Contemplative Pedagogy in the Classroom: Engaging Students’ Self-Awareness to Enhance Learning

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Contemplative Pedagogy in the Classroom:
Engaging Students' Self-Awareness to Enhance Learning
Michele L. McGrady, Western Michigan University
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Abstract
Contemplative pedagogy offers unique opportunities for students to deepen their understanding and focus through introspection, reflection, and stillness. Contemplative practices, such as meditative exercises, movement, and writing allow students to understand the nature of their minds and the learning process. Through the use of contemplative practices, students experience increased attention, connection, creativity, as well as a deeper understanding of course material. Although critics may question the appropriateness of these practices in the classroom, contemplative pedagogy has the ability to positively impact students' learning. This presentation invites participants to explore contemplative pedagogy and discuss ways to integrate practices into learning activities.

Contemplative Pedagogy & Practices: Key Ideas
- Student-centered approach
- Offers an opportunity to find meaning in learning
- Assists in students finding themselves in the material
- Fosters a contemplative mind: open, alert, attentive, calm, curious, receptive
- Focus of the practices is on student introspection & cultivation of awareness but also facilitating connection with others.
- Regular use of contemplative practices enhances students' learning by helping to teach them focused attention and inner listening.
- Faculty preparedness is essential!

Examples of Contemplative Practices
- Below you will find some examples of contemplative practices. This visual is not an exhaustive list of practices.
- Many of the practices listed are highly adaptable for the classroom.
- With regular use of contemplative practices, students discover their own internal reactions without having to adopt any ideology or specific belief.

Customizing the template color schemes
For those who wish to further personalize their poster presentation, we have included a number of printer-tested alternative color schemes for this poster template.

Implementation in the Classroom
- Can be applied to any discipline
- Explain the specific goals of the exercise
- Helps reduce the "out there" perspective
- Reduces student anxiety
- Purpose/mission of exercise can be explained before or after
- Allow students time to process and "come back" to the classroom

Why should you use these practices in the classroom?
- Increases focused attention
- Allows students to be at the center of their learning
- Various meditation practices (i.e. mindfulness, loving kindness or metta practices) have been shown to:
  - Increase concentration and attention
  - Increase mental health and psychological well-being
  - Increased connection
  - Deepened understanding of the course material
  - Increased creativity & insight
- Enhances connection between students as well as students to professor

Challenges to Contemplative Pedagogy
- Excessive optimism
- Not intended to replace other effective teaching strategies but to enhance instruction
- Faculty role-walking the walk
- Establishing context; personal practices
- Practices need to be framed to foster inclusion
- How much context to include?
- More research needed to identify how and why practices enhance learning outcomes

Take Home Message & What is next?
Take home message 1: The best of what contemplative pedagogy offers is an opportunity for students’ to learn about the nature and habits of their minds and how these relationships impact their connections to self, others, and the community.
Take home message 2: These practices are highly adaptable and increase students’ abilities to connect with the course material, themselves and each other.
Take home message 3: Faculty need to be prepared to facilitate practices. This is easier when faculty have engaged in some type of regular contemplative practice(s).
Take home message 4: There are numerous resources that can assist faculty who would like to learn more and/or deepen their understanding. See reference list below for suggestions.

What is next? Data collection (mixed methods approach) is beginning fall semester in one undergraduate course. After this pilot study is complete, additional data collection will occur.

Select References

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