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Introduction to the First Issue

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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.

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REFERENCE

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