A New Path: 
Mindfully Building 
Compassionate Communities in STEM 

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Show up.
Pay attention to what has heart and meaning.
Speak your truth without blame or judgment.
Be open to, not attached to, the outcome.
What is Community?
What is Mindfulness?
What is Mindfulness?

“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

--Jon Kabat-Zinn
What Does Mindfulness Do?

Empirically Supported Benefits of Mindfulness

• Reduces rumination
• Reduces stress
• Boosts working memory
• Decreases emotional reactivity
• Increases cognitive flexibility
• Improves relationship satisfaction

What Does Mindfulness Do?

Other benefits

- Increases immune functions
- Improves well being
- Increases information processing speeds
- Decreases in task effort and having thoughts that are unrelated to the task at hand
- Enhances self-insight

Mindfulness in the Classroom

The Six Design Principles

1. Supports and develops attention and emotional balance

1. Deepens students’ understanding of texts, theories, natural phenomena, the arts, other cultures
Mindfulness in the Classroom

3. Cultivates empathy and compassion

4. Supports creativity and insight

5. Sustains the engagement with complexity and contradiction leading to inquiry into what means the most to us

3. Personally and socially transformative
What is Contemplative Pedagogy?

Contemplative Pedagogy is the integration of meditative practices into higher education, while facilitating the achievement of traditional educational goals. It fosters improved cognitive and academic performance aiding in the development of the whole person, increasing capacities such as creativity, empathy, compassion, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness.
The Fear Factor

Supporting and developing attention and emotional balance
Fear

“We cannot see the fear in our students until we can see the fear in ourselves. When we deny our own condition, we resist seeing anything in others that might remind us of who, and how, we really are.”

• Parker Palmer
Antidotes to Fear
Mindfulness Preparation

• Practice and Patience

• On the Road to Compassion: Developing Empathy

• Collaboration/Community: Lessons of Potential and Gratitude
Mindfulness Prep #1
Practice and Patience
Practice and Patience

Ever tried?
Ever failed?
No matter.
Try again.
Fail again.
Fail better.

Samuel Beckett
Mindful Practices

- Dancing
- Yoga
- Tai Chi
- Walk in nature
- Mindful walking
- Your morning jog
- Your morning shower
- A conversation
- Journaling
- Prayer
- Watching a sunset
- Play
The Tree of Contemplative Practices

- Pilgrimage to areas where social justice issues are highlighted
- Vigils and marches
- Bearing witness
- Work and volunteering
- Council circle
- Dialog
- Deep listening
- Storytelling
- Labyrinth walking
- Walking meditation
- Yoga
- Qigong
- Aikido
- T'ai chi ch'uan
- Establishing a sacred/personal space
- Retreats
- Ceremonies and rituals based in spiritual or cultural traditions
- Meditation
- Quiet ing the mind
- Silence
- Centering
- Lectio divina
- Loving-kindness meditation
- Music and singing
- Journaling
- Improvisation
- Contemplative arts
- Visualization

communion & connection awareness

creative relational movement generative stillness ritual/cyclical

activist

The Tree of Contemplative Practices

www.contemplativemind.org
Mindful Practices

- Morning or evening gratitude practice
- Breath awareness
- Body scan
- Mindful eating (a meal, a piece of fruit, a snack, a warm beverage)
- Focused looking at a stone (or shell or flower)
- Beholding artwork
- Washing the dishes (or any mundane activity that you can mindfulness to)
- An email—compose, wait and breathe, re-read, send (maybe)
- Meditation (many forms)
- MBSR course (mindfulness based stress reduction)
- MBCT course (mindfulness based cognitive therapy)
- Daily Cues
  - Mindful Minute
Practice
Mindfulness Prep #2: Developing Empathy

Cultivating empathy and compassion
Empathy is being present, it is not being in agreement

Peggy Smith, Open Communication, http://opencommunication.org
Developing Empathy

When empathizing, we speak only in order to:

• Support ourselves in staying present (attention and focus)

• Support the speaker in connecting with their feelings and needs

Peggy Smith, Open Communication, http://opencommunication.org
Hearing to Speech

“What does it mean to listen to a voice before it is spoken? It means making space for the other, being aware of the other, paying attention to the other, honoring the other. It means not rushing to fill our silences with fearful speech of our own and not trying to coerce [someone] into saying the things that we want to hear. It means entering empathically into the [other’s] world so that he or she perceives you as someone who has the promise of being able to hear another person’s truth.”
Developing Empathy

Three levels of listening

• Intellectual understanding

• Sympathy - feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune; understanding between people; common feeling relating harmoniously to something else

• Empathy/Presence

Peggy Smith, Open Communication, http://opencommunication.org
Mindfulness Prep #3
Potential and Gratitude
As educators/individuals, we model human behavior. We bring the essence of this to students/administrators and provide human access to what connects us all. The more we can model mindfulness in our events and speech, there will be less “I have no access that.” It is at this point that we truly engage with others in a form (mindfulness) that has the greatest amount of access.
“Developing careful discursive, analytical thought is one of the hallmarks of a good education. However, creative, synthetic thinking requires more than this; it requires a holistic engagement and attention that is especially fostered by the student finding himself or herself in the material.”

Daniel Barbezat
Mindful Prep #3: Potential and Gratitude

“No matter how radically we conceive our role in teaching, the one aspect of students’ learning for which they are unambiguously sovereign is the awareness of their own thoughts, beliefs, and reactions to the material covered in the course. In addition, students need support in discerning what is most meaningful to them – both their direction overall and their moral compass. Without opportunities to inquire deeply, all they can do is proceed along paths already laid down for them.”

Daniel Barbezat
Practice
Threshold Practice
Aspects of Identity:
Who are We? Who are Our Students?

- Ideas
- Values
- Behaviors
- Feelings

self-concept

self-esteem

self-image

self-love
Deeper Conversations: Being culturally responsive

Being culturally responsive takes cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students (observing/being present/bearing witness) to make learning more appropriate and effective for students (setting intentions/empathy/recognition), plus it teaches to and through the strengths of the student (potential/gratitude).
Deeper Conversations: Us vs. Them

• **Us:** Ego/Fear of “knowing what is important’
  **Them:** Ego/Fear of “not knowing much of anything”

• **Us:** Ego/Fear of “this is the right way”
  **Them:** Ego/Fear of “where I’m from, this is how I do it”

• **Us:** Ego/Fear of how I perceive you
  **Them:** Ego/Fear of how you perceive me

• **Us:** Ego/Fear of “why don’t you know this?”
  **Them:** Ego/Fear of “why didn’t I learn this before?”

• **Us:** Ego/Fear of “they just aren’t college-ready”
  **Them:** Ego/Fear of “I’ve already blown it”
Deeper Conversations

– Validate

– Multidimensional

– Empower

– Transform
Deeper Conversations: Reframing Deficit

• Maintaining academic success despite home/family chaos – *mindfulness (patience)*

• Engaging in practices that create excitement about learning – *intention (practice)*

• Despite prior negative experiences, recognizing that education is a priority – *developing empathy*

• Seeing beyond present conditions towards the future – *potential/gratitude*
Deeper Conversations

• Through **contemplative inquiry**, we are guiding students towards reaching deep understanding and insights in order to tackle problems. This is done if we, as faculty, are open to curiosity and new thoughts from students that lead to more inquiry and open awareness. This can only occur through our own personal practices.
Bibliography


Links

Center for Contemplative Mind in Society/Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education
http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/acmhe

Selected Works of Shaun R. Harper, Ph.D.
Dr. Harper is a Professor in the Graduate School of Education, Africana Studies, and Gender Studies and founder and Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education.
https://works.bepress.com/sharper/

https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/succeeding-city-20130930.pdf
Parable of the Trapeze

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWvV5N4hOGc
Mind Full, or Mindful?
“To ‘pay attention to your distractions,’ is suggesting that the flicker of the mind, the distraction of our consciousness, are potential and potent sources of insight.”

• Louise Steinman – *The Knowing Body*
“My hope and wish is that one day, formal education will pay attention to what I call the education of the heart.”

H.H. Dalai Lama