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THE LARGEST HORSE IN THE RACE: USING MINDFULNESS TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE STUDENT-CENTERED CLASSROOM/LIBRARY SESSION

KRISTEN MASTEL AND AMY RIEGELMAN

INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness has become a popular concept in the United States. We have seen corporate America adopt meditation and mindfulness practices to reduce stress and increase productivity, emotional wellbeing, and job satisfaction in such places as Google, Salesforce, and Goldman Sachs. Meditation is almost a \$1 billion industry (Wieczner, 2016). Is it just a fad or hype?

First and foremost, mindfulness is about the present moment. Don't we want students' attention in the classroom? Can we help them in this age of multitasking focus on the present moment and learn to observe their thoughts, feelings, and emotions to engage with academic scholarship? Mindfulness is helping counter the message of multitasking in the workforce, and helping people connect with the present moment, by focusing on one thing at a time and making note of our mental and physical responses. In addition to workforce training such as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, apps like HeadSpace, Calm, and InsightTimer make mindfulness approachable and accessible wherever one is.

Libraries are no strangers to the concept of mindfulness either. Libraries have traditionally been quiet spaces conducive for reflection and introspection. Numerous libraries have meditation rooms in which students and staff can decompress and practice self-care. In addition, many libraries provide activities during finals that can be mindful moments, such as coloring and pet therapy, where one can focus on the present moment and the emotions and feelings they are experiencing. Mindfulness activities have been discussed as tools for librarians to use in all areas of work to practice self-care and reduce emotional labor and stress (Mastel & Innes, 2013; Moniz, Eshleman, Henry, Slutzky, & Moniz, 2015).

We are attempting to ensure that our library services are inclusive for everyone including traditionally underrepresented groups as well as incorporating this into our mission for student success. We maintain the awareness of longstanding historical power inequities as well as current events such as the division and intolerance visible on many campuses during the recent election cycle. This article will hopefully help you experience mindfulness-based activities in order to apply it to your thinking as well as to your work.

BACKGROUND

We are both on our personal journeys with mindfulness, and we wanted to give some context as to why we have authority on this topic. We're also acknowledging that we're growing and learning in this liminal space. We acknowledge that we are both white women, middle class, and GenX/Yers. We do not believe it is up to persons of color to educate us and students about social justice issues, rather we all can learn and attempt to weave in social justice and mindfulness practices into the classroom when it makes sense.

Kristen Mastel began her journey of mindfulness after dealing with the stressors of being a “well spouse” and primary caregiver for her husband who has significant health issues. She attended an eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course offered at the University of Minnesota, based on the work of researcher Jon Kabat-Zinn. In addition, she practices yoga, meditation, and is a Reiki Level II practitioner. All of these experiences and practices have allowed her to handle stress in a more positive manner, and improve her mental and physical wellbeing.

Amy Riegelman attended a Resilience, Radical Self Care and Inclusive Community workshop hosted at the University of Minnesota in Spring 2017. She is a social sciences librarian serving the following departments: Psychology, Educational Psychology, Institute of Child Development, and Speech-Language-Hearing-Sciences; within these disciplines, there are common interests in contemplative pedagogy and inclusion. On a personal level, Riegelman practices meditation and yoga and is a trauma survivor.

Contemplative Pedagogy and Social Justice

Kaufman (2017) highlights that contemplative pedagogy is a young movement in education, with a few varied definitions. He focuses on the fact that “contemplative pedagogy, like contemplative practices, revolves around introspection, reflection, and attention.... where contemplative pedagogues strive to treat students and the educational process with humanness and compassion” (p. 5). This tree was created by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, which is a leading research center and education association. The tree illustrates the practices and categories that can be used solo or combined to create a mindfulness practice. Many of the practices lend themselves easily to the classroom, including: journaling, deep listening, storytelling, and visualization. We will use the words mindfulness and contemplative interchangeably throughout this article. While contemplative and meditative practices are often a key component of many world religions, they can be practiced individually without religious context in the higher education setting.

Image 1: Tree of Contemplative Practices <Placeholder; Editors will place Figure here in final doc>

There have been many studies showing the physical, emotional, and intellectual benefits of contemplative practices. One of the most well know is at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where monks were studied using fMRI while meditating and found the highest gamma rays recorded, showing high intellectual activities and positive emotions. It is suggested that contemplative practices have an impact on positive emotions and can be trained and learned (Land, 2008). Additional research has shown a decrease in anxiety and depression after mindfulness practices (Shapiro, Brown, & Astin, 2011). Searching the Cochrane Library revealed dozens of systematic reviews where meditation or mindfulness activities were part of the intervention strategies for illnesses and diseases. Lastly, in *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2001) discussed the negative consequences of isolated lifestyles. Contemplative practice benefits have also included: greater empathy, communication skills, focus and attention, creativity and compassion, and reduced stress and burnout.

While many of the contemplative practices can be done solo, they bring a heightened awareness of self and others. Mindfulness and metacognition go hand in hand, as metacognition is the reflection on one’s process of learning. In education, a key aspect we are teaching is problem solving, and meditation helps develop awareness and attention that can deepen our understanding of ourselves. Practicing also allows individuals to hear their own voice and thoughts, which then prepares them to voice their opinions, experiences and thoughts in the classroom. Building on this, anti-oppression pedagogy is a combination of feminist, critical, anti-racist, and queer literacies, which lends itself well to mindfulness practices. Contemplative practices have been incorporated into all scholarly disciplines as a way to prepare students to learn and be introspective (Barbezat & Buch, 2014). Berila (2016) takes this one step further and discusses how social justice discussions can be difficult, and she provides practical tips for using mindfulness practices in addressing challenging topics. Magee (2016) has outlined numerous mindfulness-based practices that can be used in the classroom to develop "ColorInsight Practices, that assist in its development not only of personal capacity to deal more effectively with race, but, more importantly, of the tools necessary for effective collaborative social change in the 21st century" (para. 1).

However, one should begin with becoming comfortable with mindfulness activities and meditation on your own before introducing it in the classroom or library spaces. Being inauthentic or inexperienced can lead to challenging conversations and unprepared negative experiences. Recent medical research (Lindahl, Fisher, Cooper, Rosen, & Britton, 2017) has documented that meditation can bring up distressing, challenging and even impairing emotions and reactions with certain cases and populations.

The new ACRL Framework provides opportunities to weave contemplative pedagogies into library instruction. There are

many areas within the ACRL Framework where we see themes of social justice, and for further discussion see chapter 4 in Moniz, Eshleman, Henry, Slutzky and Moniz (2015), and the discussion of power, privilege, and authority by Battista, et al. (2015).

Meditation Moment

During the interactive workshop we led participants in a short meditation to expose beginner attendees to meditation, and help prime for focus and reflection. This meditation is taken from Magee's STOP acronym and meditation guidance (2013). The STOP Meditation we read, included:

Stop what you're doing. Put things down for a minute. Take a few deep breaths. If you'd like to extend this, you can take a minute to breathe normally and naturally and follow your breath coming in and out of your nose. You can even say to yourself "in," as you're breathing in, and "out," as you're breathing out if that helps with concentration. Observe your experience just as it is—including thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Maybe we are experiencing anxiousness, as this is the first time you have tried meditating, maybe you are excited to learn new strategies for working social justice themes into your teaching. Notice any emotions present and how they're being expressed in the body. Proceed with something that will support you in the moment: stretch your arms over your head, sip a cup of tea or water, or just take a few more deep breaths at your own pace. Now when you are ready to return to the session, raise your gaze to the table or projector and have a seat. Thank you for participating in a collective mindful moment with us.

EXAMPLES FROM OUR PRACTICE

While we are still beginning our practices of incorporating mindfulness in the classroom, we want to highlight a few examples from our experiences to spur conversation and ideas. These examples feature techniques used with both students and staff.

Information Privilege Example

In Spring 2016, Riegelman and librarian colleague K.L. Clarke developed a workshop to help guide graduating students who were losing access to library subscription databases. This workshop was partly a reaction to reference questions inquiring about loss of access. Since we use QuestionPoint as our chat service, we were able to mine those questions to find examples of this scenario. Patrons submit questions related to their discontinued access to library subscription databases and evolving nature of library privileges. The workshop explained information privilege using terms from the ACRL Framework (e.g., Information has value: commodity, education, influence). A learning activity had attendees examine their own information privilege (e.g., digital divide, device hardship) before, during, and (expected) after their enrollment at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Throughout the library workshop, alternative access points were recommended such as open access sources and interlibrary loan via public and employer libraries.

See Appendix B for the handout.

Diversity and the Framework Example

This staff development workshop focused on conversations around authority, privilege, and access. First, we analyzed the ACRL Framework for opportunities within the frames to discuss social justice themes. Our Undergraduate Services Librarian attended LOEX 2015 and saw the University of Virginia presentation, "Getting Carded: Threshold Concepts in One-Shot Sessions." Second, we took this activity and demonstrated it to our staff and then led a professional development session for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, as well. In the activity you start with an event, for the example the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri was used. A customizable deck of cards using a variety of sources from different time periods and related topics were printed out on individual cards. Participants were then asked to line-up according to their publication date. We then reflected on the publication cycle. Other reflection prompts included: What would happen if we only used scholarly sources? Whose voices are missing? How would you use the source in the paper? Third, we discussed in small groups how the carded activity could be adapted to various disciplines, and ideas included cultural appropriation, genetically modified wild rice, and the Dakota Access Pipeline. Fourth, we looked at some imagery of libraries and posters and analyzed them for themes of privilege and power, and tried to put ourselves in the place of our users and see how inclusive our programming and buildings are or are not. While this workshop spurred much conversation, it was emotionally taxing for the participants, and reflection time should be built in.

Small Group Activity

During our interactive session participants were assigned by table one of three topics: echo chambers, power inequities, and fake news. Each table was asked to develop a learning objective for their assigned topic, map it to an ACRL Framework, and select a contemplative pedagogy activity (see Appendix A) to use in classroom. Below are a few highlighted table ideas.

- Echo Chamber groups:
 - Deep listening activity around where people get their news. Where do you get your news? What voices are missing? Why is this important?
 - Acknowledge and define confirmation bias. Reflective journals in preparation for a debate (students won't know what side they will be assigned.)
- Power Inequities groups:
 - Do the card sort activity, and a visual imagery exercise to dissect the publication process.
 - Deep listening activity around power inequities. Think of a time when you felt powerless.
 - Students will evaluate their own privilege. Using an art walk students will be provided words related to privilege and be asked to define them. Students will draw an image of the words on the art wall and think, pair share. Do a gallery walk and reflect on others' work, and different perspectives.
- Fake News groups:
 - Show headlines of articles from news sources and then do a body scan and make note of tensions/feelings. Then students will do a reflective journaling piece on the different presentations and contexts of news sources (e.g. social media, video, newspaper).
 - Define and unpack the term "fake news." Use technology to identify bias/spin and check multiple sources. Also compare what you see first in search results.
 - Students will describe/identify the motives of content around fake news. Students will do an analysis of their Facebook pages. What % are memes? What % are re-shared items? What % sponsored content? What % personal news?

Image 2: Picture of Small Groups working on the Learning Activity
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CONCLUSION

Integrating contemplative practices into your instruction takes some time and preparation. However, it has the opportunity to move from surface discussions into deeper meaningful conversations. We would like to encourage you to begin small and adopt some practices yourself, maybe journaling at the beginning or end of your day to leave the stressors of each in their respective space, or consider doing a deep breathing exercise following a difficult patron exchange. There are many avenues to continue learning, and we hope to see you on the [Mindfulness for Librarians Facebook Group](#) or the [ACRL Contemplative Pedagogy Interest Group](#).

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APPENDIX A

Contemplative Pedagogy Activities

Selections from:

Magee, R. V. (2016). The way of ColorInsight: Understanding race and law effectively through mindfulness-based ColorInsight practices. *Geo. JL & Mod. Critical Race Persp.*, 8, 251.

Barbezat, D. P., & Bush, M. (2013). *Contemplative practices in higher education: Powerful methods to transform teaching and learning*. John Wiley & Sons.

Free Writing & Mindful Journaling: A journal records the movement of one's inner experience. Discussing social justice topics can be difficult, so writing is a good way to get participants to open up. Sample prompts: When I read the text, I thought that... I have always been confused about/afraid to....

Walking Meditation: It is not contemplating while walking, rather being mindful of the muscles of the body, awareness of movement.

Deep Listening & Mindful Narrative Practice: This storytelling practice involves a looping exercise in which each person takes a turn and is given 3-5 minutes as speaker, with uninterrupted time to share, with the other mindfully listening and watching, and reflects for 2 minutes on what impacted them about their partner's story, then swap. End by thanking each other for their undivided attention.

Contemplative Group Reading: Reading text as a whole is a simple exercise where a line is read in turn by each member of the group until completed. Often involves silent reflection time after reading.

Awareness of Thoughts, Sensations, Emotions Practice: While sitting in silence we invite an opening up of experience to encompass awareness of thoughts, bodily sensations, and feelings.

Body Scan: Attention is brought to particular parts of the body, one by one, with the guidance to focus on experiencing the sensations from that part of the body.

Awareness of Technology Practice: Reflection on the thoughts, sensations, and emotions that arise while engaging with technology.

Mindful Scripting and Rescripting Dyads: Students share their stories, seeing them through different perspectives, understanding that such backgrounds present positions that provide a basis of knowledge and understanding about various dimensions of race, or blindspots about the same.

Lovingkindness Practice: A meditation incorporating visualization, with the specific goal of increasing positive feelings toward self and others.

Visual Imagery: Go through the details of a specific event/activity and imagine the desired outcome you wish to achieve.

Appendix B

Examine your own information privilege

Things to consider: digital divide, device hardship, what characteristics could be labeled *information rich* v. *information poor*?

Before college/university	While enrolled at the University of Minnesota	After graduation

Images for Tables and Figures (Editor will put in body of the text later)

Image 1

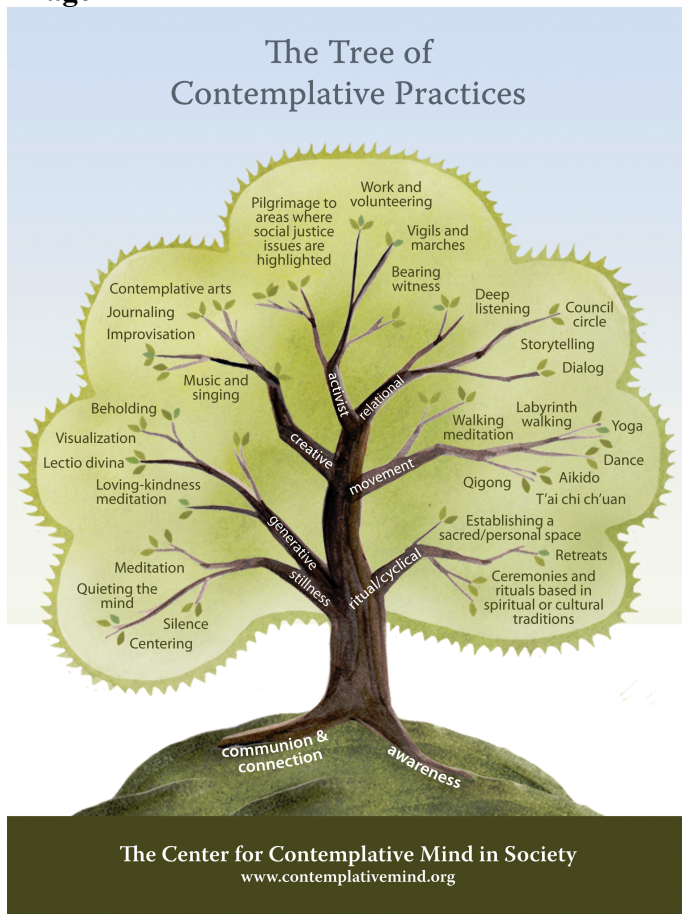


Image 2

