

I *This chapter introduces contemplative practices, studies, and pedagogy and argues in support of a contemplative pedagogy.*

The Case for a Contemplative Philosophy of Education

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This article introduces contemplative practices; explains how contemplative practices, studies, and pedagogy differ; analyzes the mechanics of some key contemplative practices; reviews the research on contemplative practices and learning; and ultimately argues in support of this new direction in pedagogy.

History of Contemplative Practices, Studies, and Pedagogy

To understand the historical context of contemplative pedagogy, it may be useful to see it as an inclusive outgrowth of earlier philosophies valuing process over content and depth over coverage, such as social-emotional learning, writing across the curriculum, and critical thinking. As opposed to the so-called banking model, whereby learning consists of “information deposits,” these pedagogies share a fundamental valuing of what is already in the student, to be drawn out through slow, reflective attention. Whereas these other approaches focus on communication, writing, or reasoning, this approach focuses on meditative reflection, which may accompany any of the other activities. Since it is more inclusive, any arguments in support of these pedagogies accrue to contemplative pedagogy.

Meditation is ancient. Although it is universal in human spiritual history, appearing in one form or another among Native Americans and Native Australians as well as Jews, Christians, and Muslims, meditation has been

perfected in Asian philosophy, particularly Indian, Buddhist, and Taoist. Meditative practices constitute the bulk of not only the methodology of these Asian philosophies but also their content, with few exceptions such as Confucianism. Thus, the Asian academy has a vast history of contemplative practices, studies, and pedagogies, and the philosophies in which they are embedded are continuous from the Classical era to the present. Until recently there has been little contemplative pedagogy within the Western academy outside Classical-era schools dominated by Stoicism and related philosophies and sectors of higher learning that intersect with Abrahamic monastic institutions. Apart from some exceptional places such as Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado (a Buddhist university, only recently fully accredited) and the Integral Institute in Louisville, Colorado (which revolves around the theories of its founder Ken Wilbur, author of *Integral Theory*), contemplative pedagogy remained largely outside mainstream higher education in the United States prior to about 2000, when academic interest began to shift coincident with a variety of academy-extrinsic contributory phenomena.

A vast corpus of scientific and medical research on the health-promoting, stress-reducing, and other positive effects of meditation and related mind-body disciplines like yoga has been consistently developing over the past half-century. Whereas interest in meditation, yoga, and the like entered and mostly exited our collective consciousness with the 1960s, the wider culture has now embraced these much more thoroughly. Just one trend shows this clearly: *Yoga Journal's* "2008 Yoga in America" study reports that Americans spend \$5.7 billion annually on yoga-related products (classes, equipment, clothing, vacations, DVDs, videos, and literature), an 87% increase over the previous study that was done in 2004 (March 2008, p. 93).

In the academy, numerous books and journal articles on contemplative pedagogy have been published (as a glance at the lists of chapter references in this volume reveals), contemplative pedagogy programs have been implemented at such venerated institutions as Brown University and the University of Michigan, and contemplative pedagogy training seminars have been offered at competitive colleges such as Smith College. In the past decade, academics from all disciplines have begun to incorporate contemplative practices into the classroom (Bush, 2006). Perhaps the most significant academic catalyst is the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, which, in collaboration with the Fetzer Institute and the American Council of Learned Societies, began granting contemplative practice fellowships in 1996 to support contemplative pedagogy faculty development. To date, the center has granted over a hundred such fellowships, each sparking a contemplative course or program, and it has spawned the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education, which in 2009, its first year, had over three hundred faculty members. More important for our purposes, researchers are validating the effects of contemplative practices on learning (Shapiro, Brown, and Astin, 2009).

Community College Context

The Garrison report, *Contemplation and Education* (Garrison Institute, 2005), examines a variety of K–12 contemplative pedagogy programs. The positive results of this research are particularly relevant because community college students are mostly at high school or lower developmental levels. That our students are multiply unprepared is our greatest challenge. The weakening of public K–12 education, No Child Left Behind, and the erosion of other social and cultural institutions, replaced by ubiquitous text messaging and other digital media championing misogyny, consumerism, egoism, cynicism, and nihilism, all conspire to produce a multiply challenged, if not traumatized, student body with a variety of powerful needs in a failing service economy. Classrooms populated by such alienated, fragmented, multiply challenged students demand an emphasis on slower, deeper, and more reflective and transparent learning designed to capture interest and attention, rekindle motivation, and develop students' self-regulative skills. Contemplative practices are just the right choice.

Consider just one contemplative practice: mindfulness. Mindfulness is the meditative act of paying close, nonjudgmental attention to the features of present-moment experience such as breath, bodily sensation, and thought. It is the antidote to mindlessness—the characteristic of scattered attention and the main problem for most community college students. No matter what the focal point is, focusing the mind collects disbursed mental energy and directs it. As the research reviewed in this chapter will show, the meditative mind cultivates a variety of traits essential to flourishing in community college, including self-regulation, intrinsic curiosity, attentiveness, focus, equanimity, responsiveness, and centeredness.

Differentiating Contemplative Practices, Studies, and Pedagogy

Contemplative practices are exercises in meditative reflection. The field of contemplative studies examines the history, methodology, and theory of contemplative practices. And contemplative pedagogy is the philosophy of education that espouses the academic use of contemplative practices.

Contemplative Practices. Contemplative practices are metacognitive exercises in which attention is focused on any element of conscious experience. Examples include mindfulness, gazing at an object, studying a single sound, contemplating a word, beholding an image, and freewriting (writing one's stream of consciousness). They are used for stress reduction, self-examination, self-development, creativity, and other similar purposes.

Mindfulness is an exemplar in the scientific and medical research literature because it is the form of meditation most studied since shown effective in initial studies (Shapiro, Brown, and Astin, 2009). One-pointedness goes hand-in-hand with mindfulness and involves focusing attention on

one point (often the breath, but any element of experience may serve as its target). Some element of one-pointedness is found in almost all forms of meditation (Goleman, 1988). To grasp its mechanics, consider candle gazing. The technique is to gaze softly at the center of the flame, focus one's visual attention there, and gently refocus there whenever attention wanders. The same technique applies to any target; the practice of repeatedly reorienting a wandering mind trains attention, generates concentration, and increasingly strengthens the ability to concentrate (Rose, 2009–2010).

William James (1918) said that an education that would improve the ability to focus attention *at will* would be ideal. While almost every meditation exercise involves some element of focusing attention, one-pointedness consists in precisely this discipline. Thus, one-pointedness training constitutes ideal education. This is an Archimedean point: since an element of one-pointedness is present in almost every form of meditation, this justification extends to all of them.

One-pointedness and mindfulness practices overlap and enhance each other. Their differences are subtle but may be clarified by comparing the breath flowing in and out to a saw cutting a log. If one focuses on the exact point at which the saw's teeth contact the log, this is analogous to a narrow form of one-pointedness of the breath where it enters and exits the nostrils, whereas mindfulness is paying attention to all the details present at that narrow focal point: to each saw-tooth cutting the log, its sound, vibration, and scent, and likewise to each feature of breathing (Rose, 2009–2010). One-pointedness involves controlling the target scope of attention and training it to one narrow range, such as the zoom lens of a camera, whereas mindfulness is the clear, focused, observing attention within that narrow target scope. By holding the aim and scope of attention on one point, one is better able to be mindful of and examine all that is going on at that point, and by being mindful of all that is going on at one point, one is better able to hold attention on that one point. Practicing either one-pointedness or mindfulness therefore contributes some skill development to the other.

These are representative meditation techniques, and there are many others, but most are variations on these. There are many other kinds of contemplative exercises such as relaxation techniques, visualizations, and writing exercises. A relaxation exercise might involve progressive, systematic tensing and releasing of muscles throughout the body. Visualization might involve imagining what it is like to be the character one is about to role-play, a calm sea, or any other image, entity, process, or state that one wants to simulate. In freewriting, thoughts are written down spontaneously and without editing, thereby loosening the creative floodgates. All of these techniques involve reframing the parameters of conscious experience in some way that fosters brainstorming, going "meta" (metacognitive) by reflecting on the mental process involved while engaged in the activity and

expanding one's reference. They are also intrinsically interesting, curiosity-invoking, engaging, and philosophically fun experiences. Community college students overwhelmingly perceive these techniques as refreshing, empowering, and transformative.

Contemplative Pedagogies. Contemplative pedagogies are philosophies of education that promote the use of contemplative practices as valid modes not only of teaching and learning but of knowledge construction and inquiry. Some concrete examples may help illustrate what is meant by contemplative pedagogy. In my discipline, philosophy, many arguments and thought experiments lend themselves to experiential amplification by way of contemplation. For instance, students who are imagining being a prisoner in Plato's cave, living in a *Matrix*-like illusion, or engaging in some philosophical role reversal find that it is enriching to engage such speculations more experientially by envisioning them from within a meditative state.

While topics in philosophy lend themselves to a meditative spin, subjects such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics, accounting, finance, and business management might not so easily. Nevertheless, content-driven contemplative exercises can be generated even in physics, say, about what happens near the speed of light, with time travel, frames of reference, space-time, or the multiverse hypothesis. Michelle Francl, a chemist at Bryn Mawr College, recently presented a Web seminar on contemplative practices in the science classroom (Francl, 2009), and Daniel Barbezat (2009), an economist at Amherst College, has students practice a loving-kindness meditation to test for changes in their self-interest-revealing responses on standard economic surveys and using the (positive) results to spark reflection on utilitarian economic assumptions. Surely any awareness exercise can help students strengthen attention, any breathing exercise can help them de-stress before an exam, and any reflective writing exercise can help them "go meta" regarding their own learning process, regardless of the discipline. These are all valid reasons to consider adopting a contemplative pedagogy.

In her introductory art survey course, Joanna Ziegler typically displays only one or a few slides during a semester, though her peers typically show hundreds (Wadham, 2009). As the class gazes at the same piece for weeks on end, she asks her students repeatedly to describe what they see, as opposed to what they think it means or what they know about the context in which it was created. She disciplines them in the art of differentiating between observational and interpretive elements and postpones examination of interpretive elements and a more integrated analysis to later in the semester. Ziegler claims that this approach develops the basic methodological skills of the seasoned art critic. She acknowledges that the traditionally taught student gains greater informational volume but concludes that the methodological skills are more valuable, empowering, and lasting. B. F. Skinner once said that education is what remains after one has forgotten

what one has learned. Here, what methodological skill remains once the details of both kinds of learning have been forgotten is clearly more valuable.

Of course, this invokes debates over traditional depth versus coverage and process versus product, and although students need both (Bransford, 1999), what we clearly have at the community college level is a case of triage in which depth and skill matter more. Intuitively, this pedagogy of methodological skills development cultivates more of an increasingly functional, user-friendly epistemic framework within which to process and construct new knowledge than does the pedagogy of information acquisition, and the development of such skills is more empowering for community college students. The same holds in most areas of knowledge in which an analogue of the meta-level analysis depicted in that single-slide art class is achieved.

Ziegler's technique involves a visual form of mindfulness meditation called *beholding* (Dustin and Ziegler, 2005). Any assignment in any discipline that creates an analogue of beholding of the subject matter ought to yield similar results, even if only for a few minutes, in addition to the time spent discursively engaging the same subject matter. Thus, *lectio divina*, a form of text-based meditation from the monastic tradition that involves reflective dwelling on a short passage, is a textual analogue of visual beholding, so it ought to engender similar results. Beholding a short film clip, equation, argument, assumption, or diagram might support a meta-analysis in which epistemic or ontological, subjective or objective, intrinsic or extrinsic, and other cognitive distinctions (analogous to Ziegler's) are driven home at the level of skill. Most of us have heard of the proverbial professor who all semester basically beholds a single word, concept, assumption, sentence, dilemma, or other intellectual curiosity and how rich that experience was.

Similarly, football players practice mindfulness, visualization, or mantra (repeating a word or phrase over and over) to "get into the zone" or anticipate the challenge before engaging in it (Forbes, 2004), as do chess masters, actors, martial artists, and other professionals (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). The teaching of these and related activities by zoning in before engaging in them may all be enhanced by engaging in contemplative exercises, so any college course may benefit from such an opening meditation.

Contemplative Studies. Contemplative studies involve the pursuit of scholarly research about the traditions, epistemology, mechanics, and scientific effectiveness of contemplative practices. Examples include contemplative neuroscience (Begley, 2007) and contemplative historical research, which examines the role of contemplative practices within ancient wisdom traditions (Andressen and Foreman, 2000) or comparatively (Hadot, 1995; Goleman, 1988). Since the focus of this volume is contemplative pedagogy, we will refer only to that segment of

contemplative studies that involves research on the relationship between contemplative practices and learning.

Arguments

A calm, clear, focused mind is ideal for both faculty and students. Such a mind is intrinsically philosophical—not in the dialectical or Socratic sense familiar in the West, but in the sense involved with contacting the deeper ground of being within one's own experience, or what may be called the contemplative mood. Putting students in touch with a philosophically vital but nondiscursive dimension of being is intuitively interesting and worthwhile.

Classes that meditate together and engage in other contemplative exercises create safe spaces for opening up that are normally unavailable to the highly stressed, multiply challenged, and generally alienated community college student. Most faculty resistant to or uninterested in innovative pedagogy assume that prepared and motivated students will learn regardless of which pedagogical style an instructor employs and that the unprepared and unmotivated will not learn no matter what pedagogy modulates their educational experience. All indicators seem to suggest, however, that contemplative pedagogies make a real difference, as we shall see shortly.

Professors who set aside time for slow, reflective, contemplative inquiry create spaces for safe, creative exploration unavailable under the informational model. They demonstrate a commitment to depth over coverage, sending an implicit but powerful message to students who have been rushed through mountains of information and whose voices have been neglected for twelve or more years: that they matter. The environmental field and group dynamics that these factors make possible help to sustain not only student-centered learning but motivated teaching. The professor who meditates with students is supporting not only her students but herself against teacher burnout and other ills that threaten motivation on a daily basis.

Objections. Robert Nozick (1981) objects to the validity of the meditative state. Absent belief in a supramundane reality of the sort posited by the Hindu or Buddhist, the meditative mind is just the brain on idle, so to speak. Applying this to the classroom, one could argue that community college students' brains are already idling too much. Gilbert Ryle (1949) also raised an objection to the notion of introspection: the idea that one can passively observe one's mind without interfering with it is contradictory, for one cannot passively observe oneself in a state of rage—either the rage has to go or the passive observation. Applying this to the classroom, one could argue that the notions of mindfulness and the like are incoherent, the last thing we would want to foist on our students.

Replies. The majority of the by-now-well-known benefits of meditation are empirically verified independent of supramundane belief systems,

and students' minds are better described as suffering from something the opposite of idling, akin to attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. Rather than idling quietly, ready to learn, they are scattered all over the place and have extremely short attention spans. Attention training is precisely what they need, James would claim, to be able to enter class calm and clear-minded (idling), ready to learn. Contemplative practices provide that training. It is precisely because the meditative element in the mind interferes with the otherwise-scattered mental state that meditation works. Thus, by bringing students into a calm, clear, meditative state, we are able to reduce agitation, confusion, disinterest, and distraction.

Research. Numerous scientific studies attest to the interest- and attention-enhancing (Lau and others, 2006; Lutz and others, 2008a), stress-reducing (Benson and Stark, 1997), and related cognitive and affective properties of meditation practices (Davidson and others, 2003); that these practices have a positive impact on high school students (Benson and others, 1994), college students (Deckro and others, 2002), and on learning in general (Bransford, 1999); and that they increase neuroplasticity and brain power (Begley, 2007). In addition to the Garrison report on K-12 contemplative pedagogy (2005), a more recent comprehensive review of research on the effects of meditation on learning reports an impressive and pedagogically persuasive variety of positive results regarding cognitive and academic performance measures and general functioning (Shapiro, Brown, and Astin, 2009). This research collectively shows that mindfulness improves the ability to maintain preparedness, orient attention, process information quickly and accurately, handle stress, regulate emotional reactions, and cultivate positive psychological states; that one-pointedness practice improves academic achievement; and that meditation enhances creativity, social skills, and empathetic responses. These findings clearly justify a shift toward contemplative pedagogies.

Regarding the ability to maintain preparedness, for instance, Kasulis (1985) summarizes research on Zen practitioners, indicating their ceaseless responsiveness to repeated stimuli that the ordinary mind normally screens off. Clearly the contemplative mind is anything but dull while idling; it is instead alive to the subtlest nuances of even repetitive experience, a clear virtue for any student. In terms of the relationship between orienting attention and regulating emotion, studies conducted using the Toronto Mindfulness Scale (Lau and others, 2006) show that mindfulness engenders intrinsic interest, heightened attention, and detachment—what Gilbert Ryle thought incompatible with rage. Intrinsically interested, highly attentive, emotionally centered students are ideal students in any college course; they are in great demand in community colleges, where more nontraditional students face greater challenges than traditional ones, such as the pressures of jobs and children.

Studies on the brains of long-term loving kindness meditation practitioners reveal more neural matter and syntactic activity in the empathy

centers of the brain attention (Lutz and others, 2008b), and studies on the brains of long-term mindfulness and one-pointedness practitioners reveal similar results regarding the neural circuitry of attention (Lutz and others, 2008a). These results have clear positive implications for both the social-emotional and cognitive dimensions of learning. The proverbial virtues of meditation are not “all in the mind,” but also “all in the brain.” Contemplative neuroscience is revealing a host of learning-related neuroplasticities connected with meditative practices (Begley, 2007).

Research on learning reveals that metacognitive activities—activities that loop reflectively back on themselves, such as thinking about thoughts or wanting to have other wants—are essential to the sort of self-regulation that supports ideal learning (Bransford, 1999). Contemplative practices are metacognitive attention-training exercises. It follows logically, and cannot be overemphasized, that research on learning establishes that since meditation is metacognitive training, it supports ideal learning, if not education *par excellence*, given James’s argument for attention training and the fact that meditation is the science of metacognitive attention-training *par excellence*. Teaching students this skill is akin to teaching the poor how to farm instead of just feeding them.

Finally, some in-class research from my own campus is revealing. Two colleagues running informal experiments in their physics and sociology courses, exposing only one of two otherwise equal course sections to a simple two-minute breath meditation exercise before an exam, claim that students exposed to the meditation before exams scored statistically significantly higher than those in the control groups, indicating a relationship between the centering effects of the practice and cognitive performance. Given that the majority of community college students have a purely instrumental attitude toward learning and a nonphilosophical attitude of epistemic confidence in their own beliefs, effectuating a shift in their attitudes in these two categories constitutes two core teaching and learning objectives in my own philosophy classes. Research on the effects of meditation on my own students shows greater shifts in philosophical attitudes in classes with greater exposure to meditation. One is a shift from an instrumental attitude toward education to one of intrinsic interest; another is a shift from certainty to uncertainty. It is another Archimedean point that my core teaching and learning objectives are better served by meditating with my students than they are solely by my attempts to engage with my students in Socratic dialogue.

Conclusion

The selection of a pedagogical philosophy is and ought to be a matter of individual instructor choice. This chapter has presented the major arguments in support of making that choice. Chapter Two by Maria Lichtmann extends that argument, and subsequent chapters amplify the rationale and

applicability of contemplative pedagogy in various disciplines and programs. I end this chapter with an observation from my favorite meditation teacher, Ram Dass, who once said that a key benefit of his lifetime practice of meditation may be seen by its absence during those times he temporarily lost the practice. He said he found himself at those times walking around with a lot of what he referred to as undigested experiences. Our students come to us with twelve or more years of undigested information and about eighteen years of undigested consumerist media programming, if not undigested traumas. They need time to digest and reflect on what they know, what they do not know, and what they need to know. So do most of the rest of us.

Contemplative pedagogy need not involve esoteric practices. Almost any classroom exercise may be transformed into a contemplative one simply by treating it the way Ziegler treats a slide in her art classes: by slowing down the activity long enough to behold—to facilitate deep attention to and intimate familiarity with—the object of study, whether it is a slide, textual passage, equation, claim, or argument. Beginning any class with a simple exercise in mindfulness or pointedness, focused on anything, promises to help sustain an attitude, in both students and faculty, of beholding throughout what follows.

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