will be a new and interesting experience, notable only by its difference from traditional college lectures. But our students lead complex lives that do not stop when they walk into a college classroom. Asking them to become more present and aware is also inviting them to more fully integrate, rather than compartmentalize, their experiences. Ultimately, integrating these practices in thoughtful and intentional ways into college classrooms, particularly those that address topics of diversity and oppression, can allow for a deeper, more embodied, and transformative learning process.

## REFERENCES

- Brown University Contemplative Studies Initiative. (2013). "The Rationale Behind Contemplative Studies." Retrieved from <http://www.brown.edu/academics/contemplative-studies/about/rationale>.
- Ellsworth, E. (2005). *Places of Learning: Media, Architecture, and Pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.
- Emerson, D., & Hopper, E. (2011). *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga: Reclaiming Your Body*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Gustofson, D. (1999). "Embodied learning: The body as an epistemological site." In Mayberry, M. & Rose, E.C. (Eds.). *Meeting the Challenge: Innovative Feminist Pedagogies in Action*, 249-274. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- "Internalizing Racism" [video]. (May 28, 2013). *HuffPost Live*. Retrieved from <http://live.huffingtonpost.com/r/segment/can-racism-cause-ptsd/519d084c2b8c2a4ebc00010d>.
- National Eating Disorders Association. (2011). "Get the Facts on Eating Disorders." Retrieved from <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/get-facts-eating-disorders>.
- Nepo, M. (2010). Foreword. In Palmer, P.J., Zajonc, A., & Scribner, M., *The Heart Of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal, Transforming the Academy through Collegial Conversations* (v-xvii). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

One in Four. (n.d.) "Sexual Assault Statistics." Retrieved from <http://www.onein-fourusa.org/statistics.php>.

Shapiro, S., Brown, K., Astin, J., & Duerr, M. (2008). "Toward the Integration of Meditation into Higher Education: A Review of Research." *The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society*. Retrieved from <http://www.contemplativemind.org/admin/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/MedandHigherEd.pdf>.

Williams, M.T. (May 20, 2013). "Can racism cause PTSD? Implications for DSM-5." *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/culturally-speaking/201305/can-racism-cause-ptsd-implications-dsm-5>.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

BETH BERILA is the Director of the Women's Studies Program and a Professor in the Ethnic and Women's Studies Department at St. Cloud State University. She earned her 200-hour yoga certification with Senior Anusara instructors and is completing her 340-hour yoga teacher certification with Devanadi School of Yoga and Wellness in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her work addresses intersections of embodiment, feminism, yoga, and mindful education. She is particularly interested in how contemplative practices such as yoga and meditation offer students an embodied empowerment that deeply compliments other kinds of empowerment found in Women's Studies disciplines. Her current writings focus on how college students can learn to use contemplative practices to live healthier, more balanced lives, and how teachers can effectively integrate contemplative practices to help students unlearn the effects of systems of oppression. More information can be found at <http://www.bethberila.com>.

# Mindfulness & Bodyfulness: A New Paradigm

**Christine Caldwell**  
*Naropa University*

---

*The word mindfulness, though it has been used for centuries, may be both poorly defined and poorly used. Though the word connotes mental processes, the construct often includes embodiment practices such as yoga, sensory tracking, conscious breathing, tai chi, and qi gong. This can generate confusion, conflation, muddled research, and an anti-somatic bias. The author proposes the invention of a new term, bodyfulness, in order to centralize the often marginalized voice of the body in therapeutic, empirical, sociocultural, and contemplative practices.*

*Keywords: mindfulness, bodyfulness, contemplative practice, mindfulness research, embodiment, somatic psychology*

---

## Introduction

In English, the word *bodyfulness* strikes most of us as odd and awkward. Why is that, aside from the fact that it is newly invented? How can I be “full” of body? What qualities and states would that word signify? The word arose out of a contemplation of the word *mindfulness*, a word that is becoming increasingly known and used in popular culture. Other “fullness” words in the English language are in general use as well—thoughtfulness, heartfulness, soulfulness. These “fullness” words connote positive human traits, traits we all want to cultivate. They imply caring, consideration, sincerity, deep reflection, loving kindness, and engagement with deeper places within oneself.

People invent words because they want to be able to express something they experience. Naming something gives that thing coherence, validity, solidity. As Daniel Siegel states in *The Mindful Brain*,

Words are digital packets of information that convey to ourselves and others our models of conceptual reality—how we see and think about the world. They’re part of the brain’s top-down apparatus for ordering and making sense of incoming sensory information. (Siegel, 2007, p. 54)

Words actively shape how we perceive the world, creating a set of verbal categories for our experiences to live in, boxes that were handed down to us by

family and culture as kits to be assembled into an adapted shape by our personal histories. These boxes are tremendously useful and at the same time always more or less distorting. We constantly get in trouble because we mistake the word-box for the reality of our lived experience, and can start dumping all sorts of connotations, biases, and historical events into the word-box, potentially poisoning it so much that we have to stop using it. I remember once helping a young German friend to practice English. He said the words “colored man.” I anxiously corrected him, stating that the phrase should be “man of color,” and that saying colored man would be terribly offensive. He didn’t get the distinction, and it sparked a long talk about the historical use of the word *colored* in the United States, and how deeply wounding and insulting the placement of a single, seemingly innocuous word can be because of the oppression that rode along with it in the word-box.

At moments like these we have an opportunity to see outside the verbal boxes, a typically disorienting event that happens every time we authentically make contact with another person’s language system, whether it be religious, ethnic, gendered, geographic, or professional. We often learn something about our own notions of the way we assume things work at these moments. Certainly these moments rattle and potentially reshuffle our internal dictionaries.

Dan Siegel goes on to talk about how poets “up-end” our verbal boxes:

Our ordinary language can be a prison, locking us in the jail of our own redundancies, dulling our senses, clouding our focus. By presenting ambiguities, by using words in unfamiliar ways, by juxtaposing elements of perceptual reality in new combinations, by evoking imagery, poets and their poetry offer us fresh, novel possibilities for experiencing life. (Siegel, 2007, p. 54)

As humans we need to make words, and after a time we need to shake out the accumulated debris that human nature sticks onto them, whether by way of poetry or a change of social convention. At the same time, some lived experiences seem so powerful and transcendent that they leave us speechless and we purposefully don’t create word-boxes for them so we can keep them undistorted. We have even invented a word for not assigning a word to these experiences—ineffable. It is often the ineffable experience that we choose to express in bodily ways—through movement, gesture, dance—so that implicit neural mechanisms can process and express wordless experiences directly, creating a powerful intersubjective resonance within and between people.

The “fullness” states cited above—mindful, thoughtful, heartfelt, soulful—all live in positively connoted and slightly ineffable word-boxes. They all endeavor to express a state of attentiveness, a quality of occupying our heart or our mind so completely that we experience a state of realized human potential. Even though all word-boxes will get us into trouble, these states themselves are something we can

safely strive for, as they seem to represent some of the best qualities that human-kind has to offer.

It's curious that in English we don't have a distinct word to express a state of being present and aware in the body—a deep state of somatic wakefulness—a state of profound occupation of the present moment, as it becomes explicit in flesh and nerve and bone. Interestingly, philosophers, scientists, and psychotherapists are beginning to explicate different bodily states that involve heightened somatic awareness (Fogel, 2009; Hanna, 1987; Johnson, 1994; Shusterman, 2008), wordlessly shared intersubjective relating and knowing (Fosha, 2000; Stern, 2004), and the body-to-body transmission of healing (Wilkinson, 2010). Many related words abound—somaesthetics, embodiment, somatic modes of attention, implicit relational knowing, the intersubjective field, mirroring, and attunement, to name a few.

I am attempting to add a new word here, called *bodyfulness*, that can function as a rubric for centralizing the body within the intrapsychic and social contexts it has long deserved to occupy but has not achieved in most modern cultures, especially Western ones. Perhaps this is because *bodyfulness* has been so ineffable that we just didn't want to box it up until now. But more likely it's because we can't name something that we don't regularly know how to feel, or that isn't important to us, or that we actively marginalize.

This article is about inventing a new word so that something important might be valued and communicated amongst us. It's about inventing a new word so that certain valuable experiences and states can become more coherent, supported, and accessible to more people on a daily basis. It's about finding a more delineated home for body-based contemplative practices. It's about foregrounding an unrealized aspect of human potential that just might have a profound effect on our futures.

### **A Lived Context**

I came to this word, *bodyfulness*, slowly and honestly. It began in my living room when I was about six years old, as I danced for my parents and their friends one evening. The look of tension and disapproval on their faces as they politely watched me jump and wiggle was so shaming to me that I stopped dancing entirely until I was a Cultural Anthropology student at UCLA, when, out of a desperate need for a required performing arts elective that had to be on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, I took a modern dance class. Within weeks my world was up-ended, which is to say that it was made right. As I stretched and gestured and moved across the hardwood floors, it was as if I *re-membered* myself. I certainly recognized myself for the first time in a long time. I “came out,” not so much as a dancer, but as a purposeful, conscious mover.

I devoted my career to the academic study of movement, and serendipitously landed at an institution in Boulder, Colorado, that was founded by a Tibetan monk named Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. He called it Naropa University, and instructed

faculty and staff to apply non-sectarian meditation principles and practices to higher education. I found myself in an academic and scholarly setting that also valued wakefulness, meditation, and compassionate action. Over time something ineffable in this environment seeped in to me, and that something was mindfulness. Slowly this time, my world turned and again oriented in the right direction. Contemplative practice was the last missing element, the piece of the puzzle that brought everything into a coherent and refined clarity. Both mindfulness and bodyfulness were and continue to be essential to my sense of a coherent and productive self.

### **Life at the Margins**

My six-year-old dancing disaster was neither unique nor unusual nor particularly remarkable. What it was, was pivotal. It vividly marked the moment when I joined the ranks of the majority of people who feel shame when they view or directly experience their body. Body shame is so rampant in the US that nine out of ten people, when shown a silhouette of their body, will have a negative emotional response (Jackson, 2002). Interestingly, this negative feeling occurs independently of what the person weighs. Research shows that in the developed countries we tend to internalize a shame-based image of our bodies fairly early and fairly enduringly (Tiggemann, 2002). Part of what I will propose is that this internalized “somatophobia” results from most of us growing up in cultures and sub-cultures that valorize *bodylessness*.

From the time that we humans began to sharpen our wits we began to dull our senses. The marginalization of the body has such a long and cross-cultural history that we barely notice or care that the oppression of our bodily selves is constant, insidious, and potentially devastating (Berman, 1989). We can see this in two ways; first, in the historical use of physical difference as a weapon in the oppression and persecution of individuals and whole populations; and second, in the devaluing of the body itself as a source of identity and authoritative knowledge about our direct, lived experience of the world.

In this context, bodyfulness is not something we can afford to marginalize any longer. As technology becomes increasingly complex and crucial to modern living, the urge to keep over-valuing thoughts and ideas increases as the need for—and valuing of—physical labor decreases. Nielsen ratings note that in the U.S. both children and adults spend an average of six hours a day sitting still in front of some kind of screen or monitor. Yearly, we are not only exercising less but we are simply moving around less as well. In the remaining physical labor jobs, many require rote, repetitive, assembly line movement, the unnaturalness of which causes multiple detrimental side effects, often named as *repetitive motion syndrome*. And as modern societies increasingly give their best resources to those of us who can understand and operate complex technology, we who are brought up with technology are becoming increasingly both privileged and disembodied. By disembodied I mean ignorant of or ashamed of our physical natures. We can download, upload, text



message, Twitter, and blog, but we are losing the ability and the interest in being able to construct a bookshelf, fix a toaster oven, or do the samba.

Cruelly, people who haven't had access to this technological privilege are becoming increasingly marginalized and *mis-embodied*. Mis-embodied can be defined as being "made less than," physically. Sociologist and feminist Judith Butler (1993), for instance, uses a play on words in English when she writes about how in many cultures women's bodies don't *matter*, and are literally *de-materialized*, made invisible. Whether we are made to feel less than others via how our body looks or how it operates, modern society's new racism, classism, ableism and sexism may be increasingly enacted through the politics of the body. Physical labor itself may be being relegated to the margins of society. With few exceptions, those who labor with their bodies are seen as simpler, stupider, poorer, less hip, lower class, unfortunate, etc. And as we hire these people to come to our homes and do physical labor that 20 years ago we used to do ourselves but now don't have the time, inclination, or know-how to do, we participate in a mutual embodiment gap that robs both groups of the basic resources to live a bodyful life.

Phenomenologist, post-constructivist, and feminist philosophers have admirably grappled with these issues, and even though their writings hint at an appalling lack of getting up, going outside, and moving around on their part, they seem to be endeavoring to help us reclaim the lived experience of the body as having inalienable rights, authoritative knowledge, and valuable perspectives. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to cover these important people, the work of Bourdieu (1984), Butler (1993), Csordas (1994), Gatens (1999), Irigaray, Johnson (1987), Grosz (1994), Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, Shusterman (2008), and others can inform this discussion.

### **The Words in the Boxes**

Bodyfulness is at its heart a contemplative practice, and this distinguishes it from *embodiment* for this reason. Bodyfulness can be cultivated by conscious, disciplined activities that increase our capacity to first be embodied, then increasingly bodyful. Embodiment is an oft-used word in the fields of dance/movement therapy, sociology, and body psychotherapy, and it is the closest term to bodyfulness that we have had up until now. Embodiment tends to be generally defined as the tangible form of an idea. The body is certainly tangible, and it likely comes from an idea (Gatens, 1999), but bodyfulness is more than just embodiment. I would define embodiment as awareness of and attentive participation with the body's states and actions. Bodyfulness begins when the embodied self is held in a conscious, contemplative environment, coupled with a non-judgmental engagement with bodily processes, an acceptance and appreciation of one's bodily nature, and an ethical and aesthetic orientation towards taking right actions so that a lessening of suffering and an increase in human potential may emerge. Just as psychologist Abraham Maslow

noted that all humans, when they reach a threshold of safety, security, and belonging endeavor to fully realize their potential, so embodiment can be seen as a basic human need, and bodyfulness can come to express our fully self-realized physical nature, held at the same level of importance as mindfulness.

The word *mindfulness* has been holding aspects of the body in its definition since its origins. For a variety of good reasons, the body and its processes are usually included in discussions of mindfulness. Siegel, for instance, includes the body in his recent definition of mind:

Our human mind is both embodied—it involves a flow of energy and information that occurs within the body, including the brain—and relational, the dimension of mind that involves the flow of energy and information occurring between people.... (Siegel, 2007, p. 5)

Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003) states that “An operational working definition of mindfulness is: the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (pp. 145-146). The shortest meaning Kabat-Zinn and other authors give to mindfulness is “moment by moment awareness.” Kabat-Zinn has developed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which includes under its umbrella body scanning, yoga, and sitting meditation, an excellent example of the conflation of mindfulness and bodyfulness.

Davis and Hayes have pointed out that mindfulness is related to the term *mentalization*. Similar to drawing a distinction between embodiment and bodyfulness, these authors want to tease out the distinction between mindfulness and mentalization, noting that

mentalization is “the developmental process of understanding one’s own and others’ behavior in terms of individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and desires. Both constructs emphasize the temporary, subjective, and fluid nature of mental states and both are thought to enhance affect regulation and cognitive flexibility” (Wallin, 2007). Mindfulness differs from mentalizing in that mindfulness is both being aware of the “reflective self” engaged in mentalizing, and the practice of fully experiencing the rising and falling of mental states with acceptance and without attachment and judgment. (Davis & Hayes, 2011, p. 198)

Mindfulness practices have become more popular and well researched in the last 30 years (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Using mindfulness to facilitate psychological as well as physical benefits constitutes a potentially radical shift in emphasis for psychotherapy, for instance. As Brown, Ryan, and Creswell put it, “Of overwhelming interest to most psychologists is the *content* of consciousness—thought, memory, emotion, and so on—rather than the *context* in which those con-

tents are expressed—that is, consciousness itself” (2007, p. 211). In other words, a shift in the field is occurring that may de-emphasize working with the content of our memories and emotions, and instead attend to the solid architecture of attending to those contents. This distinction can be crucial for the bodyfulness construct as well, because the same shift of emphasis may apply, helping us to befriend the *act* of (and the skill of) somatically attending as the most important element of healing, more than analyzing the physical contents of what we experience. As Siegel puts it: “It is not about meaning in the usual clinical sense of explaining the present in terms of the past and establishing associative linkages that are interpretable. It is about experience as it is lived” (2007, p. xi).

When we engage in what is most commonly understood as mindful awareness, one of the most frequent objects of awareness is the body, especially our breath and our sensations. The task is to observe the process of breathing and the flow of sensations in an open, non-categorizing, non-judgmental way. This practice, which trains the mind towards disciplined attention, can have beneficial emotional and physical effects. Immune function can improve. Stress lessens (Baer, Carmody, & Hunsinger, 2012). Deficits and disorders of attention can resolve (Burg, Wolf, & Michalak, 2012). Mental and emotional illness can lessen (Goldin & Gross, 2010; Green & Bieling, 2012), likely because of the psychological freedom that ensues from attention remaining “quiet and limber, *without attachment* to any particular point of view” (Davis & Hayes, 2011, p. 198). Mindfulness may be important because it develops optimal states within us, states that increase physical, emotional, and mental coherence and competence, as well as neural integration.

In this sense, the word mindfulness likely sits in an ill-fitting word-box. When we use this word, it’s hard not to think, barring Siegel’s definition, of the mind as thoughts and inner words, as rationality and logic, cogitating and ruminating. The word *contemplate*, for instance, typically means to think about, or be thoughtful. Though we often profess that an awakened and self-reflective life involves much more than what these terms connote, still we tend to centralize the mind when we use the word mindfulness. Even though meditation, one of our central activities for the cultivation of mindfulness, often focuses on the development of what can occur in the gap between thoughts, the reference point is still the thoughts themselves. In some meditation disciplines we are asked to consider bodily sensations as a type of thought, and dismiss them as such. The effects of mindfulness practice mentioned above are certainly indicative of a much more holistic process at work than that which confines itself to the frontal cortex and left hemisphere, yet it does not go far enough.

As noted above, in many mindfulness practices, body processes are the object of focus. Sensations are witnessed in an encompassing and non-judgmental manner, disciplining oneself to experience the sensation without reacting to it in a way that

can increase one's suffering. This begins to circle in on bodyfulness, but not quite. For one, it often restricts or inhibits movement, the system through which the body knows, identifies, and enacts itself. In other meditation forms, one is encouraged to meditate on the nature of the body itself, as it grows, develops, gets sick, and dies. Or, mindfulness will sometimes involve body practices such as yoga or qi gong. This also begins to approach certain aspects of a bodyful life. But the body itself is capable of awakened states that go beyond these methods and practices, beyond embodiment. The capacity to pay attention, for instance, is at its core a body process (Hanna, 1979). It is this emergent and somewhat ineffable territory that needs to be explored.

Some of what could be considered as under the rubric of bodyfulness has been already articulated in the name of mindfulness, as noted above. The word-boxes for mindfulness are messily used, often poorly defined, and can misrepresent what is actually going on. Because of this, I will take a stand for this word *bodyful* as a separate and important construct in our cultivation of a conscious, contemplative, creative, and contributive life. To say "bodyful" creates a new box, one we have gradually lost as we developed and evolved as human beings. Similar to the re-purposing of words so that they reclaim status and empowerment for oppressed peoples (words like queer and gay in the United States), or ones that seek to dignify power differentials (saying "administrative assistant" instead of secretary), using the word *bodyful* may be as much a political act as a literary or poetic device.

Because this issue is about coming home. It is about, as the poet Mary Oliver (1986) once wrote, "let[ting] the soft animal of your body love what it loves." As Theresa Silow, a German academic teaching in the United States, puts it, "The body is not a thing we have but an experience we are" (2012). Bodyfulness is about working towards our potential as a whole human animal, one that breathes as well as thinks, moves as well as sits still, takes action as well as considers it, and exists not just because it thinks, but because it dances.

### **The Research**

Luckily, it may be possible to use research findings as well as poetry and philosophy to shake up and sharpen our concepts about mindfulness and bodyfulness. In a very cursory run-through of the most extensive and robust research findings, results point to mindfulness and bodyfulness practices as an important influence on physical, emotional, and mental health. In many cases, these practices are lumped together and called mind-body medicine or mind-body therapies, thus making it difficult to tease out differential effects. This paper will begin with studies that emphasize meditative mindfulness, then cover mind/body research, then research that may fall under the rubric of bodyfulness.

Beginning in the mid 1980's, researcher/clinicians such as Jon Kabat-Zinn (1985), using clinical trials, found that mindfulness meditation reduced physical pain, nega-

tive body image, mood disturbances, anxiety, and depression, as well as increased self-esteem. This positive effect was maintained at least 15 months afterward, with the researchers noting that mindfulness meditation seemed to carry an intrinsic motivation, as subjects reported continuing the practice on their own because they enjoyed it. Kabat-Zinn and others speculated that because the practice was inexpensive to teach, because it stressed self-observation and self-responsibility, and because it was self-administered by participants such that they used it under their own control, that it also enhanced insight and self-worth. They speculated that mindfulness could be used on multiple levels, “ranging from relaxation and anxiety reduction to profound personal transformation” (p. 187). Numerous other studies have found that MBSR positively effects both cognitive and affective processing (Ramel et al., 2004).

Particular attention has been paid to mindfulness and emotional processing. A meta-analysis of studies showed that “even brief laboratory training” can help participants process affective stimuli, and that eight weeks of mindfulness practice resulted in participants increasing their ability “to uncouple the sensory, directly-experienced self from the ‘narrative’ self,” as well as increasing their capacity to “talk about past crises in a way that enabled them to be specific and yet not be overwhelmed” (Williams, 2010, p. 1). Mindfulness training has also been found to “restore balance between affective and sensory neural networks—supporting conceptual and body based representations of emotion—which could be one path through which mindfulness reduces vulnerability to dysphoric reactivity”; this in turn showed up as decreased depression scores (Farb et al., 2010, p. 32). Some of the possible mechanisms for this effect are a decrease in “rumination via disengagement from perseverative cognitive activities, and enhance[d] attentional capacities through gains in working memory; these cognitive gains, in turn, contribute to effective emotional regulation strategies” (Davis & Hayes, 2011, p. 200).

Several brain-imaging studies have also shown that mindfulness practice improved both working and declarative memory as well as affective processing and regulation (Chiesa et al., 2010; Jha et al., 2010; Williams, 2010), noting that mindfulness training can constitute a protective factor against high-stress contexts.

Other meta-analyses of cross-sectional, correlational, experimental, and intervention research on the effects of mindfulness-oriented interventions on psychological health concluded there are positive effects on subjective well-being, reduced psychological symptoms and emotional reactivity, increased empathy, improved behavioral regulation, improvements in ADHD, and increased response flexibility (Davis & Hayes, 2011; Keng et al., 2011; Smalley et al., 2009; van der Oord et al., 2012).

Using laboratory methods, particularly brainwave studies, other researchers found that meditation self-induces gamma synchrony, which tends to predict the integration of “distributed neural processes into highly ordered cognitive and affective functions,” and that this “could induce synaptic changes” (Lutz et al., 2004,

p. 16369). Another researcher found that meditation activates the left prefrontal cortex, an area in the brain associated with positive emotion (Robbins, 2004). Related to this, Brown and Ryan (2003) found that people with more mindfulness felt pleasure more frequently and intensely, felt bad less often and less intensely, and felt more autonomous about their daily activities.

Interestingly, a study done in Germany found that when therapist trainees learned and practiced Zen meditation, that not only did they experience tangible benefits for themselves, but their clients also displayed greater reductions in overall symptoms, faster rates of change, scored higher on measures of well-being, and perceived their treatment to be more effective than clients of non-meditating trainees (Grepmaier et al., 2007).

Constructing a bridge between mind-body therapies and mindfulness by studying the relationship of embodiment to mindfulness, researchers in Germany and Canada found that by analyzing gait patterns in formerly depressed patients both before and after mindfulness training, that gait patterns normalized. They noted that these findings show not only cognitive but embodied effects of mindfulness training (Michalak et al., 2011). Other researchers who included martial arts in their construct of mindfulness as they studied troubled adolescents found improvements in ADHD symptoms and relationships to parents, as well as decreased anxiety (Heydick et al., 2012).

When research looking at the construct of mind-body medicine or mind-body therapies is reviewed, findings tend to replicate the lessening of pain and decreased anxiety and depression, and improvements in ADHD symptoms seen in the meditation research. Meta-analysis of mind-body studies reveals a widening of salutary effects, however, including a decrease in migraine headaches, fibromyalgia, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, stroke, and Parkinson's disease. Practices included in the definition of mind-body therapy were meditation, relaxation, conscious breathing, yoga, tai chi, qigong, hypnosis, and biofeedback (Wahbeh, Elsas, & Oken, 2008). Obviously, this is a very wide and inclusive net, spanning both top-down and bottom-up techniques, but it again points to the possible efficacy of present-centered, experiential practices that involve the body (via sensory awareness and movement) and involve a capacity to pay high quality attention.

A second meta-analysis of mind-body medicine treatments, which included relaxation, cognitive behavioral therapies, meditation, imagery, biofeedback, and hypnosis, found considerable evidence of efficacy in the areas of ameliorating coronary heart disease, headaches, insomnia, incontinence, chronic low back pain, disease and treatment-related symptoms of cancer, and improved post-surgical outcomes. They found moderate evidence for the efficacy of these treatments in the areas of hypertension and arthritis (Astin, Shapiro, Eisenberg, & Forays, 2003).

Some areas of research focus more directly on body-centered practices or states as highly related to health and well-being, or the lack of it. For instance, it

has been postulated that postural control problems may be a *core feature* of bipolar disorder, not just a random symptom. Researchers at Indiana University speculate that specific problems adapting to changing sensory input may lie at the core of this psychiatric disorder (Bolbecker, Hong, Kent, Klaunig, O'Donnell, & Hetrick, 2011). This dovetails with various theories of schizophrenia that correlate it to sensory integration problems.

Multiple studies show a strong relationship between exercise or dance and a lessening of depression or anxiety and an improvement in declarative memory (Leste & Rust, 1984; Martinsen & Solberg, 1989; Nakamura et al., 2007). Combining dance/movement therapy and yoga has been shown to increase stress management and communication skills, as well as ameliorate pro-social behaviors (Barton, 2011). Another study found that body awareness training assisted emotional processing (Sze et al., 2010), and a qualitative study found that developing a heightened sense of bodily movement “engenders an interconnected, bodily-grounded sense of cultural identity” (Potter, 2008, p. 444).

This review of the research literature is by no means exhaustive. It is meant to illustrate the conceptual and linguistic overlaps in terminology and practices, as well as point to the increasingly robust evidence that direct, lived experience that involves wakefulness, physical self-reflection, active engagement with bodily as well as cognitive states, and a strong emphasis on the architecture of consciousness rather than its contents seems to predict broad and profound well-being.

What lies ahead likely involves the sorting out of the underlying mechanisms that allow many varied, experientially-based treatments to work. In a sense, we may be looking at a kind of neo-behaviorism, one that can be profoundly more sophisticated, one that centralizes body-centered self-reflection, one that abolishes the arbitrary and false distinction between physical, emotional, and mental health, and one that reclaims overarching human values such as empathy, compassion, relational attunement, and the need to live a contemplative, creative, and contributive life. The construct of bodyfulness may be an essential element in reaching these goals.

### **Actions and Applications**

The construct of bodyfulness, as it has been laid out so far, has both personal and social implications. From this perspective, it can influence individual healing and well-being as well as being able to steer society towards a more sustainable and just expression.

One of the first ways an individual or group can oppress another is to make their body wrong—the wrong color, size, shape, posture, gesture, or movement (Caldwell, 2013). Sociological literature calls this “othering.” My current research interest lies in this area. How do we not only make bodies in general inherently less valuable than the mind, but how do we “other” specific bodies that are different from our own in such a way that causes oppression and social injustice? What are

the effects of this oppression in the bodies of the people who are marginalized for being somatically different?

Perhaps the cultivation of bodyfulness on a social level can be a way to vaccinate us against social injustice and autocracy. If individual members of a society readily knew and valued what they were feeling, if they listened to and respected their embodied experience, they might be more likely to resist being “othered,” and less likely to succumb to any social pressure to “other” people different than themselves. A person who is keeping track of their embodied experience is more likely to keep track of their rights as an embodied being, value the rights of others, and to feel empowered enough to stand up for them effectively.

Bodyfulness may also be able to help balance the rights of the individual with the needs of the community. While living a bodyful life, we not only value our individual experience via somatic self-reflection, but we put ourselves in touch with and under the influence of other bodies. Humans are social animals, and our sociality is navigated by our body-to-body relationships. Because bodyfulness awakens empathy, attunement, and bonding, it can help us care for our own somatic experience while at the same time being connected to, influenced by, and even regulated by people and things around us.

Bodyfulness may also contribute to a shift in developmental theory and identity theory, with broad social implications. Currently, theorists such as Kegan, Hermans, McAdams, and others are challenging our classic understanding of human development, put forth by luminaries such as Piaget and Erikson. For instance, Erikson felt that identity development serves an integrative function, providing one’s life with unity and purpose. He and Piaget also hinted that development begins bodily, but culminates in the crowning achievement of cognitive capacities that make us who we are. McAdams (2006), however, believes that we need a theoretical framework that can accommodate multiplicity, conflict, and even contradiction in the structure of the self. He asserts that we don’t need to assume a singular identity, or even a selfhood, which dovetails with many contemplative traditions that assert that a fixed sense of self creates suffering.

Hubert Hermans writes about the self as a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions. “Positioning” may be a more dynamic alternative to the static concept of “role,” he notes:

The I fluctuates along different and even opposed positions, and can give each position a voice so that they can talk/relate to each other. Each voice has a story to tell about his or her own experiences, from his or her own stance, resulting in a complex narratively structured self. (2001a, p. 248)

Here we begin to see the concept of narrative identity. McAdams notes that “We use the term *narrative identity* to refer to the stories people construct and tell about



themselves to define who they are for themselves and for others. Our narrative identities are the stories we live by” (2006, p. 4).

Both Hermans and McAdams wonder what kinds of self-narrated stories, both redemptive and transformative, are associated with psychological health and psychosocial maturity. They offer that we can use the telling of life stories as a way to work through negative life experiences and ultimately find redemptive meanings for them.

Narrative identity, the idea that we form a sense of identity via the stories that we tell about ourselves, constitutes an important advance in our fields. It can have a bodyful application, and this application may be vitally important. Though narrative identity may be an advance in the field, it will likely benefit by being broadened by the inclusion of nonverbal narratives as well as verbal ones—what I call *body narratives*—the body telling its stories on its own nonlinear and nonverbal terms. Once again, we impoverish ourselves if we assume that identity or narrative is exclusively verbal in nature.

Part of what may be included in the bodyfulness construct is the reality of embodied sensing and moving as a series of relatively autonomous “I positions”—a present-centered and quite literal positioning of the physical self in both a personal and social space. These conscious body movements generate a fluid, nonverbal narration of self and identity no less important than the verbal stories we may tell. Health and well-being may be powerfully and centrally generated by the redemptive and transformative nonverbal action sequences that occur when we engage in bodyful practices. Let us advocate for the body to tell its stories on its own terms, through expressive movement, practiced and elaborated in daily life, without the hegemony of being boxed up into verbal explanations and rationalizations. Because the body moves, our sense of self can move with it.

This idea may be related to developments we continue to witness in the research on emotional processing. Antonio Damasio’s book *Self Comes to Mind* seems to assert the idea of a freestanding and life-long body identity, one that both begins and continues with a “proto-self,” formed by proprioceptive, interoceptive, and exteroceptive stimuli (the sense of one’s body position in space as well as sensing inner and outer events). This translates to an identity that is fundamentally identified with and managed by how we track our bodies as they feel and move, and how we situate our moving bodies in the world.

A word of caution may be in order, one that can be seen occasionally on bumper stickers that exhort us, “Don’t believe everything you think.” It speaks to one of the major pitfalls of cognitive, left hemisphere processing, which is that through its compelling need to create coherent narratives, our left hemisphere will just make things up, regardless of their veracity. This tendency is called the interpreter mechanism (Gazzaniga, 2000). At the same time, we must caution ourselves not to believe everything that we feel or sense or enact bodily.

This may point to the fundamental difference between embodiment and bodyfulness. In embodiment we know what we feel and sense, but in bodyfulness we somatically reflect upon our embodied experience in a way that tempers the compelling and habituated action patterns of the moving body.

How can bodyfulness be cultivated in daily life? We can promote and develop bodyful practices that replicate the way the body is actually constructed—as a sensorimotor and visceral/limbic loop. In other words, we can develop practices that circulate from tracking sensations as they enter our awareness, engaging with them so that they are processed in complex and conscious ways, and expressing the resulting experience in wakeful, expressive movement that in turn generates novel sensations that can be processed and expressed in conscious ways. This loop is replicated in the visceral limbic system by tracking visceral states as they process into emotional states, and participating with the resulting affective motor plans as they are expressed in conscious movement, which then moves us to new feeling states. These two loops are supported and fueled by full, conscious breathing.

These loops can in turn be worked with in two ways. First, by uncovering and examining sensorimotor and visceral/limbic historical “records” and procedural memories associated with past neglect or trauma that have created affect-laden action sequences that in turn have created a disturbed sense of self, other, and world. Second, by promoting practices that work directly on body tone and attentional architecture, so that the act or skill of somatic self-reflection is efficient, graceful, and sharp.

Because the capacity to pay high quality attention is a shared mechanism in the constructs of both mindfulness and bodyfulness, we need opportunities to work on attentional skills directly (Wallace, 2006). Meditation is an extremely effective discipline, over 3,000 years old, that has stood the test of time as a central means of cultivating attentional capacities. In my work, I also introduce more body-centered and movement-oriented ways to practice attentional focus, ones that overlap physical and attentional toning (Caldwell, 1996).

From this perspective we can also create balance by alternating between mindfulness and bodyfulness practices, what Silow (2012) calls *ascent*—movement from direct experience towards abstract thought, coupled with *descent*—a return to individual, subjective, sensuous depth. Again, this mirrors the way the body actually oscillates, between top-down and bottom-up processing, the balance between them as what promotes health and well-being.

Related to the idea of body tone, bodyfulness can be enhanced by developing more conscious control of the moving body. This literally requires an almost athletic use of the body so that postural tone and movement efficiency are promoted. Interestingly, research is currently validating the strong relationship between body and postural tone and attentional clarity and focus. (Hannaford, 2005; Lefevre, 2002;

Woollacott & Shumway-Cook, 2002). In turn, attentional focus is strongly correlated to both intelligence and creativity. This likely is what Csikszentmihaly refers to when he speaks of optimal experiencing and “flow” states (2008). We need to get up and move around more, in ways that challenge not only our thinking but our cardiovascular, vestibular, and musculo-skeletal systems as well.

Phenomenological experience is a central theme in bodyfulness. Siegel states it beautifully when he writes: “The idea of *presentness* is key. The present moment that I am after is the moment of subjective experience as it is occurring—not as it is later reshaped by words” (2007, p xiii). The point here may also be that the present moment is even more than an embodied experience. Frank and LaBarre state that:

... engagement in the world with flexible movement and action is important itself since movement and action are always a part of perceiving, feeling, thinking, and meaning making... sensorimotor learning is not merely a stepping stone to higher orders of learning and thinking or verbalization. These abilities do emerge later out of action, but they do not displace sensorimotor engagement or necessarily come to control it, as has been conventionally thought. In fact, on the contrary, we always think with our bodies; that is, with the practiced action repertoires that begin to develop in the first year and through which we perceive, understand, and interact with the world. Yet, this domain is being hidden from our awareness by our routine ways of functioning and by the lack of concepts and a usable vocabulary that can help us see differently. (2011, p. 7)

In many ways, it comes down to “unhiding” our awareness of our bodily movements—the beating heart as well as the raised arm. The lungs inhaling and exhaling as well as the stomping of the foot. The oscillation of brain waves as well as the sways of the samba. When combined with absorbed attention to both the inside and outside world, we find our way home, to the natural state of the individual and social organism, and find ourselves embedded in a bodyful life.

## REFERENCES

- Astin, J., Shapiro, S., Eisenberg, D., & Forays, K. (2003). “Mind-body medicine: State of science, implications for practice.” *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine* 16(2), 131-147.
- Baer, R. A., Carmody, J., Hunsinger, M. (2012). “Weekly change in mindfulness and perceived stress in a mindfulness-based stress reduction program.” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 68(7), 755-765. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jclp.21865>

- Barton, E. (2011). "Movement and mindfulness: A formative evaluation of a dance/movement and yoga therapy program with participants experiencing severe mental illness." *American Journal of Dance Therapy* 33(2), 157-181.
- Berman, M. (1989). *Coming to our senses: Body and spirit in the hidden history of the west*. New York: Bantam.
- Bolbecker, A. R., Hong, S. L., Kent, J. S., Klaunig, M. J., O'Donnell, B. F., et al. (2011). "Postural Control in Bipolar Disorder: Increased Sway Area and Decreased Dynamical Complexity." *PLoS ONE* 6(5): e19824. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0019824>
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction*. New York: Routledge.
- Brown, K.W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). "The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84(4), 822-848.
- Brown, K., Ryan, R., & Creswell, J. (2007). "Mindfulness: Theoretical foundations and evidence for its salutary effects." *Psychological Inquiry* 18(4), 211-237.
- Burg, J. M., Wolf, O.T., & Michalak, J. (2012). "Mindfulness as self-regulated attention: Associations with heart rate variability." *Swiss Journal of Psychology/Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Psychologie/Revue Suisse de Psychologie* 71(3), 135-139.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex."* New York: Routledge.
- Caldwell, C. (2013). "Diversity issues in movement observation and assessment." *American Journal of Dance Therapy* 35(2), 183-200. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10465-013-9159-9>
- Caldwell, C. (1996). *Getting our Bodies Back*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
- Chiesa, A., Brambilla, P., & Seretti, A. (2010). "Functional neural correlates of mindfulness meditations in comparison with psychotherapy, pharmacotherapy and placebo effect. Is there a link?" *Acta Neuropsychiatrica* 22(3), 104-117.
- Csikszentmihaly, M. (2008). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper.
- Csordas, T. (1994). *Embodiment and experience: The existential ground of culture and self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Damasio, A. (2012). *Self comes to mind: Constructing the conscious brain*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Davis, D., & Hayes, J. (2011). "What are the benefits of mindfulness? A practice review of psychotherapy-related research." *Psychotherapy* 48(2), 198-208.
- Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Norton.
- Farb, N., Anderson, A., Mayberg, H., Bean, J., McKeon, D. & Segal, Z. (2010). "Minding

- one's emotions: Mindfulness training alters the neural expression of sadness." *Emotion* 10(1), 25-33.
- Fogel, A. (2009). *The psychophysiology of self-awareness: Rediscovering the lost art of body sense*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Fosha, D. (2000). *The transforming power of affect: A model for accelerated change*. New York: Basic Books.
- Frank, R., & La Barre, F. (2011). *The First year and the rest of your life: Movement, development, and psychotherapeutic change*. New York: Routledge.
- Gatens, M. (1999). "Power, bodies and difference." In Price, J., & Shildrick, M. (Eds.), *Feminist theory and the body: A reader*. (pp. 225-234). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gazzaniga, M. (2000). "Cerebral specialization and interhemispheric communication." *Brain* 123(7), 1293-1326.
- Germer, C. K., Siegel, R. D. & Fulton, P. R. (Eds.). (2005). *Mindfulness and Psychotherapy*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Goldin, P. R. & Gross, J. J. (2010). "Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) on emotion regulation in social anxiety disorder." *Emotion*, 10(1), 83-91.
- Green, S. M. & Bieling, P. J. (2012). "Expanding the scope of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy: Evidence for effectiveness in a heterogeneous psychiatric sample." *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice* 19(1), 174-180. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2011.02.006>
- Grepmaier, L., Meitterlehner, F., Loew, T., Bachler, E., Rother, W., & Nickel, N. (2007). "Promoting mindfulness in psychotherapists in training influences the treatment results of their patients: A randomized, double-blind, controlled study." *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* 76, 332-338. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1159/000107560>
- Grosz, E. (1994). *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism*. Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press.
- Hanna, T. (1979). *The body of life*. New York: Knopf.
- Hannaford, C. (2005). *Smart moves: Why learning is not all in your head*. Arlington, VA: Great Ocean Publishers.
- Hermans, H. J. (2001a). "The dialogical self: Toward a theory of personal and cultural positioning." *Culture and Psychology* 7, 243-281.
- Heydicky, J., Weiner, J., Bdali, P., Miligan, K., Ducharme, K.M. (2012). "Evaluation of a mindfulness-based intervention for adolescents with learning disabilities and co-occurring ADHD and anxiety." *Mindfulness* 3(2), 151-164.

- Jackson, L. (2002). "Physical attractiveness: A Sociocultural perspective." In Cash, T. & Pruzinsky, T. (Eds.), *Body image: A Handbook of theory, research, and clinical practice*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Jha, A., Stanley, E., Kiyonaga, A., Wong, L., & Gelfand, L. (2010). "Examining the protective effects of mindfulness training on working memory capacity and affective experience." *Emotion* 10(1), 54-64.
- Johnson, D. H. (1994). *Body, spirit and democracy*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Johnson, M. (1987). *The Body in the mind: The Bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). "Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future." *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 10(2), 144-156.
- Kabat-Zinn, J., Lipworth, L., & Burney, R., (1985). "The Clinical use of mindfulness meditation for the self-regulation of chronic pain." *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 8(2), 163-190.
- Keng, S.-L., Smoski, M. J., & Robins, C. J. (2011). "Effects of mindfulness on psychological health: A review of empirical studies." *Clinical Psychology Review* 31(6), 1041-1056. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.04.006>
- Lefevre, C. (2002). "Posture, muscular tone and visual attention in 5 month-old infants." *Infant and Child Development* 11(4), 335-346.
- Leste P., & Rust, C. (1984). "Effects of Dance on Anxiety." *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 58, 767-772.
- Lutz, A., Greischar, N., Rawlings, N., Ricard, M., & Davidson, R. (2004). "Long-term meditators self-induce high-amplitude gamma synchrony during mental practice." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA* 101(46), 16369-16373.
- Martinsen, E., & Solberg, O.Y. (1989). "Aerobic and non-aerobic forms of exercise in the treatment of anxiety disorders." *Stress Medicine* 5(2), 115-120. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/smi.2460050209>
- McAdams, D., Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. (Eds.). (2006). *Identity and story: Creating self in narrative*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Michalak, J., Troje, N., & Heidenreich, T. (2011). "The Effects of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy on depressive gait patterns." *Journal of Cognitive and Behavioral Psychotherapies* 11(1), 13-27.
- Nakamura, S., Deocaris, C.C., Kimpara, A., Imura, M., Fujikawa, T., Chang, H., McEwen, B.S., & Nishijima, T. (2007). "BDNF induction with mild exercise in the rat hippocampus." *Biochemical and Biophysical Research Communications* 358(4), 961-967. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bbrc.2007.04.173>

- Oliver, M. (1986). *Dream work*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Potter, C. (2008). "Sense of motion, senses of self: Becoming a dancer." *Ethnos* 73(4), 444-465.
- Ramel, W., Goldin, P., Carmona, P., & McQuaid, J. (2004). "The Effects of mindfulness meditation on cognitive processes and affect in patients with past depression." *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 28(4), 433-455.
- Robbins, M. (2004, January). "Scientists see yet another reason to go to the gym," *Discover Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://discovermagazine.com/2004/jan/neuroscience#.UtLssJ5dWSo>.
- Shusterman, R. (2008). *Body consciousness: A Philosophy of mindfulness and somaesthetics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Siegel, D. (2007). *The Mindful brain: Reflection and attunement in the cultivation of well-being*. New York: W.W. Norton
- Silow, T. (2012, August 12). *Personal communication*. USABP Conference, Boulder, CO, USA.
- Smalley, S., Loo, S., Halle, T., Shrestha, A., & McGough, J. (2009). "Mindfulness and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 65(10), 1087-1098.
- Stern, D. (2004). *The Present moment in psychotherapy and everyday life*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Sze, J., Gyurak, A., Yuan, J., & Levenson, R. (2010). "Coherence between emotional experience and physiology: Does body awareness training have an impact?" *Emotion* 10(6), 803-814.
- Tiggemann, M. (2002). "Media influences on body image development." In Cash, T. & Pruzinsky, T. (Eds.), *Body image: A Handbook of theory, research, and clinical practice*. New York: Guilford Press.
- van der Oord, S., Bogels, S., & Peijnenburg, D. (2012). "The Effectiveness of Mindfulness Training for Children with ADHD and Mindful Parenting for their Parents." *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 21(1), 139-147. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10826-011-9457-0>
- Wahbeh, H., Elsas, S., & Oken, B. (2008). "Mind-body interventions." *Neurology* 70(24), 2321-2328. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1212/01.wnl.0000314667.16386.5e>
- Wallace, A. (2006). *The Attention revolution: Unlocking the power of the focused mind*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Wilkinson, M. (2010). *Changing minds in therapy: Emotion, attachment, trauma, and neurobiology*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Williams, J. M. (2010). "Mindfulness and psychological process." *Emotion* 10(1), 1-7.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0018360>

Woollacott, M., & Shumway-Cook, A. (2002). "Attention and the control of posture and gait: a review of an emerging area of research." *Gait & Posture* 16(1) 1-14.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

CHRISTINE CALDWELL, PhD, BC-DMT, LPC, NCC, ACS, is the founder and former director of the Somatic Counseling Psychology Program and Dean of Graduate Education at Naropa University, in Boulder, Colorado, where she teaches and researches in the areas of somatically-based counseling, clinical neuroscience, research, and diversity issues. Her work, called the Moving Cycle, spotlights natural play, early physical imprinting, fully sequenced movement processes, the opportunities in addiction, contemplative movement practices, and a trust in the authoritative knowledge of the body. She has also taught at the University of Maryland, George Washington University, Concordia University, Seoul Women's University, Southwestern College, and Santa Barbara Graduate Institute, and trains, teaches, and lectures internationally. She has published over 30 articles, chapters, and performances, and her books include *Getting Our Bodies Back* and *Getting In Touch*.



# Secular Ethics, Embodied Cognitive Logics, and Education

**Brendan R. Ozawa-de Silva**  
*Life University*

---

*The Dalai Lama's model of secular ethics not only makes possible an understanding of contemplative practices within a wider ethical framework, but also helps to illuminate the important question of the relationship between contemplative practices and the religions within which they developed. This article explores that question and proposes an approach to the study of contemplative practices that examines the diachronic and synchronic relationships among embodied cognitive states and the "embodied cognitive logics" inherent in the theories and practices of contemplative traditions. Since secular ethics looks to common experience, common sense, and scientific findings, rather than metaphysics or religion, to ground ethical virtues and decision-making, recognizing that such virtues and prosocial emotions correspond to common embodied psychological realities can help us to understand how we can implement practices that enhance such virtues in secular educational settings.*

*Keywords: compassion, contemplative practice, education, embodiment, grounded cognition, meditation, psychology, secular ethics*

---

**T**he growing interest in contemplative practice and in the scientific study of contemplation is perhaps one of the most exciting developments of recent times, particularly when regarded within the context of recent discoveries in the psychological, cognitive, and neurosciences. Research in the areas of neuroplasticity, neurogenesis, and psychoneuroimmunology has changed our understanding of the mind-body connection and our potential to affect our brains, our bodies, and our psychological and physical health. This in turn has the opportunity to affect our very understanding of what it means to be human beings, both individually and collectively.

Indications that we can effect change in our bodies and minds in scientifically measurable ways, and in ways that promote health, has led to an increased interest in all manner of contemplative practices, and for the first time in history we are seeing contemplative practices, which have historically almost always been restricted to a select few, entering the mainstream of society.

For the current interest in contemplative practices to bear its greatest fruit, and for it to genuinely take root in society, the introduction of such practices into education could be most beneficial. In this article, I examine some emerging trends

in the rise and scientific study of contemplative practices in modern societies, and argue that we will be best served if we take a broad approach that includes attention to dimensions of contemplative practice and contemplative life that have up until now remained at the margins. By a broad approach, I mean attending to a wide array of practices, such as analytical forms of meditation and those that seek to cultivate certain values and virtues like compassion. I also mean attending to the mechanisms that underlie contemplative practices and not merely their effects. I therefore look first at the question of contemplative practices within the context of secular ethics, and argue that this approach—one proposed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, among others—allows us to harness much more of the potential of contemplative practices because it places such practices within a wider social and ethical framework, and also because it helps us to think through the difficult yet important question of the relationship between contemplative practice and religion. Without addressing this question, we face one of two undesirable scenarios: either we will have to introduce contemplative practices in a way that is fully divorced from their ethical basis, which will greatly limit the types of practices we can engage in, or we will have to teach contemplative practices only as religious practices, which will make them unsuitable for most of the public domain, including public education.

Secondly, I propose an approach to the interdisciplinary study of contemplative practices that takes seriously the importance of the body and the relationships between embodied cognitive states both synchronically and diachronically, a model that I call “embodied cognitive logics.” Although a secular ethics approach can draw from all religious and philosophical traditions, it is best served if it also draws from scientific understandings of the mind and body. Recognizing that virtues and prosocial emotions are not merely religious and ethical phenomena, but also correspond to embodied psychological realities helps us to understand how we can implement contemplative practices that enhance those virtues and emotions in educational and public settings.

### **Secular Ethics and Education**

In 2010 I had the rare opportunity of making a presentation to His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the introduction of compassion training in an elementary school setting. The protocol our research team used, called Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT), was developed by Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi at Emory University, and is based on the Lojong (Tib. *blo-sbyong*) or “mind training” tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. It employs analytical meditation alongside stabilizing meditation to cultivate systematically the ingredients that lead to sustainable, unbiased compassion (Ozawa-de Silva & Negi, 2013). A number of research studies have now indicated that this form of analytical meditation practice has measurable psychological and physiological benefits, including improved immune response to

psychosocial stress and an increase in empathic accuracy (Desbordes et al., 2012; Mascaro et al., 2013; Pace et al., 2009, 2010; Reddy et al., 2013). While some forms of contemplative practice are less normative and might be considered more “neutral” with regard to ethics and values, CBCT explicitly focuses on the cultivation of moral emotions like compassion, gratitude, and forgiveness through both stabilizing meditation (such as mindfulness of the breath) and logical analysis and analytical meditation (Ozawa-de Silva et al., 2011, 2012). Its complementary use of both mindfulness and logical analysis lends itself to educational settings, but it also raises the question about teaching ethics in the public sphere, where education must be secular.

When my colleagues and I asked how one might go about introducing ethical contemplative practices into education, the Dalai Lama noted the centrality of compassion as a value that should be taught and cultivated, and indicated that there were both theistic ways of cultivating it, such as by totally submitting to God and thereby reducing one’s self-centered attitude, as well as non-theistic ways, such as those employed in Buddhism, whereby the law of cause and effect is employed to teach one the necessity of not harming others. Beyond this, however, he said:

Now there should be a third way, a secular one. This theistic way will not be universal. So we now need a universal approach. There is no other alternative except for a secular way. So even if someone does not like secularism, you still have to follow that. That is my view. Secularism is very broad. You can take some from Buddhism, some from Christianity, some from Islam—if there’s something suitable there, then you can take it. But mainly it is based on scientific research. A secular approach can definitely be possible. It is the only way.<sup>1</sup>

The vision of secular ethics in education is therefore one that brings science and religious traditions together, rather than seeing them as diametrically opposed; therefore, it is respectful to religious and non-religious approaches. In that case, one might ask what makes “secular ethics” secular. One response would be that whereas religions appeal to revelation, tradition, authoritative texts, authoritative persons, or metaphysics to justify the virtues and precepts that they hold to be ethical, secular ethics appeals to secular, non-religious reasons: scientific evidence, common experience, and common sense. Secular ethics cannot appeal to those other sources, because they are not universally shared, but rather specific to each religious tradition. Yet the conclusions that both secular ethics and religious ethics arrive at—by different means, and appealing to different sources—may look remarkably similar. While religions appeal to their own authoritative sources to

---

<sup>1</sup> “Compassion Meditation: Mapping current research and charting future directions,” Emory University, October 18, 2010. Video available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvFfn59BEzM&feature=relmfu>.

justify the importance of compassion, forgiveness, generosity, and other virtues, secular ethics may also arrive at the importance of those same values, yet it does so by appealing to scientific and common sense reasons. To this, some might object that ultimately secular ethics too must rest on a metaphysical bedrock, which would make it also covertly ideological or even religious.<sup>2</sup> This need not be the case, however, as there are shared experiences we can agree upon that do not require metaphysical assumptions. One that the Dalai Lama frequently cites is the fact that we all wish for well-being and happiness, and wish to avoid suffering. If we reflect upon this and accept it as axiomatic, this simple observation can serve as a basis for an ethics of compassion, especially as a universal feature of ethical systems is the dimension of care and harm (Ozawa-de Silva, in press).

Since ethics and religion have been so closely coupled throughout much of human history, succeeding in such an undertaking may require a reconceptualization of what religion actually is, and how it relates to our bodies and minds. Recently, there has been a rise of cognitive theories of religion and in the “cognitive science of religion” (Barrett, 2004; Boyer 1996, 2001; Guthrie 1996; Lawson & McCauley, 2002; McCauley, 2011; Slingerland, 2008). These attempts, which have largely concentrated on ritual and belief in supernatural agents, have not yet fully mined the relationship between religion and cognitive sciences, however. In line with the above comments by the Dalai Lama, my interest here in cognitive science and its application to the study of religious traditions and religious practices is neither to promote a perennialist approach nor to support the idea that a particular type of cognition underlies or explains religious behavior and beliefs. Rather, it is to investigate how contemplative practices can be applied in a secular way outside their original religious context and still promote changes in cognition, affect, and behavior. I propose that this is because contemplative practices call upon “embodied cognitive logics” that are cross-cultural in applicability, and that such processes are not dependent upon, and do not require acceptance of, the metaphysical and philosophical tenets of the religious traditions they stem from in order to have at least

---

2 Stanley Fish, for example, claims that secular reasons are impossible because they must always rest on a priori metaphysical claims or assumptions about reality (Stanley Fish, “Are There Secular Reasons?” *The New York Times*, February 22, 2010). He does not consider that they could be simply based on commonly facts—that is, facts taken for granted or seen as axiomatic by both parties. The idea that we all want well-being and happiness, and do not want suffering, plays this axiomatic role in the Dalai Lama’s articulation of secular ethics. This provides a basis for secular ethics that actually non-metaphysical, because it is rooted in commonly accepted experience.

some salutary effects.<sup>3</sup> I mean here not “logics” in the sense of formal logic, but in the sense of rational principles and ordered relationships, harking back to the concept of *logoi* employed in ancient Greek spiritual practices and philosophy. Attention to such embodied cognitive logics may help us to understand better those aspects of religion which deal with cross-cultural existential and psychological realities, although they may be expressed in particular ways unique to a given religion, and may help us as scholars and as a society to recognize the power of practices and ritual in effecting changes in the body and mind, in line with contemporary research in cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience on embodiment effects (Barsalou et al., 2003).

Much scholarship on religious practices assumes that such practices are religiously or culturally specific and therefore efficacious only for members of that particular cultural or religious group. Following Levi-Strauss’s (1963) work on magic and shamanic healing, and subsequent investigations, anthropologists and religious studies scholars may hold that religious and healing practices are effective for those who participate in a given symbolic world (“believers”), but are ineffective or inapplicable to those who do not (“non-believers”). Indeed, research on the placebo effect or what Daniel Moerman calls the “meaning response” can be seen as supporting this idea that much of the healing power of ritual interventions comes from socially constructed meanings and therefore varies across cultures (Moerman, 2002).

Nevertheless, a recognition of cross-cultural variability should not necessitate a rejection of shared meanings and processes across cultures, and in fact an acknowledgment of the mind/body relationship and the close connection between the body’s sensory modalities and our higher cognitive processes pushes us in this very direction. More attention needs to be paid to the ways in which religious and contemplative practices employ embodied mechanisms that are shared cross-culturally. This is difficult, because it may require tracking a practice as it moves across

---

3 Jensen notes the pendulum swing in the study of religion away from the formerly problematic approaches to “universals” and comparisons that had characterized early anthropological work on religion to the increasingly specialized and highly contextualized study of religion now predominant in religious studies. However, he defends the importance, and indeed inescapability, of universals in the study of religion, and notes, “Recurrent behavioural phenomena may be termed ‘universals’ on condition that they do exhibit universals in the sense of properties and relations. In fact, most recurrent forms of behaviour do so, but it is important to stress that it is not the behaviour as such that is ‘universal’ but aspects of it—and, again, with certain properties and relations... Although ‘higher-level’ behavioural features, say culture-specific institutions, may require lower-level, e.g. cognitive, explanations to account for their existence and functions, they do not ‘disappear’ as a result of being so explained... Thus, the ontology of social and cultural entities is not threatened by the fact that they may be explained as the results of cognitive phenomena and functions. And this also affects the issue of universals, for they may ‘exist’ (‘literature’ or ‘text’) irrespective of what the subject matter may be reduced to (‘paper’ and ‘ink blots’).” (Jensen, 2001, p. 244) This suggests the possibility of multiple, complementary levels of analysis that allow for recognition of both the particulars of each tradition and contextualized universals across a set of traditions.

cultural, religious, and geographic boundaries, meaning that one would have to understand its original context(s) as well as the context into which the practice has been transplanted, and one would also have to be sensitive to the ways in which the practice itself has changed as a result of this transplantation. Secondly, and just as importantly, one would require tools with which to study the “efficacy” (however defined or measured) of the practice as compared across its original and its new context. There are, however, a growing number of opportunities for just this kind of study. The secularization and scientific study of contemplative practices taken from the Buddhist tradition is one clear example.

There is a rapidly growing literature in the scientific study of meditation, most of which deals with secularized practices. What is at stake in the secularization of practices, and what does it even mean to secularize a religious practice? We cannot answer this question adequately without recognizing how the dividing line between secular and religious is not clear, because both terms themselves are not given, but are constructs of history and culture, and therefore their definitions vary across historical and cultural contexts. For some, religion “refers to a distinctive, nonreducible aspect of human life” (Schilbrack 2005, p.437). Religious symbols and religious experience are irreducible, according to this view, and do not refer to things of this world. It is hard to employ such a view analytically, however, because although experiences may be interpreted as religious, they are also often open to alternative interpretations. Reducing religion to a single aspect, such as belief in supernatural agents, as some cognitive scientists do, is clearly overly reductionist (Boyer, 1996, 2001; Weeks et al., 2008). At the same time, saying that all religious phenomena constitute an absolute break from this world also seems a problematic position.

Many of the claims made by contemplative traditions, however, are not claims about a separate spiritual realm, but about the nature of bodies and minds; they are not supernatural, but rather very much related to the natural, observable world—that is, if we include thoughts and emotions as part of that phenomenally “observable” world. Teachings on the nature of emotions, on the momentariness of phenomena (impermanence), or how all things arise in dependence on other causes and conditions (interdependence) do not require faith in the supernatural, and are amenable to scientific and rational investigation. Should they withstand such investigation, then the mere fact that they originated in a religious tradition should be no reason to refuse them the status of commonly shared knowledge. This has clear implications for bringing such knowledge into educational settings, and if we do not examine this point closely, we will suffer from confusion with regard to whether we are teaching religion or not. If we can clearly see that the states of mind that are being cultivated, such as compassion or familiarization with interdependence and impermanence, are not in and of themselves religious, then we can be clear that the practices that lead to such states need not be religious either.

In his book *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* (a book he originally wanted to title *Secular Ethics*), His Holiness the Dalai Lama sets out his case for rethinking the notion of secularism to mean impartial respect for religious and philosophical systems. In India, he notes, secularism does not mean a rejection of religion, but rather an impartial respect for groups of all religious viewpoints, including non-believers. Out of this atmosphere of respect can develop an acceptance of basic human values that are shared by diverse members of the community. These values can then be promoted in society, and even taught in schools, in a way that is non-partisan and respectful to all. When it comes to enunciating how one would teach such values, the Dalai Lama points to the practices employed in contemplative traditions for developing “ethical mindfulness,” awareness, heedfulness, compassion, and altruism.

In works like *Beyond Religion* and the earlier work *Ethics for the New Millennium*, as well as in his public talks, the Dalai Lama appears to use the terms “secular ethics,” “basic human values,” and “spirituality” interchangeably. The equation of spirituality with secular ethics may puzzle us at first, but makes good sense upon investigation. The sociologist of religion Nancy Ammerman has found that an “ethical spirituality” of compassion is one of the four main ways in which people understand the term spirituality, alongside ideas of spirituality that involve transcendence or relationship to a higher being (Ammerman, 2013). Furthermore, we must remember that “secular” in the Dalai Lama’s sense does not mean *anti-religious*, but rather *impartial with regard to religion*. Secular ethics therefore does not need to refer to the lowest common denominator across religious traditions, but can involve a robust sense of spirituality and the development of the whole human being.

### **Embodied Cognitive Logics**

One of the great strengths of contemplative traditions is that they approach the cultivation of ethical virtues through the use of practical techniques of self-transformation. Whereas religions in general may teach the importance of values, such as compassion, on the basis of injunctions (“Be compassionate” or “Do not steal”) and through the formation and bonds of community and communal rituals, contemplative traditions focus on effecting a deep inner transformation through sustained, individual practices that employ specific techniques that function as individual rituals. Communities remain important, but they are primarily communities of contemplatives, who separate themselves from wider society (either permanently or for a time) in order to grow spiritually through proficiency in these specialized techniques (Merton, 1960), techniques involving what Foucault called the care of the self, or the fashioning of the self (*souci de soi*) (Foucault, 1998). Indeed, a contemplative practice can be seen as any sustained practice that is intended to lead to a restructuring of subjectivity towards spiritual development (understood in a specific religious sense, or simply an ethical sense). Typically, this process is seen

as involving a very deep level of deconditioning, and therefore a time-intensive engagement with such practices, which is perhaps why contemplation has always remained a minority practice in every major religion, even in religions closely identified with it, such as Buddhism. Yet as a result of their relative isolation and intensive practice, contemplatives in various traditions developed what they considered to be bodies of knowledge regarding these teachable techniques that could allow for powerful inner transformation.

If these techniques could be brought into education, the results could be remarkable. A great number of universities, colleges, and schools subscribe to vision and mission statements that speak of an education of character and intellect, an education of the whole person, an education that instills values in students. Too often, however, such educational institutions have difficulty in finding ways to practically instill these values in their students, whether in the classroom or through other activities. When one looks at the actual experience of a student, the majority of their time may be spent in a fairly traditional way: attending classes, doing homework, taking tests, and so on, with very little active engagement in activities that would strengthen their ethical or spiritual development. The university or school may believe that its “ethos” is somehow imparted to every student who goes through the institution, or may claim that its faculty and staff embody the qualities that they seek to impart to their students, but in many cases the faculty and staff themselves are not provided with any kind of training or support when it comes to such development. One of the precise challenges facing such institutions, if they are public and/or pluralistic, is that they cannot introduce practices or resources that are religious in nature.

Here contemplative traditions have much to offer, in that they go beyond the idea of a general ethos and dictated injunctions towards the implementation of specific techniques. It is not enough to tell students that they should be honest or that cheating is wrong; one must also teach them how to resist the temptation to cheat or withstand the pressure to compete at all costs. Since there is a natural relation between resisting temptation for religious reasons and doing so for simply secular, this-worldly reasons (such as resisting the temptation to cheat on a test), it is perfectly reasonable to think that at least some of the contemplative techniques developed in religious contexts can be applied in secular ones.

To understand how a religious contemplative practice can be adapted in such a way or “secularized,” contemporary scientific paradigms and research can be very helpful. Recent work in grounded cognition, for example, has profound implications for the study of religious and contemplative practices. Grounded cognition is the idea that our higher cognitive processes are not free floating (*contra* Descartes) but rather grounded in the body’s sensory modalities. Just as we share commonalities across cultures in terms of our physical embodiment, which structures our experience of the world, so do we share commonalities in terms of cognitive



and affective processes, because these are fundamentally embodied processes that developed along evolutionary lines within specific environments. A grounded approach provides a powerful means for empirically studying the effects of various practices on the body and mind, thereby providing tools for studying the commonalities of such practices across religious and cultural difference. Acknowledging such commonalities does not efface the important roles that religion and culture play in shaping and constituting our experience of the world; rather, it supports the importance of these roles.<sup>4</sup>

Grounded theories of cognition provide sophisticated models for understanding the relationship between perception, conceptual processing, and action—all of which can take place on an unconscious level. They stand in contrast to the amodal view of knowledge and concepts that has been dominant in psychology and cognitive science for some time. According to the amodal view, knowledge consists of arbitrary amodal symbols that have been transduced from modal perceptions. The experience of perceiving a situation (through all the body's modalities) produces representations in the brain's modality-specific systems, but this experience is then transduced into amodal symbols to represent the experience in knowledge, and the amodal symbols are stored in memory. After that, the body and brain's modality-specific systems are no longer required for such knowledge. These amodal symbols can then be retrieved and expressed using words. Some, such as Jerry Fodor and Steven Pinker, have called this language-like symbol system "the language of thought" or "mentalese"—the idea being that despite there being different languages, there is an underlying mental system of symbolic representation that is linguistic in nature and that is basically universal. In an important difference to grounded theories of cognition, the original modal-specific symbols that produced these transductions do not become active during this process of re-creating the experience.

Grounded theories, on the other hand, as seen in the work of Larry Barsalou (Barsalou et al. 2003, 2005), maintain that all knowledge—not just perception—is grounded in the brain's modality-specific systems. In contrast to amodal theories, Barsalou's theory of simulation holds that the original modality-specific states are partially captured during experience for the purpose of later representation. Thus, experience is not transduced into a symbolic language of concepts and symbols; rather, the modal systems of the brain activated during an experience are captured

---

4 As Fuller notes (2007, p. 27): "Drawing attention to the 'leverage' that the body and its emotions have on religion does not ignore the role of culture in constructing human experience. Indeed, the pre-eminent biologist Wilson (1975, p. 550) warns that biological explanations of human behavior can never be complete since, in humans, 'genes have given away most of their sovereignty' to culture. Understanding how the body influences religion, then, is not about reducing human thought and experience to biology. It is, however, about mapping the different kinds of leverage that the body exerts on humanity's spiritual impulses."

by association areas. Later, when that experience is recalled, the same systems in the brain that were active during the original experience become reactivated. Thus, the conceptual system is on a certain level a close recreation of the experience (or, more likely, aggregations of multiple experiences) using the same modalities and brain areas. For that reason, it is called a simulation, because the individual is simulating the experience in a fully embodied way, albeit not necessarily on the level of conscious awareness.

Considerable evidence has amassed supporting this model of cognition. In one experiment, participants produced more occluded characteristics for concepts such as “rolled-up lawn” than for just “lawn,” such as roots and dirt, suggesting they were unconsciously simulating (visualizing) the rolled-up lawn, something one would not expect amodal theories to predict. When describing concepts such as “worm” or “bird,” subjects tended to look down or up, respectively, suggesting they were simulating “being there.” When asked to speak on positively and negatively affectively charged concepts, such as “smiling baby” or “attacking dog,” subjects’ facial expressions showed positive or negative affect, again suggesting simulation and that they were actually generating appropriate emotional responses. Subjects to whom a physical setting was described produced appropriate motor orienting responses for such settings. Even subjects evaluating a simple sentence involving motor activity for grammar activated the associated motor system (Barsalou et al., 2005).

Embodied states both result from and affect social processing. As Barsalou et al. note:

people establish entrenched simulations of frequently-experienced situations, where a given simulation includes (among many other things) a variety of bodily states, such as facial expressions, arm movements, and postures. When environmental cues trigger the simulation of a social situation, part of the simulation is expressed in relevant bodily states. Conversely, if the body is configured into a state that belongs to one of these simulations, the state retrieves the simulation, which then affects social information processing. (2005, p.29)

Moreover, the relationship between bodily states and affect / cognition seems to be a two-way street: adopting certain postures and facial expressions leads to measurable changes in affect and cognition; similarly, changes in affect and cognition result in changes in body states, including posture. Most of the work in this area has been on facial expressions and emotions. Ekman has found that forming facial expressions for fear, anger, disgust, and so on, triggers the associated emotions and their physiological responses (Ekman and the Dalai Lama, 2008); and other studies have shown that smiling or frowning, even when the subjects were unaware that they were making an emotional expression (because they had merely been asked to hold a pencil in their teeth or lips), similarly resulted in changes in affect (Barsalou

et al., 2003). The literature showing embodiment effects and supporting the view that mind and body are much more closely related than has been previously acknowledged in the cognitive sciences is already significant, but the real significance of such discoveries for our understanding of religion and religious and contemplative practices has not yet fully sunk in, despite contributions by Slingerland (2008), the early pioneering work by Varela et al. (1992), and others.

### **Cumulative Interaction Effects**

Many of these findings suggest that types of processing on cognitive, affective, and embodied levels can be mutually supportive or mutually hindering. In other words, certain types of thought and affect are conducive for certain body postures, and vice versa. That is to say, compatible embodied and cognitive states result in smoother, faster processing, whereas incompatible states slow down or inhibit processing (Barsalou et al., 2003). This finding from grounded cognition research should sound very familiar to students of contemplative practices, particularly students of yoga or martial arts: if the body and mind are in alignment, the practitioner will achieve far greater success than if they are not. In one experiment, where subjects were asked to signal things they liked with a pulling of a lever towards them and things they disliked with a pushing of the lever away, the subjects were able to complete the action more quickly than those for whom the association was reversed (Chen and Bargh, 1999). Such experiments are in general alignment with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work on the embodied metaphorical nature of language ("I feel close to him" vs. "I feel distant" or "I'm keeping him at a distance"), suggesting that the basis for such language use is in fact the nature of our conceptual thought and its fundamental reliance on embodied action. As human beings, we have the option of disregarding or overriding our inclinations—we can, in fact, pull the lever to indicate we dislike something and push it away to indicate that we like something—but optimal performance is seen when embodiment, cognition, and affect are compatible and in alignment, perhaps due to the benefits of redundancy in situated simulations.

Such work clearly has profound implications for the study of religious, contemplative, and ritual practice. It provides the means to show empirically how such practices may be combining body practices, thought processes, affect, and words in ways that are mutually supportive in creating powerful transformative experiences and changes in subjectivity over time. It helps us to understand that when contemplative practices employ movements or positionings of the body, such as a yoga *āsana* or a hand *mudra*, such movements are actually facilitating cognition and affect in a very specific and tangible way. Furthermore, most contemplative practices do not merely create one embodied cognitive-affective state; rather, they tend to be arranged in a sequence or liturgy of practices that move from one state to another. These states are not unrelated to each other; rather, they reflect an embodied cognitive logic, whereupon a prior state induces a subsequent state, much in the

way that a logical syllogism induces an inference. In other words, the liturgy of the ritual practice (such as in a Buddhist *sādhana*, a series of yoga *āsanas*, or sequenced *lojong* practice like Cognitively-Based Compassion Training) evokes certain cognitive-affective states that then facilitate other states in synchronic and diachronic dynamic causal relationships.

One typical example of this (reflected in two secularized Buddhist practices: Japanese Naikan practice and CBCT) is that a sustained reflection on the kindness one has received from another leads to an experience of deep gratitude for that person (or those persons), which then results in a wish to repay their kindness; it also leads to a greater sense of affection for that person, which in turn lays the ground for genuine love and compassion (Ozawa-de Silva and Ozawa-de Silva, 2010). Modern psychology has up to now devoted insufficient time to studying the ways in which cognitive-affective states relate to one another, or how one state can induce another, or inhibit another. Research on positive and negative emotions, for example, and how they relate to each other, is just beginning. Yet this type of embodied cognitive logic is central to contemplative practice, and significant portions of contemplative psychology in traditions such as Buddhism are devoted to understanding the specific relations between emotional and cognitive states.

### **Embodied Cognitive Logics in Religious Traditions**

Disciplines such as anthropology and religious studies have long attempted to account for the power of ritual action, and the relationship between beliefs and bodily practices. This has occurred within the cultural context in many modern societies of a strong dismissal of ritual as meaningless action. By providing both a methodology and a theoretical model for understanding the relationship between conceptual understanding, cognitive processing and affect, on the one hand, and bodily states and actions, on the other, grounded cognition can contribute significantly to the study of ritual and contemplative practices in the social sciences and humanities.

Every major religious tradition incorporates ritual as a central aspect of the tradition, suggesting an implicit recognition of the connection between bodily and verbal practices with mental and emotional states. Contemplative practices, I have suggested, may themselves be seen as rituals for individuals, just as rituals may be seen as collective contemplative practices—with the caveat that a *sine qua non* for contemplative practice is that it leads to, or is oriented towards, a transformation in subjectivity conducive to spiritual development. For example, in Catholic theology, the saying *lex orandi, lex credendi* (“the doctrine that is prayed is the doctrine that is believed”) implies that people will come to believe what they vocalize repeatedly

in prayer or liturgy.<sup>5</sup> In the Buddhist tradition also, recitation is a main form of religious practice. Many contemplative practitioners have dozens of pages of text that they have memorized and that they recite daily. These recitations include many stock formulae about intentional, affective, and cognitive states that the tradition teaches should be cultivated and are beneficial for spiritual development. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, for example, has often advocated recitation of a four-line verse written by the 8th century Buddhist philosopher and saint, Shantideva, in his work *Bodhicaryāvatāra* or *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. In teachings that the Dalai Lama gives to Buddhist assemblies, he often asks those present to recite this verse seven or twenty-one times along with him:

*As long as space remains  
As long as sentient beings remain  
Until then may I too remain  
To dispel the miseries of the world.*

Clearly, the tradition believes that the recitation of these words, preferably combined with an attempt to generate an altruistic intention in one's mind, has a certain beneficial quality, gradually making the arising of genuine altruism possible in the practitioner. It is understood in the tradition that there is a sequence that moves from the mere recitation of words, to a "contrived" form of generating the related cognitive and affective states, to a genuine, deeply felt experience of the cognitive and affective states.

In certain cases, we find practices that are even more explicit about this connection. For example, in a text by Padmasambhāva, the tantric adept who is credited as one of the key figures who brought Buddhism to Tibet, the author gives precise instructions on how to cultivate the appropriate sense of disillusionment with cyclic existence (*samsāra*) that is necessary for embarking upon true spiritual practice. What is remarkable is the precision of the body postures that should be adopted to bring about this state of mind. Moreover, these body postures are to be combined with specific vocalizations and thoughts:

First, go by yourself to a place that arouses disillusionment. If possible, go to a deserted place, broken-down ruins, a field of dried grass rustling in the wind, or an eerie place...

---

5 Members of some religious traditions may actually leave their religious organization because they find that they can no longer assent cognitively to what they are reciting verbally (for example, a Christian increasingly having trouble reciting sections of the Creed dealing with the virgin birth); this, however, does not disprove the connection between recitation and cognition, but rather supports it: the inhibition of not believing what one is reciting may make the recitation more difficult, and become an incentive to leave and not recite. Alternatively, cognitive dissonance may trigger a re-conceptualization of the content of faith (a new idea of what the virgin birth may signify, or a non-literal interpretation that comes to supersede the literal one), thereby relieving this kind of tension.

In terms of posture, sit on a comfortable cushion with one leg folded. Plant your right foot on the ground, press your left leg against the ground, rest your right elbow on your right knee, press your palm against your right cheek, and clasp your left knee with your left palm. This posture will lead to stark depression.

Then with your mind ponder the sufferings of the cycle of existence, and with your speech occasionally utter these words, letting them arouse your mindfulness: “Alas, alas! Wretched me! This cycle of existence is suffering. Nirvana is joy!” (Wallace, 1997, pp. 17-18)

These instructions and practices would provide very interesting study material for social and cognitive psychologists interested in embodiment effects. Embodied states both result from, and affect, social processing.<sup>6</sup> If the optimal performance seen when embodiment and cognition are compatible is due to the benefits of redundancy in situated simulations, then are such instructions as the ones above examples of compatible body postures, thoughts, and words? They seem to be organized to induce, as the text says, “stark depression,” yet the “turn” may be in the following instruction then direct that depression at the “cycle of existence” (*samsāra*). This may lead to a new conceptualization, one considered beneficial by the tradition.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

Although the scientific study of contemplative practices has focused largely on their benefits for physical and psychological health, contemplative traditions rarely, if ever, sought to employ such practices for such purposes. Although the use of contemplative practices for the treatment of mental illness, for example, may bear fruit and help to ease the suffering of many, we should remember that such practices are not employed in such a way in their traditional contexts, even today. Instead, their purpose is for the ethical and spiritual formation of practitioners. The employment of contemplative practices in education, therefore, may have even greater potential than their use in medical and health-related fields.

---

6 As Barsalou et al. (2005, p. 29) note: “people establish entrenched simulations of frequently-experienced situations, where a given simulation includes (among many other things) a variety of bodily states, such as facial expressions, arm movements, and postures. When environmental cues trigger the simulation of a social situation, part of the simulation is expressed in relevant bodily states. Conversely, if the body is configured into a state that belongs to one of these simulations, the state retrieves the simulation, which then affects social information processing.”

7 Similarly, in tantric meditation practices, the practitioners similarly engage in hand gestures (*mudra*), vocalizations (e.g., mantras), and visualizations (e.g., mandalas). The visualizations often contain the visualization of the body of a Buddha, in a very specific posture, with specific expressions, and with specific proportions, which, due to mimicry, could effect changes in the practitioner. It would be very interesting to study how these practices create specific effects and changes in the body and mind depending upon what is gestured, recited, and visualized.

Up until now, a large focus of the integration of contemplative practice into education has focused on non-analytical practices such as mindfulness meditation, yoga, and so on. These practices have much to offer educational practice and educational institutions, but they do not represent the full breadth of the resources available in contemplative traditions. Some may believe that through the sustained practice of a single technique, such as mindfulness, the full range of positive virtues, like compassion, forgiveness, generosity, and self-restraint, will emerge. It is quite possible, however, that a single technique is not enough, and that there is a good reason why contemplative traditions contain a variety of practices, rituals, texts, and contemplations. Recently, more attention is being paid to secularized adaptations of more complex forms of practice, including practices that involve analytical or discursive meditation, such as Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT). In analytical meditation, a practitioner engages in a critical engagement with his or her object of meditation, seeking to gain new insight or a new perspective into it. Attention to such practices opens up new possibilities for contemplative pedagogy, because they bring specific pedagogical content into the meditation itself. Indeed, recent efforts to bring CBCT into educational settings and to populations of elementary school-aged children, adolescents, and university students have proved fruitful (Ozawa-de Silva and Dodson-Lavelle, 2011; Dodson-Lavelle et al., under review). This program includes complex reasoning about interdependence, the nature of destructive emotions and how to overcome them, and other topics, integrating such reflections into the meditation practice itself. The CBCT program for children therefore seeks to provide children with the tools for developing ethical decision-making and for cultivating the emotions and attitudes that will contribute to ethical behavior, rather than simply providing external ethical injunctions and standards. Gradually, entire curricula could be developed that allow student to engage in critical reflection on ethical issues and that also teach them the skills of contemplative practice that are necessary to close the gap between the ethical ideals we aspire towards and our everyday behaviors and emotional reactions.

Although the use of non-analytical techniques may seem safer, because they avoid concepts or values that could be considered religious, they will likely be less powerful in facilitating ethical formation for just that reason. Recent developments in science actually give us less reason to fear moving in this direction towards ethics in education. The study of embodied cognitive logics will likely show that while culture and religion do shape practices and how we should understand them, they should not be understood as *completely* determining the meaning or effect of practices. Those of us who are cultural anthropologists, social scientists, or humanities-based scholars of religion cannot ignore the body and its impact on cognition and affect; nor should we ignore that our common embodiment means that there may be commonalities of practices and their effects across religious and cultural boundaries. In other words, there is a common ground for secular ethics.

The idea of embodied cognitive logics also suggests that we should not give in to a subtle tendency to take for granted the *arbitrary* nature of symbols and rituals. This arbitrariness that may stem in part from Saussure's pioneering work in linguistics (what he called *l'arbitraire du signe*) and its appropriation into social science by figures such as Levi-Strauss. Such arbitrariness, however, presumes an invalid break between symbol and world that actually is founded upon an equally invalid break between mind and body (cf. Saussure, 1983 and Levi-Strauss, 1963). Part of the power of language is no doubt its ability to separate the signifier from the signified, to have multiple signifiers refer to a single signified, and also a single signifier able to refer to multiple signifieds; therefore, one naturally has to acknowledge a degree of flexibility when it comes to language's relationship with the world. Nevertheless, that does not mean that language is completely arbitrary. It is much more likely that language (in particular, specific words and utterances) arose within contexts that were shaped not by the environment and bodies within that environment; this embodied cognitive view would therefore suggest that language would not be completely arbitrary, but that specific sounds might be tied to certain bodily and embodied cognitive states. This is supported by recent research by Nygaard, Cook, and Namy, who have used a variety of thought-provoking experiments to show that people have a tendency to relate certain kinds of sounds (words in other languages) to certain kinds of concepts, even if they have no knowledge of what the words mean (Nygaard et al., 2009).

Gestures, colors, words, visualizations, body movements, foods, clothing, decorations and arrangements of sacred space, and so on, all of which may be employed in ritual liturgies should *not* be seen as merely arbitrary. Not only do they have cultural and religious symbolic significance—for this has been long recognized by scholars of religion, anthropologists, and ritual studies specialists—but they also engage embodied cognitive structures in a way that is not “merely symbolic” in the sense of arbitrary and restricted to effects on the mental level.<sup>8</sup> These symbols, actions, environments, and so on, function interactively to create cumulative interaction effects. In many cases they will be cross-culturally salient; in some cases, symbols and actions may be culturally or religiously specific. The point is that they are not necessarily *all* culturally and religiously specific.

In a similar way, ethics is neither arbitrary, nor entirely dependent upon specific religious traditions, because it is rooted in common embodied experiences of harm and care. Far from leading to a reductionist understanding of religion, therefore, attention to the interconnected relationship between body and mind suggested by grounded theories of cognition can provide an impetus for studying

---

<sup>8</sup> Of course, most of the scholars in these disciplines would not accept a view of something being “merely symbolic,” and that is the point here: symbols in such context are non-arbitrary and have effects that we now know can be discovered through empirical means.



the power of beliefs, body practices, environments, and their processes of mutual influence and interaction. Moreover, it is not only contemplatives who may have something to learn from recent work in psychology and neuroscience; it is quite possible that the scientific study of contemplative practices and a greater understanding of the embodied cognitive logics they are built upon could significantly alter the way scientists understand the plasticity, structure, and function of the mind, emotions, and subjectivity.

It is important to stress that the recognition of regularities in cognitive and affective processing that take place due to shared features of our embodiment and our environment, and that seem at least at a basic level to transcend cultural and religious differences, should not in any way efface the importance of those very differences and the ways they can impact processing. The “nature vs. nurture” divide is an artificial one, just as current thought in epigenetics increasingly sees the relationship between genes and the environment as an interdependent one, rather than a clean and fast division. As Nathaniel Barrett points out:

In contrast, an interactive approach sees convergent patterns of human behavior—even universal patterns—as jointly constructed by innate biases and environmental regularities, including the socio-cultural regularities of a particular historical context. The outcome of this joint construction may be so stable and widespread that it seems fixed or “hard-wired.” But once we admit the possibility of accounting for patterns of human behavior in this way, we raise the question of how the reshaping of our environment creates new landscapes, with new patterns of convergence—which is to say, new kinds of cognitive possibilities—and we thereby open the door to considerations of how human behavior is *continuously evolving* as a dynamic biocultural system. (Barrett, 2010, pp. 602-603)

One task for the emerging field of contemplative studies is therefore to bring diverse theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary approaches to the practices of self-transformation that have been developed in a variety of religious and non-religious contexts in a way that actively seeks to gain practical and theoretical knowledge of the practices and to develop a discourse for analyzing, describing, and comparing such practices that is not bound to a particular religious tradition. To do this, scholars in contemplative studies must be both open to the possibility that religious practices have effects that can be observed and investigated empirically, and skeptical (in a positive and critical way) of the indigenous explanations offered by the traditions themselves. At the same time, it will be important for scholars to take seriously the indigenous explanations and theoretical models put forward by individuals within the traditions as discourses that can potentially inform, and even shape, scholarly discourse.

In his concluding remarks to the conference on compassion meditation mentioned above, His Holiness the Dalai Lama put out a call to all those who care about the implementation of contemplative practices in education for the benefit of humankind, saying:

I think we have to promote that there is a possibility for moral ethics based on secularism. We have to promote that. And we have to work hard to try to alleviate the fears and suspicions that people may have about the untenability of secular ethics. For years I have wished for some concrete research on the benefits of the practice of compassion. Now you are actually implementing that here. So now these are a new concrete basis for a curriculum to educate in a secular way from kindergarten up to university. So this is really wonderful. It sounds like there's a dawning of a new day.<sup>9</sup>

To the extent that each one of us contributes to the implementation of contemplative practice in education for the cultivation of basic human values, however large or small our contribution may be, we are helping to bring about that new day.

## REFERENCES

- Ammerman, N. (2013). "Spiritual But Not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52(2), 258–278.
- Barrett, N. (2010). "Toward an Alternative Evolutionary Theory of Religion: Looking Past Computational Evolutionary Psychology to a Wider Field of Possibilities." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78(3), 583–621.
- Barsalou, L.W., Niedenthal, P.M., Barbey A.K. & Ruppert, J.A. (2003). "Social Embodiment." *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation* 43, 43–92.
- Barsalou, L.W., Barbey, A. K., Simmons, W.K. & Santos, A. (2005.) "Embodiment in Religious Knowledge." *The Journal of Cognition and Culture* 5, 14–57.
- Boyer, P. (1996). "Theories of Religion. The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion." *American Anthropologist* 98(1), 162.
- Boyer, P. (2001). *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Chen, M., & Bargh, J. A. (1999). "Nonconscious approach and avoidance behavioral consequences of the automatic evaluation effect." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 25, 215–224.

---

<sup>9</sup> "Compassion Meditation: Mapping current research and charting future directions," Emory University, October 18, 2010. Video available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvFfn59BEzM&feature=relmfu>.

- Dodson-Lavelle, B., Robbins, E., Ozawa-de Silva, B., Negi, L.T., Pace, T., Raison, C.R., Rochat, P. (under review). "Enhanced Benefits of Compassion Training by Elementary School Children."
- Desbordes, G., Negi, L.T., Pace, T.W.W., Wallace, B.A., Raison, C.L., Schwartz, E. (2012). "Effects of Mindful-Attention and Compassion Meditation Training on Amygdala Response to Emotional Stimuli in an Ordinary, Non-Meditative State." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6, 292.
- Mascaro, J.S., Rilling, J.K., Negi, L.T., Raison, C.L. (2013). "Compassion Meditation Enhances Empathic Accuracy and Related Neural Activity." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 8(1), 48–55.
- Moerman, D. (2002). *Meaning, Medicine and the Placebo Effect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ekman, P. and Gyatso, T. (H.H. the XIV Dalai Lama) (2008). *Emotional Awareness. Overcoming the Obstacles to Psychological Balance and Compassion*. New York: Times Books.
- Foucault, M. (1998). *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, vol. I* New York: The New Press.
- Fuller, R. C. (2007). "Spirituality in the Flesh: The Role of Discrete Emotions in Religious Life." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75(1), 25-51.
- Guthrie, S.E. (1996). "Religion: What Is It?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35 (4): 412-419.
- Gyatso, T. (H.H. the XIV Dalai Lama) (1999). *Ethics for the New Millennium*. New York: Riverhead.
- Gyatso, T. (H.H. the XIV Dalai Lama) (2005). *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*. New York: Morgan Road Books.
- Gyatso, T. (H.H. the XIV Dalai Lama) (2010, October 18). "Compassion Meditation: Mapping current research and charting future directions." Presented at Emory University, Atlanta, GA.
- Gyatso, T. (H.H. the XIV Dalai Lama) (2011). *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Jensen, J.S. (2001). "Universals, General Terms and the Comparative Study of Religion." *Numen* 48(3), 238-266.
- LaMothe, K. L. (2008). "What Bodies Know About Religion and the Study of It." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76(3), 573-601.
- Levi-Strauss, C. (1963). *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Merton, T. (1960). *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Nygaard, L.C., Cook, A.E., and Namy, L.L. (2009). "Sound to meaning correspondences facilitate word learning." *Cognition* 112, 181-186.

- Ozawa-de Silva, B. (in press). "Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health: Towards a Preventive Model Based on the Cultivation of Basic Human Values." In Ellen Idler, ed., *Religion as a Social Determinant of Public Health: Interdisciplinary Inquiries*, Oxford University Press.
- Ozawa-de Silva, B. and Negi, L.T. (2013). "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training: Protocol and Key Concepts." In Singer, T., and M. Bolz, *Compassion: Bridging Theory and Practice*. Retrieved from <http://www.compassion-training.org>.
- Ozawa-de Silva, B., Dodson-Lavelle, B., Negi, L.T., Raison, C. (2012). "Compassion and Ethics: Scientific and Practical Approaches to the Cultivation of Compassion as a Foundation for Ethical Subjectivity and Well-Being." *Journal of Healthcare, Science and the Humanities* 2(1), 145-161.
- Ozawa-de Silva, B., and Dodson-Lavelle, B. (2011). "An Education of Heart and Mind: Practical and Theoretical Issues in Teaching Cognitive-Based Compassion Training to Children." *Practical Matters*, no. 4, 1-28.
- Ozawa-de Silva, C. and Ozawa-de Silva, B. (2010). "Secularizing Religious Practices: A Study of Subjectivity and Existential Transformation in Naikan Therapy." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49(1), 147-161.
- Pace, T.W.W., Negi, L.T., Adame, D.D., Cole, S.P., Sivili, T.I., Brown, T.D., Issa, M.J., Raison, C.L. (2009). "Effect of Compassion Meditation on Neuroendocrine, Innate Immune and Behavioral Responses to Psychosocial Stress," *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 34(1), 87-98.
- Pace, T.W.W., Negi, L.T., Sivili, T.I., Issa, M.J., Cole, S.P., Adame, D.D., Raison, C.L. (2010). "Innate Immune Neuroendocrine and Behavioral Responses to Psychosocial Stress Do Not Predict Subsequent Compassion Meditation Practice Time," *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 35(2), 310-315.
- Reddy, S.D., Negi, L.T., Dodson-Lavelle, B., Ozawa-de Silva, B., Pace, T.W.W., Cole, S.P., Raison, C.L., Craighead, L.W. (2013). "Cognitive-Based Compassion Training: A Promising Prevention Strategy for At-Risk Adolescents," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 22(2), 219-230.
- Saussure, F. (1983). *Course in General Linguistics*. Eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. Trans. Roy Harris. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.
- Schilbrack, K. (2005). "Religion, Models of, and Reality: Are We Through with Geertz?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73(2), 429-452.
- Searle, J. (1969). *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Slingerland, E. (2008). *What Science Offers the Humanities: Integrating Body and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, M.C. (2007). *After God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Varela, F.J., Thompson, E. and Rosch, E. (1992). *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Wallace, B.A. (1997). *Natural Liberation: Padmasambhava's Teachings on the Six Bardos*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Wallace, B.A. (2006). *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Weeks, M., Weeks, K.P. and Daniel, M.R. (2008). "The Implicit Relationship Between Religious and Paranormal Constructs." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47(4), 599-611.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

BRENDAN OZAWA-DE SILVA is Associate Professor of Psychology at Life University in Marietta, Georgia, Associate Director for Buddhist Studies and Practice at Drepung Loseling Monastery in Atlanta, Georgia, and a Research Fellow for the Emory-Tibet Partnership, Emory University. He received his M.Phil. and doctorate (D.Phil.) from Oxford University, a Master of Theological Studies from Boston University, and is scheduled to complete a second doctorate in Religious Studies at Emory University in 2014. As one of the lead meditation instructors for the Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT) research program at Emory, he has worked to bring compassion training into elementary schools, foster care, and the prison system in Georgia. He has published recent articles on the mind/body relationship in Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan medicine, the secularization and scientific study of contemplative practices, the evaluation of compassion meditation in school settings, and suicide and mental health in Japan.



# Reflections





# A Pedagogical Heartbeat: The Integration of Critical and Contemplative Pedagogies for Transformative Education

**Juan D. Mah y Busch**  
Loyola Marymount University

---

*With so many figurative references to the heart, the heart has become an overextended metaphor and threatens to become less meaningful. Widely circulated books on Critical Pedagogies and Contemplative Pedagogies refer to the heart. Though they may share a sense of learning as transformation, each has a very different method, which I identify as dialectical or dialogical. And, each one defines its liberatory transformation in a very different way, one with “third space” and the other in relational and holistic space, which is considered transcendent. This essay describes two forms of heartfelt awareness, first-order heart-based knowledge and the heart’s second-order regulatory function. Then, through the lens of the heart’s regulatory function, it examines the differences between Critical and Contemplative Pedagogies. I do so in order to articulate, through the form and function of the actual heart, a model for how to measure the way contemplative and conventional philosophies of education might come together for transformative education.*

*Keywords: critical pedagogy, contemplative pedagogy, epistemology, heart, transformative education, third space*

---

Everyone loves the heart. Writings abound. There is the open heart and the loving heart. An honest heart, a sympathetic heart, and a brave heart. Each one seems to extend into becoming hopeful hearts, mostly because we like to think of an ever loving heart reaching out into the world toward the hearts of other living beings, becoming the heart of a good society. What is almost always true, as well, is that all of these various hearts are courageous and kind. They are rarely wrong. True to themselves. The collective swirl of wondrous references to the heart makes me dizzy. Maybe I just have a cynical heart.

To be clear, it is not that I dislike references to the heart. It is just that the heart has become an over-extended metaphor, too modular in its unacknowledged variability. In that multiplicity of meanings something emerges, albeit tacitly; in the accumulation of allusions, actual meaning is inadvertently determined by the collective momentum of its implications. It at least seems clear that these references to the heart all seem to want to share a certain ethics, even if only in the ring of

their reception, an ethics that is somehow meant to guide me pedagogically. Because it is tacit and implied, however, it is difficult to examine what actually grounds and orients such a pedagogy, its philosophy or its practices. In this essay, I draw attention to the actual heart, its particular forms of awareness and its function, as a mechanism for measuring the healthy engagement between Critical Pedagogies and Contemplative Pedagogies.<sup>1</sup> To do so, I first loosen the singular grip of the heart's association with love. Then, understanding the resulting wider range of the heart's forms of awareness, I use the heart to develop a language for evaluating the mutual integration of Critical and Contemplative Pedagogies.

Though my research is based on years of work with both pedagogical approaches, in an attempt at efficient clarity my blunt categorization of them risks nuanced complexity and the precision of poetic depth.<sup>2</sup> The Critical and the Contemplative each represent a diverse set of principles and practices, from Paulo Freire to bell hooks and Peter McLaren, from Parker Palmer to Edmund O'Sullivan and Mirabai Bush.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the categories seem to hold, identifying a coherent set of ideas. Critical inquiry, for instance, mistrusts several key concepts found in writings about the contemplative. At best, to us critical theorists the Contemplative can seem overly

---

1 I capitalize "Critical" and "Contemplative" in order to refer to the canon of writings about that particular philosophy of education. I recognize that both terms refer to a wide and diverse range of writings, which is why I pluralize "Pedagogies"; nonetheless, I believe that the categories are internally consistent and useful for examination.

2 My academic training is in the philosophy of language and language-based cultural studies. Language is the lens through which I view these pedagogies, and it should be clear that language is much more than just language. I explain more below.

Moreover, I have an intimate appreciation for the critical and the contemplative. After an average secondary education, I entered university unprepared. As a lower middle class, halfbreed Chicano raised in Escondido near the Mexico-U.S. border, where racial tensions were heightened, I was intellectually and politically born into a world that saw me, in various ways, as illegitimate. My white father's family disowned my mother and us children for being Mexican and Catholic; yet, in the world at large, I passed as white. In the 80s, with affirmative action, it was also a world that made available to me university tutorial services founded on critical pedagogical principles. It was there that I began to understand intimately how a word can clarify, disentangle, and reorient. And for the last two decades, I have trained in meditation, primarily in Vipassana and meditative Kabbalah, with a monk, whose classes, both collective and individual, I still attend. These two formative experiences, which are both personal and educational, shape and inevitably influence my project in this essay.

3 There are also those who attempt to bring the two together. See, for instance, the work of bell hooks, Edmund O'Sullivan, or Laura Rendón. I believe each of these, however, in their foundational presuppositions, commits him or herself to either the critical or the contemplative framework. Though this essay is not the place to work through each theorist, and I am humbled by their contributions to this conversation, I do attempt to develop a language for such an examination. Briefly, I think we can see each pedagogue's commitment in whether or not his or her primary ethical principle relies on difference and distinction or on relationality and transcendence. I would put hooks in the former and O'Sullivan in the latter. To categorize Rendón's work would require a lengthier discussion, one that would have to involve an understanding of feminist theory by women of color.

naïve, with references to “direct perception” and universalist assumptions about human nature and the good, as if the twentieth-century critiques brought about by structuralism and poststructuralism never happened. In this way, the Contemplative can be seen as an unreconstructed return to Enlightenment foundationalisms, but with an Eastern twist that captures the moral force now granted to the other. Worse, the Contemplative might seem to draw on thought that masks power and privilege, as has been done by the ideology of the aesthetic and moral philosophy since the rise of modernity, a modernity marked not by the Enlightenment but earlier, by colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, those of us who meditate and write about the Contemplative might see such recalcitrant notions of difference as underdeveloped, ugly like the poor slave Caliban who, in his struggle for freedom, cannot get out of his own way. If only he would follow his fellow slave, the ephemeral spirit, Ariel.<sup>5</sup> From this perspective, the judgmentalism of social and cultural critique is seen as bad, as if it locks the soul too much in its material struggle, which is a narrow view of human experience.

Yet, despite these mutual misgivings, the Critical and the Contemplative have much in common, most significantly their shared yearning for transformative education. But words such as *transformational*, like *heartfelt*, can be easily shared, especially when used in overly ambiguous ways. It is more difficult to live them out, to inhabit the words. This essay emerges, then, from my intimate examination of these pedagogies, as a student, a researcher, and a teacher who has increasingly integrated them into the classroom. Therefore, where categories seem overly blunt, I ask you to read with the benefit of the doubt, even if only initially. I do not write these words with a sense of closure, but rather as an initial attempt to ground language in the lived experience of the words, a point from which we can speak more clearly and honestly. Whether I read Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Heart*, a Marxist epistemology of the oppressed sprinkled with liberation theology, or Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc’s *The Heart of Higher Education*, a holistic and integrative model that is also interested in social justice, the qualities of the heart feel present and yet considerably different from one another. It is this that leaves me wondering how the heart can be at the center of two pedagogies that strike me as not only very different from one another, but in fact divergent. And we tend to think about

---

4 This adjusted chronology is suggested by several postcolonial theorists, especially those who write about Latina America. See, for instance, Walter D. Mignolo’s work (2000).

5 This is a reference, of course, to William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. In addition to that, however, it also calls up an ongoing debate within postcolonial and decolonial studies. In the context of Latina American intellectual history, there are two particular, widely circulated, texts, José Enrique Rodó’s *Ariel* (1900) and Roberto Fernández Retamar’s “Caliban” (1971). These days, after the Cuban Revolution and the publication of Fernández Retamar’s essay, the character of Ariel has been critiqued and largely abandoned for attempting to purchase freedom, a sort of complicity with power. The School of Caliban, as it has been called, has eclipsed Arielismo.

divergence with concern. To understand why this need not be the case, I return to the heart itself.

There are at least two reasons why it is unfortunate that the most common way we write about heartfelt awareness is through its popular association with love. The first is how love reduces the object of the heart's attention to an ideal virtue. The heart, in reality, also perceives pain and suffering. It produces anger. The heart can be deceived and deceitful. It may even be wicked. It most certainly is easily broken. When I think of the heart I am reminded of the character Cholly in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. One of the amazing accomplishments of that novel, Morrison's first, is that even though the reader knows by the second page that in the end of the story Cholly rapes and impregnates his own daughter, by the end of the story the reader comes to feel sympathy for Cholly. My undergraduate students initially are unwilling to acknowledge this sympathy because they want to be able to hold Cholly responsible for his reprehensible action. They are unable to disentangle readerly judgment, situational evaluation, sympathy for a character, and moral condemnation. The students struggle against the reality they refuse to admit: that they actually feel badly for Cholly. Even worse, they understand him.<sup>6</sup> This is made even more difficult for them when they realize that Cholly is one of the few characters whose heart opens up to and reaches out for his little daughter. In fact, as horrific as it might sound, that seems to be the very reason he rapes her. The heart, then, clearly does not on its own always offer the good and the right.

The metonymical love of a now metaphorical heart not only limits the range of sensations that the heart perceives, but it also collapses two forms of awareness produced by the actual heart. Let me explain through Harry Frankfurt's well known distinction between first-order and second-order desires, even if it suggests an epistemological hierarchy that I would reject. The first-order form of heartfelt knowledge is best described by the fact that the knowledge is, well, that it is felt. It is embodied knowledge. The heart is the location of sensate cognition. For Frankfurt, first-order desire, a yearning awareness, describes a seemingly intuitive set of desires or tastes that motivate basic choice, like a person's preference for coffee or a plant's appetite for the warmth of the sun's light. This embodied, sensory aspect is essential to every reference to the heart that I have encountered, especially in the

---

6 At one level, it would seem that the novel is precisely what is often written about, that an open heart allows the reader, even a reluctant reader, to connect with Cholly, a character who initially is described as "beyond human consideration." This is, of course, true; but the example of Cholly demonstrates that the heart is not wise and good, a priori. Rather, more in line with my reading, Morrison treats subjectivity, what it means to be a person, as a sort of hermeneutic circle, offering the memorable line that *wicked people love wickedly*. The novel actually requires that the reader move between evaluation and sympathy, judgment and understanding.

way in which the heart is set against the thinking mind.<sup>7</sup> We use phrases like *learning by heart*, *opening one's heart*, or *being true to one's heart*. The heart's felt knowledge sits in contrast to abstraction and generalization. From this first-order awareness follows three basic points about the nature of heart-based knowledge. First, it is tangible. Unlike abstract conceptual knowledge, the heart perceives texture and vibration. It is intimate familiarity. By extension, this knowledge is immediate, and it is of the present moment.<sup>8</sup> That is to say, I can feel its vibrational quality as present to me. It is to this quality that I refer when I say that it is embodied and that we can inhabit heartfelt language. Whereas all references to the heart seem to share this first-order knowledge—what is meant by the word *heartfelt awareness*—the second-order awareness produced by the heart is less discussed, and it speaks directly to cases like how to disentangle the moral mess my students go through when reading Morrison's *Cholly*.

I have second-order awareness, according to Frankfurt, when I reflect on or have a desire whose object is my (first-order) desire. When a plant follows its sense of yearning, for example, but also realizes that it prefers the various blues of the morning light and, despite the afternoon warmth, consistently turns toward the east in order to harvest mostly in the early hours of the day. Or, I might decide not to drink a cup of coffee because it is unhealthy for me or because the industry

---

7 Elsewhere, I link the heart to the aesthetic field. It is worth mentioning that the reason Alexander Baumgarten introduced the concept of the aesthetic in the first place was in order to examine a form of awareness in contrast to logic. Interestingly, Aristotle had already located aesthetic knowledge in the heart (erroneously believing that it was the first organ developed in a fetus). Now, as contemporary philosophers rediscover the aesthetic, broadening it from Kant's focus on art and the sublime to include the everyday and the environmental, the concept of *aisthesis* is becoming increasingly important. Aisthesis has been defined as sensate cognition (see Adler and Welsch), which again, as I read it, seems to return us to the heart.

It is worth noting two different ways to read this notion of sensate cognition. I realize that the idea of the heart's potential intelligence is not uncontroversial. Work such as Childre and Martin (1999) has been critiqued. There is a difference, though, between *intelligence* and *awareness*, and my focus is on the latter. As I point out, there can be an incompetent heart. Moreover, when I write that the heart has certain forms of awareness, it is in that regard no different than any other organ of the body. Each organ has a particular form of awareness, just as eyes are sensitive to light, or more aware of light, thereby enabling spatial orientation.

8 This is not to say that the past and the future cannot be felt by the heart or, for example, that a war 6,000 miles away cannot be felt. The heart is aware of such abstractions, but only to the extent that they are vibrationally present to the person, just as in the wake of a nightmare a person might continue to feel its terror.

does not practice fair trade.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the heart also has a second-order form of awareness. It is found in the heart's regulatory function. The heart not only feels, but it has a vital role in regulating the body's circulatory system. By perceiving the body's needs, capacity, and design, the heart regulates the flow of blood, managing its pace and pressure. Then the heart communicates with the brain in order to regulate its circulation according to the required rhythm.<sup>10</sup> These various activities of the heart, contained in its regulatory function, require a more open sense of what the heart perceives than simply loving kindness. These activities also draw attention to the organ's organizing principle, its sense of oscillatory balance. This regulatory, second-order function can be of particular significance for the principles and practices of philosophies of education.

Since both pedagogies believe in liberatory transformation based on embodied knowledge, it is easy to conflate epistemic values (that which helps produce knowledge) with pedagogical virtue (those virtues, implied or explicit, toward which we teach), thereby collapsing these two forms of heartfelt awareness. The way the heart has come to be discussed—loving and hopeful, honest and courageous—inadvertently becomes both productive and good. But this collapse of the epistemological and the ethical disables our conversation. Therefore, since Critical and Contemplative Pedagogies both share an interest in the felt (first-order) awareness of the heart, its embodied ability to get past the limits of social discourse and language, the second-order function may help clarify their points of departure.

*Each heartbeat contains two phases, the systolic and the diastolic. Systole measures the contraction of the cardiac muscles, the moment when blood is expelled from the heart, passing through its continuous chambers, out to the body.*

### **Systole: Dialectics and the Need for Words**

“Critical theorists,” according to Peter McLaren, “begin with the premise that men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege” (Darder et al., 2009, p.63).<sup>11</sup> Such contradictions and asymmetries are often unrecognized, hidden by language. *Language is a*

---

<sup>9</sup> Frankfurt, unfortunately, is invested in describing what is unique about *human* agency. For him, the hierarchy of first- and second-order desires has a rationalist leaning in which the second-order is better, or higher, than the more spontaneous first-order desires on which it is based. Not only does this diminish the simple wisdom found in a plant's movement to light, a response not so different than human sight, but it also devalues the human wisdom and creativity produced by the struggle to survive, by simple needs of existence, for any living being in this world.

<sup>10</sup> For the first insight, I am indebted to my teacher of meditation. For the different forms of communication between the heart and the brain, see Montgomery (2008).

<sup>11</sup> See McLaren, “Critical Pedagogy: A Look at the Major Concepts,” in Darder et al. (2009).

site of struggle.<sup>12</sup> Critical pedagogy is about learning to put words to the previously unworded experiences of those who live on the margins of language.

Words contract. Like a person's identity, words distinguish. They mark this from that, here from there, me from you. Inversely, words also contain what is not there, the opposites and absences to which the words themselves implicitly refer. For instance, when I say that something is pretty, I have identified, at least in part, a field of other things that I presumably think of as uglier than that. When I say something is painful, I quietly mark my conception of a better or healthier life as that which does not contain this type of suffering. In this way, even the absence of something like happiness reveals the presence of something else, like the conception of happiness itself that does not exist or an indictment of whatever is the cause of its absence.<sup>13</sup> It is the task of words to mark concepts. This sort of conceptual marking of distinctions, a compression of understanding into the grasp of knowledge, shapes how I see the world and myself in it.

Critical Pedagogies are dialectical. For them, learning begins with the discovery of an embodied contradiction, an asymmetrical difference, in relation to a seemingly fixed concept or category. If someone yearns for freedom but lives in alienation or unnecessary fragmentation, she embodies a contradiction. Heartfelt language puts words to such tension, illuminating embodied knowledge. This process is a struggle for the oppressed who are born into the dominant language, a language that does not represent marginalized experiences, thereby devaluing them.<sup>14</sup> To understand this we need only to revisit the title of Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*, a story in which a young Black girl, Pecola, desperately wants blue eyes. Blue eyes are not

---

12 See hooks (1999, 28-34), where she revisits this statement several times. It presumes what I mentioned above, that language is much more than just language. It is this understanding that is central to Critical Pedagogies. Whether we consider linguist Ferdinand de Saussure or anthropologist Clifford Geertz, language precedes thought. It is something into which we are born, providing an infrastructure for our behavior, thoughts, and imagination. Bill Ashcroft captures this well when he defines Michel Foucault's closely related concept of discourse, which for our purposes here can be replaced with language: "...a discourse [or language] is a strongly bounded area of social knowledge, a system of statements within which the world can be known. The key feature of this is that the world is not simply 'there' to be talked about, rather, it is through [language] itself that the world is brought into being" (2007, pp. 70-71).

13 The Marxist concept of alienation identifies precisely this negation of Aristotelian eudaimonia, a full sense of happiness. Ideology, like language or discourse, can mask alienation. So, for instance, capitalism can come to look natural, as if it has no history and is simply a system conducive for human flourishing. Free markets becomes yoked together with the idea of true freedom.

14 There is a paradox between social power and epistemological potential. In Marxist and feminist understanding of the production of insight, there is an epistemological advantage for being oppressed. That is to say, the oppressed live with more obvious and pervasive contradictions from which to begin dialectical thinking. That said, it should be clear that this is not the celebration of oppression. No reasonable person would prefer to be oppressed. Nor is this the silly belief that, say, in terms of race, that a person of color is always right or that a white person is always wrong.

just about blue eyes. Blue eyes, in the language of 1941 Ohio, the setting of the novel, are about being recognized and loved. Blue eyes are the equivalent of being beautiful, and beauty is about being seen with affection. When the man at the candy store will not touch her as he hands her the candy, Pecola believes it is because she is ugly. Sadly, she is correct. Then and there, as a poor Black girl she is considered too ugly to be properly recognized. If Pecola had an understanding of critical dialectics, she would have seen how her own ugliness served more as an indictment of her society and the stratified hierarchies of significance that give meaning to words. She did not. Instead, the poor Black girl wants blue eyes (in an era before colored contact lenses). She goes crazy because she has no critical language for the contradictions she embodies: a Black body, a racialized definition of beauty, and a yearning for the affection associated with beauty.

We are born into the codes and conventions of society just as we are born into language. Language is a site of struggle. And by language we do not just mean linguistic units, but also those units of meaning, such as identity, through which we know ourselves and our respective relationships to the world around us. Therefore, to become more active in language, or in culture, each person must find the words that best represent his or her lived experience. Critical Pedagogies begin with and are guided by word-based dialectical methods.<sup>15</sup> Thesis-antithesis-synthesis.<sup>16</sup> Several widely circulated anthologies with essays by well known pedagogues cite the significance of dialectical thinking for Critical Pedagogies. Paulo Freire, in fact, uses dialectics to describe the nature of critical consciousness through the concept of the true word as the essential element of transformative praxis:

Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world. (Freire, 1970, p. 68)

The word, again, represents a more general dialectic process. Within a well-placed word, reflection on its accuracy may contradict action, or behavior may contradict abstract thought; each one speaks to the other, correcting and refining

---

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, the introduction to *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Darder et al.; or Kincheloe's "Critical Pedagogy in the Twenty-first Century" in McLaren and Kincheloe (2007).

<sup>16</sup> Inwood (1992) defines dialectic as: "(1) One or more concepts or categories are taken as fixed, sharply defined and distinct from each other. This is the stage of understanding. (2) When we reflect on such categories, one or more contradictions emerge in them. This is the stage of dialectic proper, or of dialectical or negative reason. (3) The result of this dialectic is a new, higher category, which embraces the earlier categories and resolves the contradiction involved in them" (pp. 81-82).

I cite this Hegelian meaning of dialectic because it is fundamental to Marxist thought, especially his earlier work, supposedly written by the "young" Marx, often considered the more humanist moment of Marx's work because of his focus on the concept of *alienation*.



along the way. From that tension emerges a new, syncretic word. As a method, echoing Socratic method, word-based dialectics are valuable for education. As a student or teacher attempts to understand, she or he uses the language of critical analysis to make sense of social and cultural contradictions.

Two prominent writers, the cultural theorist Raymond Williams and poet-essayist Audre Lorde, both use a similar metaphor in order to talk about the importance of this dialectic of words: distillation. It is a heating process that separates the more volatile from the less volatile parts, then cooling and condensing it to produce a more refined substance. At first, Williams explains how words offer clarity, but he explains that they do so by holding still, somewhat falsely, that which is in constant flux and by isolating that which is complicated and interconnected. The experience of culture is fluid and ever evolving, so Williams uses his concept *structures of feeling* to draw attention to its liveliness as well as the way in which each feeling, like the anger or sadness of Morrison's characters, emerges from a given set of circumstances, or structure. Even if that structure is not immediately evident, the feelings can draw the person's attention to it. In his explanation of structures of feeling, however, a concept meant to bring together the more wordable structures that hierarchically stratify meaning and the inchoate and emerging first-order perceptions, Williams considers the "semantic availability" of an object of awareness.<sup>17</sup>

The value Williams places on making a feeling available to language highlights the uneven epistemic value Critical Pedagogies give to words and wordlessness. Similarly, Audre Lorde, who elsewhere writes wonderfully about the uses of anger, here puts such embodied sensation in context by writing about the need for language.

The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. ... This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding. (Lorde, 1984, pp. 36-37)

This semantic edge between the realm of words and the unworded pedagogically privileges words; and tacitly disregards not only the value of things that are

---

<sup>17</sup> The phrase "semantic availability" comes at the end of Raymond Williams' chapter "Structures of Feeling," in which he discusses the relationship between language and feelings. It is central to his method of cultural critique.

unworded but also might preclude the very existence of that which is unwordable.<sup>18</sup>

What is significant for my purpose in this essay is to point out the orientation of Critical Pedagogy, a philosophy of education that attempts to move from the wordless (first-order) embodied knowledge to a world of words. It is in the productivity of the true word that Critical Pedagogies find transformation, the way in which putting words around lived experience constructs a new space. This new space is a more liberatory alternative to the dialectic's contradictory thesis and antithesis, produced by the epistemic product of their shared difference and tension. Social and cultural progress occurs when the new critical awareness animates behavior. Often angrily. And continuous progress occurs when the new synthesis encounters a new contradiction, and the dialectic process for the production of transformative knowledge continues to unfold, over and over again.

As a method, dialectics unify the various forms of Critical Pedagogy. The problem with this word-based dialectical method, however, is not the method itself. Rather, its weakness is its relentless valorization of words over wordlessness. The primacy of words in critical dialectics threatens over-contraction. Arrhythmia. Such forms of awareness, though necessary, can get trapped in the extended tightening of language and its linear logic, which, like a sentence, valorizes the world of the subject's action. Words yearn to clarify. They need to grasp, always distinguishing and specifying. But what if something is beyond the reach of language?

*After the contraction comes dilation. The diastolic. Tension and release. Differentiation expands and disperses. And blood returns to the heart.*

### **Diastole: Dialogism and Its Wordlessness**

Contemplative Pedagogies refer to a wide range of formal exercises, from stillness meditation to creative acts. It also includes relational and movement practices, generative and ritual/cyclical exercises. In its "Tree of Contemplative Practices," the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society cites these as well as activism and volunteerism. With a list that feels as exhaustive as this one, it should be clear that what define Contemplative Pedagogies are not merely the acts themselves. There is a qualitative dimension.

In an academic world of achievement and assessment, how do we justify a pedagogy whose meditative practices resist both the desire for achievement and the anxiety to assess? In the current literature there are a few different approaches. Because of its attempt to account for the full range of practices that might be considered contemplative, the work from the Center captures well some of the most essential elements, and is one of the more value-neutral, or balanced, descriptions.

---

<sup>18</sup> The obvious example of something unwordable would be the possibility of the existence of God, or "G-d," which emphasizes this fact. Williams, here, as a cultural materialist, is consistent, though he may inadvertently slip into the trap of the scientific discourse that he is trying to avoid.

In “What is Contemplative Pedagogy?” Arthur Zajonc coheres all of these meditative practices around two essential ends:

- the cultivation of attention and emotional balance
- the development of faculties required for insight and creativity.

As Zajonc goes on to explain, our capacity for attention is precious, and central to the learning process, and therefore central to any pedagogy. “While few would deny this, conventional pedagogy makes little effort to develop the student’s native capacity for attention directly” (Zajonc, 2008, p.9). While I appreciate the inclusiveness of the Center’s list of contemplative practices—I often say that my introduction to meditation was my childhood love of shooting basketball—such an exhaustive list and such a value-neutral description of their attention to attention still does not capture the essence of Contemplative Pedagogies, nor is it meant to.

More than just a set of practices or the cultivation of attention, what marks Contemplative Pedagogies is something about the qualitative dimensions. This qualitative dimension seems to defy definition; yet, I only need to attend a conference about contemplation in higher education or read almost anything on the subject in order to see that there is more at play. Parker Palmer, in a book co-authored with Zajonc, tries to get at it by describing the philosophical foundations underlying what he calls “integrative education,” and seems to characterize a common view in Contemplative Pedagogies. First, Palmer demonstrates a link between a historical era’s particular ontological view and the dominant pedagogy of the time. Discourses tend to cohere. He uses the example of how the Newtonian view of reality, with the help of social Darwinism, affected our notion of the self and a competitive understanding of human relations.

That view, in turn, helped shape an educational system premised on the notion that knowledge consists of collecting atomistic facts about an atomistic reality, facts to be delivered by individuals who know them to others who do not in a system where learners compete with each other for scarce rewards. (Palmer, 2010, p. 25)<sup>19</sup>

Every ontology is linked with a certain epistemology, and that epistemology extends naturally to a particular pedagogy. And, as we know, every pedagogy has an underlying ethics to it, even if unstated. There is a certain art of living demonstrated by the course design, the classroom arrangement, the professor’s demeanor, etcetera.

After establishing this link between ontology and epistemology, pedagogy and

---

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Aronowitz and Giroux have a description of the last two decades that sounds equally atomistic: “During these years, the meaning and purpose of schooling at all levels of education were refashioned around the principles of the marketplace and the logic of rampant individualism. Ideologically, this meant abstracting schools from the language of democracy and equity while simultaneously organizing educational reform around the discourse of choice, reprivatization, and individual competition” (quoted in O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 5).

ethics, Palmer describes our current ontology as relational. Whether we consider systems theory, deep ecology, or Gestalt psychology, we can say that we are examining the importance of matrices of relationships. In this, he is consistent with many writers, from David Bohm's sense of wholeness to Laura Rendón's integrative and consonant pedagogy. And it is for this reason that the concept of community is crucial for Palmer's work. It is in community that we inhabit a relational field of experiences (ontology). If knowledge is justified belief, then it is in our subjective and inter-subjective experience of community that we come to know about ourselves and the world we live in (epistemology). It follows, then, for Palmer as well as Contemplative Pedagogies in general, that this multidimensional worldview can only come about in dialogue, a less linear and more open conversation that includes multiple perspectives without hierarchy in a unified whole (pedagogy). This immersion into relationality is why an ethics of engagement is so significant for Palmer's formulation.<sup>20</sup> If this is the foundation of higher education's heart, the confluence of ontology, epistemology, pedagogy, and ethics makes it seem like the heart's primary function is the confluence itself; which is why dialogical method becomes central to the Contemplative project. What better to account for multiplicity than dialogue, open and undifferentiated? It allows for a certain secular spirituality. Indeed, the relational would seem to also account for race, class, and gender, the sociopolitical triad at the center of Critical Pedagogies. Additionally, dialogism offers a platform for whatever pedagogical approaches a person would like.

But dialogism has at least two weaknesses worth mentioning, and therefore is not sufficient on its own to characterize the Contemplative. The first is illustrated by Parker Palmer's otherwise wonderful description of what he calls a spirituality of education in *To Know As We Are Known*. Citing Robert Frost's poem "Two Tramps in Mud Time," Palmer tellingly links this relational ontology with its corresponding epistemology:

But yield who will to their separation,  
My object in living is to unite  
My avocation and my vocation  
As my two eyes make one in sight.

The line of sight from each eye combines into one unified vision. It is a rich image. From the union of two individual eyes a single vision is produced; and, it is because of the union of these two different perspectives that we are able to see depth and dimension. Palmer calls this "wholesight," a term that captures the allure of holism and dialogism in writings on the Contemplative, as it has been described by many of its most widely circulated authors (e.g., Zajonc, Palmer, Rendón, O'Sullivan). On the other hand, however, notice that the depth perception and di-

---

<sup>20</sup> There is again overlap with recent aesthetic theory. See Berleant's *aesthetics of engagement*.

mensionality that emerges from the metaphor of this single vision does not involve the actual interaction of the left and the right eye. It is simply their coexistence that gets translated by the mind into a unified vision. There is no mechanism for managing the exchange, no pedagogical guide: it is as if when you simply put conventional and contemplative methods side by side, something happens. While I appreciate the epistemological uncertainty for which this allows, it not only seems too open-ended but it also could devolve into pedagogical relativism: in the classroom, is every dialogue as functional as every other? Are there good and bad dialogues?<sup>21</sup> Also notice how this understanding of dialogism erases the epistemological value of difference, further distancing the Contemplative from the Critical. It seems to suggest two unsatisfying options: either there is no interaction or there is complete union.

The other problem with dialogism parallels the first. Whereas Palmer writes in an almost causal chronology, from ontology to epistemology to pedagogy and then ethics, there is a less linear way to categorize them. They fall into two sets of pairs. Between ontology/epistemology and pedagogy/ethics there is a significant distinction. It is the matter of choice. That is to say, while ontology and epistemology describe a state of being and the nature of knowledge, pedagogy and ethics describe the art of doing something, either learning or living. And artistry requires making choices. For the ontological, relationality captures well the interlocking matrices of the various discourses in which we live. It follows, then, that epistemology should yearn to be relational as well, even if in the process we also become increasingly aware of the limits of our knowledges. Unfortunately, pedagogy and ethics are fundamentally about the choices we make, what to do and how to do it. When I have to decide what to do in today's class session of seventy-five minutes, in a fifteen-week course that meets twice a week, do I teach this or that? Do I teach it from this perspective or that one? Do I give fifteen minutes or seventy-five to a meditation-based exercise? I must evaluate significance and make choices. Wholesight and harmony do not offer a method for making such pedagogical judgments.<sup>22</sup> (This is an advantage for Critical Pedagogies, which identify their shared quality as a method, i.e., dialectics, which does not presume a particular ontology.)

We can use an exhaustive list of practices and the philosophy of dialogism in order to identify Contemplative Pedagogies, but something essential seems to still be missing. I have referred to it as a qualitative aspect of experience. I believe that

---

21 Rendón seems to openly refer to this in the name of her pedagogy, which is both *integrative* and *consonant*. Apparently aware of the possible relativism of the integrative, with "consonant" Rendón accomplishes what others try to do with the over-extended metaphor of the heart. Harmony is her more encompassing, and more elegant, sense of ethical orientation which stabilizes the otherwise free-flowing moral flux.

22 A third problem, though this essay is not the place to elaborate, is that *wholesight* is too ambitious. It is the same reason I prefer the name *meditative pedagogy* over "contemplative" pedagogy, which carries with it too much expectation.

it is this. Whereas critical consciousness privileges the world of words, the contemplative—with a simple sense of appreciative aspection—savors wordlessness. It might at first seem paradoxical to associate wordlessness with a pedagogy also defined by dialogism, but it is important to distinguish between *dialogue* and *dialogics*. One has to do with speech, the other has to do with relationality. For instance, both Paulo Freire and bell hooks write about the importance of dialogue in the classroom; yet, even though there is an ethical thrust in how they write about it, both Freire and hooks write about dialogue more as a practice. It is the nature of a conversation in the classroom or an interview between a working-class white man and a Black woman: “an interaction across and with our differences” (hooks 132). Despite their appreciation for dialogue, both Freire and hooks ultimately identify as foundational dialectic pedagogical methods that depend on identifying difference and the uneven distribution of power. Dialogics, on the other hand, is not about speech (though conversation can be dialogic). Dialogics draws on the formalist work of literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin: as opposed to monologic, dialogism suggests multiple subjectivities co-existing, becoming something new in a novel’s larger narrative. This is why dialogism is so common in Contemplative Pedagogies, because of how dialogics poetically suggests a certain wordless quality. The various contemplative practices all cultivate the student’s capacity to tend to this sort of wordless dimension of experience.

Wordlessness refers to something other than these ideas I am sharing with you, because these are wrapped and delivered in words. With my words I can only point to dimensions beyond the limits of language, to the ocean on the other side of the semantic sand on which I sit. Indeed, it is the impossibility of its representation that enriches music and poetry.<sup>23</sup> Wordlessness is the feeling, to me, of my body at rest in the embrace of the ground. I cannot exactly put it into words. It is the cool breeze of a refreshing inhale, or the burn of anxiety in the middle of my chest. And it is the soft, unshareable, vibrations of every other everyday experience. Even though Critical Pedagogies also depend on heartfelt knowledge, especially that aspect which is inchoate and emerging, the dialectic process is conveniently clean, confining such knowledge to linguistic categories and linear progress. The Contemplative relishes in the wordless, though tangible, dimensions of experience. That is why it defies definition.

The point might be made from another direction. Mirabai Bush opens her

---

23 W.J.T. Mitchell (1995) says that creative art emerges from the inevitable gap that exists between lived experience and the representation of that experience. As he puts it: “The problem with representation might be summarized by reversing the traditional slogan of the American Revolution: instead of ‘No taxation without representation,’ no representation without taxation. Every representation exacts some cost, in the form of lost immediacy, presence, or truth, in the form of a gap between intention and realization, original and copy. . . . But representation does give us something in return for the tax it demands, the gap it opens. One of the things it gives us is literature” (p. 21).

essay, “Contemplative Higher Education in Contemporary Life,” with the following quote by Thomas Merton:

*The fruit of education, whether in the university or in the monastery [is] the activation of that innermost center, that apex or spark which is a freedom beyond freedom, an identity beyond essence, a self beyond ego, a being beyond the created realm, and a consciousness that transcends all division, all separation. (Bush, 2011, p. 221)*

Bush’s description, as always, captures well the essential elements of Contemplative Pedagogies. Notice, of course, how the quote by Merton is so much more than a list of practices or a description of the relationality found in dialogue. With Merton, Bush opens by grounding the awareness of Contemplative Pedagogies in “the activation of that innermost center,” a phrase that recalls the heart. Notice, too, though, the word that is most often used in the passage: *beyond*. The preposition “beyond” is used four times, only to be replaced by the last line’s *transcendence*. While the idea of transcendence can be troubling for critical theory because it diminishes materiality and difference, the contemplative does not shy away from it. Indeed, the word *beyond* is used repeatedly precisely because the writer cannot account for what he is trying to describe with words alone. The object to which the passage refers is, quite literally, beyond the words available to the writer. Wordlessness. Dialogism is significant because it is in the relationality that one moves beyond the atomistic and the individual. In the classroom, a conversation moves beyond an individual perspective when we share ideas. Or, as Merton writes, in meditation, as we sink deeper into the sense of the ground and breath, it can also speak to a self beyond the self we know. Even to a freedom beyond freedom, whatever that might be.

*To avoid arrhythmia or arrest, the heart maintains an open-ended, non-repeating rhythm through the systolic and diastolic phases of the heartbeat. Contraction and dilation, compression and expansion. The heart yearns for balance in this oscillatory rhythm.*

### **The Balanced Heart: Producing a Transformative Space**

To close, let me revisit the idea of transformative education, of creating in the classroom a more liberatory space, in order to clarify the pedagogical model offered by the heart, a framework that is not only about formal meditation practices but might also contribute to conversations about teaching in general.

Above, I make brief reference to the pedagogies’ respective images of transformative education. Both see liberatory transformation as the production of a new space. In Critical Pedagogies, it usually emerges from the contradictions revealed by word-based reflection and action: the true word transforms the world. The product of this dialectic (or praxis) is what postcolonial and critical theorists write

about as *third space*.<sup>24</sup> From difference, distinction, and the contradictions that bind them emerges a more liberatory space. For *Contemplative Pedagogies*, the sense of liberatory space is not based on contradiction as much as union, a more integrative or holistic standpoint. This union transcends the particular, the presumed location of difference, which is one reason the contemplative space is often described in terms of harmony and wholeness. A place beyond this one. Not bound to the particular. The dialogic is inherently more relational and multidimensional than a dialectic, and therefore also seems more immediately whole and harmonious. Even though these two pedagogies, as I describe them, hold different conceptions of what a liberatory space might look like, both think about the transformational as a new space. The classroom is an obvious example. To learn is to change one's mind. In class we attempt to change and transform a student's understanding, with a more hospitable home for all students and their diverse forms of intelligence. But, like a heart that over contracts or dilates, each of these approaches has severe limitations, as does their respective view of what orients transformation.

In order to identify a more viable understanding of the liberatory dimension of transformative learning, I am intrigued by the oscillatory, rhythmic movement between the two phases of a heartbeat, systole and diastole. In the systolic phase the cardio-muscular system contracts, forcing blood away from the heart. In the ensuing diastolic phase, the heart releases the tension and dilates, allowing blood to flow once again back toward, and into, the heart.<sup>25</sup> It is in this way that a cycle of oxygenated, de-oxygenated, and re-oxygenated blood flows through the body, touching each and every cell in order to continuously nourish the body and expel its waste. Balance. I want to mark certain elements of this process that are important for understanding liberatory transformation. First, notice how each phase, the systolic and the diastolic, contraction and dilation, is born from and simultaneously gives birth to the other phase. Each phase of the heart is, in fact, product as well as precondition of the other phase. The heart cannot contract unless it has already dilated. Nor can it dilate until it has contracted.

Let me return to the spatial example, drawing attention to the understanding of space offered by the heart. When I think, for instance, of our common conception of space I might think of the doors of a house. We usually think of doors as something we open and then pass through in order to get to another place, to somewhere other than where we are at. In this way, the door leads to a new space. Or, we think of a door in terms of safety, locking it shut in order to protect us from that which exists outside, in that other place. Whichever the case may be, this sense of space draws attention to differentiation and connection. The heart,

---

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Soja (1996).

<sup>25</sup> I must credit the work of Stephen Buhner. Not only does the initial inspiration for the structure of this essay come from his project (2004), but this basic description of blood flow, to and from the heart, comes from a central point of his thesis.



however, offers us a different sense of space. Systole and diastole. Tension and relaxation, retraction and release. Between the end of systolic contraction and the initial moment of diastolic dilation, the heart creates space. It is not a new space, though. It is space inside of itself. The chambers empty, for however briefly, and between the phases of a heartbeat an openness is created. An openness in order to re-nourish. So the heart does not produce a new space. It creates space anew. As a result, in order to identify that which grounds and guides true transformation, instead of space we can talk about the production of spaciousness.

Spaciousness is not a place at all. It is a quality. A living quality of experience. Whether we describe political liberation or the moment a student, in sudden realization, gasps “a-ha,” what we actually appreciate in each example is the quality of spaciousness that has occurred. It is not the degree of depth or distance. Spaciousness is the quality of having enough room. Roomy or ample. Not about naked expanse. It is about expansion, of the limits of what currently exists. Less limited, less confined. It might be found in the farthest reaches or in the deepest depths, but is always present in the simple act of stretching a tightness. Spaciousness is created by movement. A wiggle where there once was only stiff stillness. It is found when someone loosens congestion, or in an honest statement that disentangles some familiar, knotted thing. Such as when someone finally recognizes domestic violence as violence. An opening where once it was not as open. Like when a young, college-aged boy who is half Mexican and half white realizes that his father’s family was just racist, and that even if others do not see him as Latino, he can still be Chicano.<sup>26</sup> And, there again, when the same Chicano boy lets the anger loosen, even realizing that some of the anger is not due to racial tension.

Since the physical heart also maps the energetic flow of blood, we can talk about pedagogy and the production of knowledge in similar terms of more spacious awareness. Indeed, it is the quality of spaciousness that makes sense of the integration between conventional word-based pedagogies and meditational pedagogies. Again, notice the nature of newness when we talk about creating new knowledge. Words and wordlessness contain the same energetic elements as the heart. Embodied words—those whose meanings are not emptied by, say, clichés—tacitly contain the sort of living presence that escapes the words themselves, that ghostly matter that oozes around the sequence of letters we read, one after the other, seemingly endlessly.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, in lived experience it is from the wordless, both the as-of-yet unworded as well as the unwordable, from which new words emerge. One includes the other, without erasure. Indeed, our awareness of them is

---

26 Naomi Scheman, in the context of feminist consciousness raising group, offers a more elaborate description of this process, of how a name or label, or a word, can actually change an emotion. See her chapter, “Anger and the Politics of Naming” (1993).

27 For a wonderful examination of *ghostly matter*, see Gordon (1997).

both product and precondition of the other. And a new word opens up a space in a person's consciousness, a space that becomes material when it indexes future behavior (Freire's transformative praxis). The newness of these new words is important. New words, whether neologism or the application of a word in a new way, are not the creation of a new language. Within the already existent language, they are the creation of a space anew. And with them the language becomes more spacious. Such poetry is not just found in a poem. It can be found in a scientific breakthrough, or in a historical text that reorients my thinking. Spaciousness is the enchantment and tranquility found in a struggle for liberation. It is in the embrace of heaviness I find in my increasing awareness of roots sinking down more deeply into furrows in the ground's open field. Paying attention to the qualities of spaciousness draws attention to the qualities therein, which somehow changes the experience itself, as anyone knows who meditates or who has taken the time to carefully look at an emotion, like explosive anger, and then sees the qualities of that emotion evolve inside of itself. Transformation.

Since I practice meditation, in my classes I regulate this heartfelt energetic flow using exercises derived from formal meditation, most simply through the use of (wordless, meditative) focusing and (unedited, spontaneous) freewriting, culminating in the more conventional formal essay. Other teachers do similar exercises, too. The point is that contraction and dilation can be present with any activity. To recognize it, all we need to do is pay attention to the heightened concentration students have right before an examination and compare that tension to the energetic qualities of a conversation held the day after the examination. Contraction and dilation. In the same way that the heart regulates the flow of blood, we can begin to take the pulse of how we regulate the energetic flow in the design of a course, in a sequence of class sessions, or in the exercises within a class session. Moving between contraction and dilation. To be clear, the heart does not control the flow of blood and does not ensure certain results. The heart does not progress linearly and it is not one-sided (in other words, the heart's movement is not primarily dialectic or dialogic). The heart nourishes through a non-repetitive movement between its phases. It is not their contradiction or the erasure of their differences, not transcendence or moving beyond, but an ongoing, ever adapting oscillatory rhythm within the body itself.

The pedagogical heartbeat is underwritten by the creative wisdom of the struggle to survive, by open dialogue with other organs of the body, and an epistemology of uncertainty. The uncertainty is not only felt by the students but also by the professor, who through structure and guidance offers pace and pressure, but then relinquishes the pretense of knowing exactly what will come. The energetic movement cannot be mastered, but we can manage it. The healthy heart perceives need, capacity, and design; based on those, it then makes choices, communicates

with the appropriate parts of the body, and acts accordingly. With this understanding of the heart we also see how the insights of meditational pedagogies should not be limited to those of us who practice formal meditation. The heart offers a language for how to gauge the energetic rhythm of a classroom. Like taking a pulse. And it offers insight into the transformative aspect of our learning, and yearning. Like the heart in a body, we can manage that rhythm and begin to learn how to teach students to produce the quality of spaciousness.

## REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. (2007). *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Routledge.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1982). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. University of Texas Press.
- Berleant, A. (2004). *Re-thinking Aesthetics: Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.
- Bohm, D. (1980). *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. New York: Routledge.
- Buhner, S. (2004). *The Secret Teachings of Plants: The Intelligence of the Heart in the Direct Perception of Nature*. Rochester, Vermont: Bear & Company.
- Bush, M. (2011). "Contemplative Higher Education in Contemporary Life." In *Contemplation Nation: How Ancient Practices Are Changing the Way We Live; Papers from The State of Contemplative Practice in America*. Mirabai Bush, ed. Kalamazoo, MI: Fetzer Institute.
- Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. (2008). *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: A Handbook of Classroom Practices*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Childre, D., & Martin, H., with Beech D. (1999). *The HeartMath Solution: The Institute of HeartMath's Revolutionary Program for Engaging the Power of the Heart's Intelligence*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Darder, A., Baltodano, M., & Torres, R. (Eds.). (2009). *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Routledge.
- Fernández Retamar, R. (1989). *Caliban and Other Essays*. Translated by Edward Baker, Foreword by Fredric Jameson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, M. (1986). *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, Inc.
- Franco, J. (1986). "Death Camp Confessions and Resistance to Violence in Latin America." *Socialism and Democracy* 2(Spring/Summer), 5-17.
- Frankfurt, H. (1971). "Freedom of the will and the concept of a person." In *Journal of Philosophy* 67(1), 5-20.

- Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of the Heart*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company.
- Galeano, E. (1991). *The Book of Embraces*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Gordon, A. (1997). *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota.
- Hillman, J. (1992). *The thought of the heart and the soul of the world*. Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, Inc.
- hooks, b. (1999). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (1990). *Yearning*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Hyde, A. (2013). "The Yoga of Critical Discourse." *Journal of Transformative Education*. 11(2), 114-126.
- Inwood, M. (1992). *A Hegel Dictionary*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc.
- Lake, R. & Kress, T. (Eds.). (2013). *Paulo Freire's Intellectual Roots: Toward Historicity in Praxis*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.
- McCarthy, G. (1992). *Marx and Aristotle: Nineteenth-Century German Social Theory and Classical Antiquity*. Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- McLaren, P. & Kincheloe, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?* New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Mignolo, W. (2000). *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Miller, J., Karsten, S., Denton, D., Orr, D. & Colalillo Kates, I. (Eds.). (2005). *Holistic Learning and Spirituality in Education: Breaking New Ground*. State University of New York Press.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (1995). "Representation." In *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed., Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Montgomery, P. (2008). *Plant Spirit Healing: A Guide to Working with Plant Consciousness*. Rochester, Vermont: Bear & Company.
- Morrison, T. (1970). *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- O'Sullivan, E. (1999). *Transformative Learning: Educational Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Foreword by Thomas Berry. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Palmer, P. (1998). *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Palmer, P. (1983). *To Know As We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Palmer, P., & Zajonc A. (2010). *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rendón, L. (2009). *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice and Liberation*. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Rodó, J. E. (1988). *Ariel*. Translated by Margaret Sayers Peden, Prologue by Carlos Fuentes. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Scheman, N. (1993). *Engenderings: Constructions of Knowledge, Authority, and Privilege*. New York: Routledge.
- Soja, E. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc.
- Trifonas, P. (Ed.). (2003). *Pedagogies of Difference: Rethinking Education for Social Change*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Welsch, Wolfgang. (2009). "Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics." In Halsall, F., Jansen J., & O'Connor T. (Eds.) *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy, and Art Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Zajonc, A. (2008). "What Is Contemplative Pedagogy?" In *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: A Handbook of Classroom Practices*. Unpublished manuscript.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

JUAN D. MAHY BUSCH is an associate professor of English and Chicana/o Studies at Loyola Marymount University. He researches the interplay in aesthetics between ethics and epistemology, especially in regards to questions of consciousness and agency. For the past twenty years, he has practiced and studied Vipassana and meditative Kabbalah. He has published essays on ethics and aesthetics in ethical theory and Chicana/o and U.S. Latina/o literatures, and also co-authored an essay with novelist Helena María Viramontes, "Being the Boarder: A Train of Thought, Imaginative Training." Juan lives in Los Angeles with his partner Irene and their children, Iza, Josué, and Serén.



# Honor the Negative Space

**Renée A. Hill**

*Virginia State University*

---

*Bradford Grant's concept of "negative space" is the area between, around, above and below objects. Becoming aware of negative space gives us a feeling of spaciousness in our environment. Awareness of negative space as it relates to time opens our lives even more. This paper examines and helps us to value the negative space which flows around, between and through activities and which makes up the latticework of our days.*

*Keywords: mindfulness, observation, attention, pause, contemplative teaching*

---

There are the moments in our lives when we glide onto the stage to accept an award for research which we conducted for twenty long years, or when we hear that the book we have been obsessing over is going to be published or that the student we have been meeting with weekly has been accepted into the graduate program she coveted, or a difficult concept which we have been struggling to explain to our students has finally clicked and understanding has dawned. And then there are all the other moments.

Negative space. Bradford Grant, Professor of Architecture at Howard University, introduced the term "negative space" to our summer session for teachers offered by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. Negative space is not "bad" space, like the clutter on top of my office desk or the putrid smell of decay wafting from the forgotten refried beans in the back of the refrigerator. Brad described it as the space above, under, between, and around objects, like the three-dimensional dough left behind once the gingerbread man cookies have been removed. The "not object" space. He pointed out how the gentle curve of arced streetlights divides the sky into two sections: a limitless space above resting on a tortoise-shell-shaped hump, and a bell-shaped window flowing down to the ground. The puzzle-shaped pieces of blue you see through the canopy of leaves in the trees. The shifting geometric shapes formed by space between legs of chairs and tables. The "not" things. The negative space.

Looking at the negative space is an effort of shifting attention from the things we have been taught to notice, avoid, and manipulate to the universally unobserved and dismissed interstices of our world. Recognition of negative space broadens our world, forces us to be aware of an expansiveness we normally miss. Albert

Einstein taught us that space and time are part of the same continuum; therefore, honoring negative space can mean not only looking beyond the physical lumps scattered throughout our environment, but also becoming conscious of the time between activities, the “down” time, the unimportant time lacing together important events. There is negative space in every day, within every event, the recognition of which can make our lives sweeter, calmer, and more productive. If the negative space Brad taught us about is “not object,” the form of negative space I am introducing is “not task.”

In philosophy we refer to the *tabula rasa*, the “blank slate.” Each day is like that, a blank slate containing countless opportunities, until we start cluttering it, often from the moment we open our eyes in the morning, with a list of must-do’s. In the old *Star Trek* series, the characters would go to the transporter room to be beamed down to a planet. As they stepped onto the transporter circle and their atoms were copied to be replicated in some distant place, there was a moment when they entered the sweet spot of infinite possibility: their atoms were dissolved and it was possible that they could reassemble on the planet as something completely other than the human they had been. They might reassemble as a furry tribble, or as He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named from Harry Potter. In that split second when they disappeared from the starship *Enterprise* and before they reassembled somewhere else in the universe, in that pause, negative space offered the world.

It is not necessarily in the activities so meticulously planned and executed, around which we organize our days, that the most important things happen. So much happens in the cracks in our lives, much that we may not even notice. I was attending a retreat a few years ago and was walking on a path through the woods. Although it was a beautiful sunny day, I was not attending to the peaceful landscape because I was having what Judith Viorst describes as a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. I was miserable. As I was dragging along, a woman, a stranger, was walking the path from the other direction. As we passed she looked up and smiled at me—the sweetest, kindest smile I have ever encountered. That one look completely changed my day. My mood lifted immediately, and I felt a surge of happiness that I can still remember years later. It was a moment from the empty, unplanned space in our lives, and it affected me deeply.

Although we dash through life feeling harried, overwhelmed, and crushed by obligations, there actually is a lot of negative space in our lives. We simply don’t notice it. We squander negative space by obsessing our way through it, packing it with anxiety or wasting it with regrets. But we do not honor it, or relish it, or “be” with it, the negative space sprinkled within our lives, representing a pause which we can bring out of the shadows. When we consider this pause, four opportunities for experiencing negative space come to mind.



1. The pause with intention. When the conductor raises his baton there is a collective inhalation as the audience and the musicians ready themselves for the glorious first note. Intentions are crucial; they are our ramp to the tangible. How do we enter our activities? How do we begin our classes? How do we open a meeting? Rushing in with papers sliding from our arms, mentally rehearsing the main points to be discussed? Do we enter meetings rehashing the last argument with our partner or trying to figure out when to schedule the next playdate for our children? We have heard of the stillness before the towering tsunami wave, how the ocean draws back and there is a frozen moment when the tsunami energy and power coalesces and water several stories high comes crashing down on the shore. We, too, have an inner power which we can access if we learn to notice that space. How we enter an activity is important. How we begin is important. Moving from the negative space (the non-activity) into the positive space (the activity) should be a slow, seamless glide replete with the intention to welcome, to be kind, to honor what surfaces within the event. The stance on the diving board before the first move determines whether the dive will be a well-executed forward two-and-a-half pike or a belly flop. How often do we jump into the car, snap on the seatbelt, and pull out into traffic without taking an instant to feel the car seat, smell the interior of the car, or pay deference to the journey? Even if there is no conscious intention, simply pausing before the act, recognizing the quiet, the moment of infinite possibility, honors the negative space.
2. The pause between. The individual chapters in a book give us space to breathe, often heightening tension as they make us turn a blank page. Running from one event to another, moving from one activity to another in the classroom, we may not recognize that there is the opportunity for space between adrenaline surges. Our days look tight and dense, but there is still space—there is always space—for us to pause, to breathe, to turn within. Just take a moment to sit on the bench on the way to the meeting. Walk outside on the bathroom break. While the students are doing an assignment, instead of grading the last stack of papers, those fecund papers that spontaneously reproduce in your bookbag, savor the moment. Pause.

It's the space between the harp strings that allows them to vibrate and make their music. Musicians have pointed out the way that the rests, the quiet spaces within the music, enhance the musi-

cal quality of the notes. We can throw open our day by making way for space, taking time to walk during our lunch break, especially in nature, or closing our office door for a few moments to simply sit quietly or read something affirming, or just by looking out the window. It does not have to be a long pause; even a few moments can help you hit the reset button and move into a more relaxed place. Savor the pause between.

3. The pause with exhalation. At the end of the class, the meeting, the activity, we can take a moment to witness the ending. Be present for the conclusion. So often we are off planning the next event even as we are gathering the evaluation forms and stuffing our items into our briefcase. Being thankful for the meeting, or class, or activity honors our lives and helps to short-circuit the inevitable post-mortem of what went right and the stickier, harder to get rid of “things that went wrong.”

The *Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred text from India, uses the phrase “surrendering the fruit.” It refers to plowing the field, doing everything one can in order to get the best possible harvest, and then letting go. You surrender the results. You had no control over them anyway, and letting them go mentally creates space.

There is a story about two monks who were out walking and encountered a woman who was desperately trying to get across a stream. The monks had taken vows which precluded their interaction with women, but vows notwithstanding, one of the monks picked up the woman and carried her across the stream to the other side. He deposited her safely on the shore and the two monks continued on their way. A few miles later, the other monk could no longer contain his anger and began berating his brother monk for touching the woman. The first monk responded, “I set the woman down by the stream. You are still carrying her.” For the second monk, there was no exhalation, no pause. He was so wrapped up in his negative thoughts that he missed the completion of the act and the ensuing rejuvenating space. Value the pause at the close.

4. The most powerful is recognizing the underlying space throughout. Mary Rose O’Reilly talks about “resting in the stroke,” incorporating rest into each movement. Musicians who play massive pipe organs are moving hands and feet simultaneously, operating consciously on two separate tracks. We can also maintain our activities while being continuously nurtured by the quiet within. The space within the hollow body guitar gives it its sound. We have infinite

space within us, which we can tap at will. We can infuse all of our events with spaciousness, making them a latticework of negative and positive activity.

I once team-taught a class with a woman who was very bright, but became completely rattled in front of a room full of students. When it was her turn to teach she would fumble with her notes, drop books, and lose her place when she was speaking, all while her hands fluttered and her feet shuffled from side to side. She telegraphed anxiety, and the students would become restless while the rest of her team of teachers stood poised on the sidelines to help her or take over before the *Titanic* reached the bottom of the sea. The worst of it was that her discomfort made her irritable, and she would either snap at the students when they asked questions or else respond sarcastically. Outside of class she was a lovely person, and when students would come to her office and talk with her individually she was helpful and kind. In front of a group she simply was not able to tap into the quiet flow within. Like a syringe drips energy-giving glucose into your veins, remaining aware of the well of quiet within can keep a person grounded and at her best. It is so easy to live one's life always on the edge of irritation, suspicion, doubt, and insecurity: one can march into each class mentally calculating how many days are left in the semester or glare at students taking exams, constantly searching for the cheaters that *must* be there, or one can agonize through countless meetings, angry when someone asks a question close to the time set for the end. You can spend a lifetime in doubt about your abilities and always comparing yourself to someone else, or remain in the present moment, in contact with inexhaustible space. When feeling frantic, a person can consciously slow down her actions, matching movements with deep exhalations of breath. A person can widen her awareness of the environment, noticing color, texture, smell, and sights on the periphery of her vision. A person can consciously focus on her breath, visualizing it flowing from the soles of her feet straight up to the crown of her head and back down, or out to each of her extremities. Or stoking a warm blaze in her heart. These practices clear out the negative debris that blocks our connection to the space within. We are so full of hopes and fears and envy and doubt that we can barely push our heavy bodies across the earth. If we tap into the negative space all around and within us, we can fly.

## REFERENCES

- Easwaran, Eknath, trans. (1985). *The Bhagavad Gita*. Berkeley: The Mountain Center of Meditation.
- O'Reilly, Mary Rose. (1998). *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Boynton/Cook.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RENÉE A. HILL is a philosophy professor at Virginia State University. Although her area of specialty is political philosophy, as a long-time meditator she has become more and more interested in sharing contemplative practices with her students and colleagues. To that end, she has begun incorporating contemplative practices into her classes as well as exploring content which incorporates the cultivation of inner peace and the alleviation of suffering. She has developed courses on the philosophy of compassion, healing after genocide, and contemplative practices.

# Meditations on Contemplative Pedagogy as Sanctuary<sup>1</sup>

**Jackie Seidel**  
*University of Calgary*

---

*Composed as a collection of interrelated meditations, this paper contemplates what it might mean to invoke a word like “contemplative” in relation to pedagogy.*

*Keywords: contemplative pedagogy, sanctuary, kairos time*

---

1

Western educational institutions are characterized by the ways they operate (consciously or unconsciously) by the culturally inherited logic and rules of *chronos*—chronological time. Eco-feminist theologian Catherine Keller (1996) names this violent timeline an unwinding “death-line” (p. 137). It is the time of erasing the present in favor of a mythical future that never arrives (“progress”). It is the time of colonization, of the market, of extinction, of war, and of fragmentation. It separates humans from our own bodies, from one another, from other species, from the fragile and finite earth which sustains life. It enables and legitimates the continued perpetration of unspeakable ecological, economic, and cultural violence. In educational institutions chronological time is often individually experienced as the suffering of interminable rushing, competition, fear, and lonely individualism.

2

Meditating on the meaning of invoking the words *contemplate* or *contemplative* in relation to schools, curriculum, and pedagogy reveals a spacious opening in language that might offer us some healing time, space, and rest from this rushing, distracting, and violent timeline.

---

<sup>1</sup> For the seeds of this paper, I am grateful to my colleague and friend Dr. Sandra Wilde with whom I first explored the interpretation of contemplation as “temple” and “sanctuary” through many generative conversations and in conference presentations at the ACMHE 2010 conference in Amherst, MA, and at the CACS 2010 pre-conference in Montreal.

3

Etymologically, *contemplate* derives from Latin *contemplari*, meaning “to gaze attentively” (> Latin. *con*, “with” + *templum*, temple). A *temple* is defined as space marked out for “observation,” a “consecrated space,” a “sanctuary,” or a “sacred space” (ODEE, 1966, p. 908). Because they are not normally used in relation to the inherited institutions of secular, industrial society, words like *sanctuary* and *temple* have the potential to disrupt or deconstruct common images of school and pedagogy. To speak such words, then, in relation to pedagogy, curriculum, and schooling at all levels might summon forth a new kind of responsibility to this language.

4

What are pedagogical obligations to *these* images?

Contemplate.

Temple.

Sacred spaces.

Sanctuary.

5

What kind of space and time does pedagogy imagined as sanctuary open for us as teachers and learners? Pedagogy imagined as sanctuary might be characterized by the active and ethical creation of sacred space. Pedagogy imagined as sanctuary calls for the courageous resistance of ways of living, being together, and educating that engage in or promote social, ecological, cultural, and economic violence. Pedagogy imagined as sanctuary creates an active and mindful practice: awe and reverence for life itself. Pedagogy imagined as sanctuary enables us to recognize illusions and false promises, drawing our gaze away from the forces of shallowness and disembodiment and towards awareness of senses, existential experiences and meanings, and to what is actually before us: This world. This student. This life.

6

To imagine pedagogy, curriculum, or school as sanctuary invokes images, thoughts, or feelings of peace, sacredness, and non-violence.

## 7

To utter the word sanctuary invokes a sense of spaciousness of both place and time, the kind of place where one might become aware of breathing, of silence, of stillness, of the sensory and sensual body, of the bodies and being of others both human and non-human.

## 8

We wake up.

## 9

The sanctuary is a place and time of rest. The desire to move fast and rush around falls away. To create such *restful* spaces and times is necessary to focusing, to learning, to being well, and to doing good work in the world. It is a place of rest from the frenetic and meaningless activity and exhaustion of participation in the neo-liberal, globalized economy and all that has meant for education in our time when so much of life's energy is being consumed for more production and *in the name* of the future.

## 10

French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy (2003) called the 20<sup>th</sup> century the time of “expropriating from beings their conditions of existence” (p. 18). He describes the ways our strength, labor, bodies, senses, and even the space-time of our own singularity become objects of production. “Capital” and the “global market” only can endure and prosper by such massive expropriation and extermination. The result, he writes, is that we are “deported in advance from the here and now” (p. 19). A violence in the service of “progress” and of a future that is already known before it is lived. Educational institutions at all levels have and are participating in these processes. To invoke “contemplative,” *the temple*, in relation to schooling and pedagogy calls forth then a spiritual obligation to face, name, and resist the historical and contemporary political and economic forces that have created these institutions. This is the difficult, heavy, and ethical work of imagining and creating *other* presents and possible futures that remain free and not-yet-known.

11

To contemplate pedagogy as the time, space, and place of the temple or sanctuary implies then not the places of production, accumulation or expropriation, or of the accompanying waste, destruction, and excess with which we are so deeply familiar, but rather *the cultivation of an aesthetic of not too much and not too fast*. An aesthetic of conservation.

12

The sanctuary is not a place of competition or of getting ahead. Nor is it the kind of place that fills us with the desire to reform or fix it with fancy new programs and methods. Our desire might be to let it be. To be with it.

13

To pause.

14

Stepping purposefully and with intention, into the sanctuary, into the space for contemplation, for even a moment out of the turmoil and confusion of the rushing stream is sometimes enough to draw our gaze towards what matters.

15

To enter the sanctuary is not an escape away from the so-called “real” world; rather, this intentional action represents the possibility, so necessary in this time of unprecedented and unsustainable ecological strain on the planet, of sensing the deep and infinite interconnections with the rest of life, of our own entanglement in all this, of the co-arising of all life and its going back into the world. In recognizing the interconnectedness of life, awareness of others including the non-human others sharing this space grows. There is no desire to harm them. We are not alone. We understand that we share the same breath that has always been.



16

Chronic stress and feelings of threat give rise to fear and anxiety responses that might provoke more competing, rushing, protecting, colonizing. Sanctuary invokes images of safety, of a place where body, heart, and mind might be protected, a place where violence might not occur. This kind of safety is necessary for doing good pedagogical work in the world.

17

As a teacher educator, I visit schools often with student teachers. I witness the rushing and panic. The fear. A friend talks about sitting in a school hallway during her PhD research and observing people in the hallways. Her impression was that everyone was running and running. The thought that came into her mind was, "Where are they all running to?" In the sanctuary, there is no pre-determined destination. It is the space for observation and inquiry into the world, into our selves, into our relations. It is a space and time for awakening, over and over again, to the unfolding world around us and to our complex participation in it.

18

In the contemporary neo-liberal and ever more corporatized model of schooling, curriculum, and pedagogy at all levels, the destination is the future. This is not an indeterminate or open future that has yet to unfold; rather, it is the future that is known and colonized in advance. It is the future of competition for few resources, the future of competing to be the winner, to be on top, to be the best, to be excellent.

19

Yet, it might be in our time that it is *the future* that requires sanctuary. We know that many challenges face us and our descendants and the non-human life that share our and their space. It requires sanctuary from us and our activities, from our befouling and spoiling, from our colonizing it in advance. It requires that we leave it, and ourselves, and *all the others* some space and time to unfold.

20

Such unfolding requires a different timing. The sanctuary is characterized by *kairos* rather than *chronos*. *Chronos* is clock time, linear time, and necessary for both colonization and for capitalism to do their work.

21

Madeleine L'Engle (2001) calls *kairos* "real time" and "that time which breaks through *chronos* with a shock of joy" (p. 45). *Kairos* might be imagined as the time of love and compassion, of wonder, of open potential and unknown futures, and of yet unwritten rhythms and possibilities for all life on earth. *Kairos* is a qualitative and deconstructive timing which interrupts the line of *chronos* when we meditate, when we play unselfconsciously, and when we work creatively. It is an existential and ontological timing that might be consciously practiced in our pedagogy in the hopes of untangling ourselves from the strangling timeline of *chronos*. It is the time that faces the present with courage, compassion, and a peaceful heart and mind.

22

This is the time of the sanctuary.

23

Come in.

## REFERENCES

- Keller, C. (1996). *Apocalypse now and then: A feminist guide to the end of the world*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- L'Engle, M. (2001). *Madeleine L'Engle {Herself}: Reflections on a writing life*. (compiled by C.F. Chan). Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books.
- Nancy, J-L. (2003). *A finite thinking*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- ODEE (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*). (1966). New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

JACKIE SEIDEL is an assistant professor in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, Canada. Her teaching, research and scholarship focus on curriculum studies, contemplative pedagogy, ecopedagogy, and literacy education. Her forthcoming co-authored book with David Jardine is *Ecological Pedagogy, Buddhist Pedagogy, Hermeneutic Pedagogy: Experiments in a Curriculum for Miracles* (Peter Lang, 2014).