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Slow Looking: Powerful Tool of Mindfulness to Facilitate Transfer

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This paper illustrates how teaching through a "slow looking" pedagogy helps students of Generation Z—who have grown up in a culture of distraction and multitasking—cultivate the habits of mind and dispositions that can enhance their academic performance as well as physical and mental health during pandemic remote learning. Drawing on students' practice of slow looking in freshman writing courses, the paper demonstrates the power of slow looking as a tool of mindfulness to develop students' insights and knowledge that are useful in educational settings as well as in their personal lives. It elucidates how their practices of slow looking in various contexts developed inner strength, resilience, and compassion which enhanced their capacity for learning through their own self-discovery. It highlights the insights of slow education that embrace the "whole student" (bodily senses, emotions, and mind) and the significance of reconnecting a cognitive dimension of learning with an affective dimension of learning to facilitate "positive transfer," helping a student's learning in one context improve their performance in other contexts.

On Our Hurried Life

In her video poem "Thank you, Coronavirus" Riya Sokol (2020) expresses an unconventional but needed perspective of the important lessons that COVID has taught the world. I used this poem to guide the students in my freshman writing classes to explore their experience of the global pandemic and connect the lessons they've learned to their college education journey. Some students immediately expressed their feelings about the pandemic outbreak: "It is so unfair," "Why us?," "Why at this time?" Although there were different opinions about the poem, most students chose the following two lines of the poem as most resonating:

> Thank you for stopping us and making us see how lost we were in the busyness of our lives not having time for the most basic things.
>
> Thank you for this reevaluation of our lives.

My students expressed how busy they were with curricular and extra-curricular activities, how pressured they were daily in coping with their activities, and how anxious and rushed they felt all the time. They colorfully portrayed their campus life as "rushing around like a chicken with its head cut off." It illustrates their own perception of their inner state of having no time to think about what they are doing and why they are doing it. They do not have sufficient capacity for reflecting on their experiences that can lead to learning.

The culture of speed and multitasking is one of the main challenges for deep learning and transformative education in our modern times (Twenge, 2017). Living in this digital age, we have portable distraction available everywhere we go. Our constant access to the digital world has made moments of stillness less and less available for us. The French philosopher Blaise Pascal said, "All of humanity's problems stem from a man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." The ability to pause and dedicate time to one single task such as sitting may sound very simple. But the constant presence of distraction and habits of hurrying make it difficult to focus on one task or connect with our inner thoughts and emotions.

The Buddha is quoted as saying, "We do not learn by experience but by our capacity for experience." The transition into Zoom due to the pandemic outbreak was an opportune time for us to develop perspectives on our habits and hurried life accelerated by the digital world. Learning to teach on Zoom, I needed to pause and revisit my assumptions about "education" and "learners," not so much to invent a new paradigm or introduce a new vocabulary for old ideas, but to give my students and myself permission to begin in the difficult moment we found ourselves in together. We needed to situate ourselves and use what seemed like impediments to learning as vehicles for exploration. The end goals of our writing class for discovery, critical thinking, close

reading, rhetorical awareness, and effective argumentation are widely shared across the writing curriculum. However, our means for getting there could be more holistic. By allowing ourselves to acknowledge our existential moment—saturated with emotions, fears, and uncertainties—we have the opportunity to develop inner strength, resilience, and compassion, and most importantly, to cultivate our capacity for "learning to learn."

The Location & Data Sources

This paper is based on my experience of teaching multiple sections of a freshman composition class for both native and non-native English speakers during the pandemic remote learning at the University of Colorado Boulder in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. In addition to the major disruption brought on by the pandemic, in 2020, Colorado was also experiencing the catastrophic effects of wildfires accelerated by climate change. The fires and choking smoke that were ominously present in the Boulder area kept people indoors during an already locked-down situation. A total of over 1000 fires burned over 665,000 acres of land and hundreds of structures. On March 22, 2021, Boulder also experienced tragic mass gun violence within two miles of our campus at the King Soopers grocery store, in which ten people were killed. The impacts of the tragic incident on the campus as well as the local community were viscerally felt. Underlying all of this was the tension over the 2020 Presidential election and the peaceful transfer of power, which was in question for the first time in U.S. history.

When the university officially switched to remote learning in Fall 2020, my students utilized their flexibility to join our class meetings from various places around their homes and university campus. My local students who contracted COVID attended our classes from a local hotel that was used as the university's quarantine camp while they were recovering. My international students who travelled back to their home countries joined our classes from their quarantine hotels and spaces of their homes to which they were confined before they could be reunited with their families. In Spring 2021, my international students, who were located around the Pacific coast of Asia and the Middle East, attended

our classes in the middle of the night with local times between 9:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m. They described this style of late-night remote learning as "living in the world upside down."

Seeing the debilitating effects of the local, national, and global crises on my students' remote learning motivated me to use the foundational ideas of "slow looking" as the basis of my pedagogy. The freshman writing class was founded on an inquiry-based learning curriculum. It aimed to develop students' critical inquiry ability and academic literacy practices by using their everyday experiences as sources of academic research. Students were guided to become active readers, writers, and researchers by writing from their own inquiry, experience, readings, and research. It developed their close reading and rhetorical awareness by adapting reading and writing practices to various genres, audiences, and purposes.

There were four units in the course. In the first unit (Why Am I Pursuing College Education?), students explored the lessons they were learning from the pandemic and how they could use such lessons to enhance their education and personal growth. The second unit (Power of Mindful Learning), which is the main data source of this paper, connected their experience of attending the university remotely with the greater circle of life. By using "slow looking" as a tool of mindfulness, students explored their habits of mind and the changes such mindfulness practices brought in their daily life, especially their relationships with digital media and literacy practices, food and eating, engagement with nature and local environments, and their outlook on life. By using observation and reflection notes in weekly journals, they wrote essays about what they learned from trying such practices and how they could improve their college education as well as their well-being and happiness. The third unit (Power of Collaborative Learning) was a group research project, which asked the students to examine an issue that deserved attention in our communities, drawing on the growing body of research on mindfulness and the insights of slow looking that they developed in the previous units. In the last unit (Reimagining College Education for the Unknown Future), by utilizing multimodal sources, they expressed their

pent-up feelings and wrote about how they maintained their well-being during the pandemic and what they learned from the course.

In this article, I will first discuss the fundamental ideas of "slow looking" as the basis of my writing pedagogy, followed by a discussion of the research on the transfer of learning across contexts. Then, I will describe the class activities, assignments, and students' writings[1] in the second unit (Power of Mindful Learning) to illustrate the impacts of a slow looking pedagogy on their personal lives as well as on their literacy practices and schoolwork. Finally, I will highlight their deep yearning for slowing down and the important implications of this pedagogy for their lives.

Slow Looking

As we began our class meetings on Zoom, I noticed that many of my students had difficulty focusing on class. It was clear that they were distracted by the new environment that surrounded them. They acknowledged their constant urge to reach for their cellphones and look for something that they could distract themselves with during class. They mentioned that their loss of focus followed them when they tried to study or do class readings, and they were more fearful of falling behind as their grades started to decline. They expressed—while coping with their pandemic anxiety and stresses—handling the new remote tasks of juggling zooms and coordinating their work and others with deadlines was a "completely exhausting feat."

The idea of "slowing down" and truly taking in "what is in front of you" immediately caught my students' attention especially when I mentioned "slow looking." The key idea of slow looking is observation which is foundational to all mindfulness practices. When I mentioned "mindfulness" the first time in class, some students immediately responded that they have tried meditation but gave up because it was so challenging to "empty their minds." They expressed that "mindfulness" and "meditation" were quite intimidating, and such activities were for hippies or people who had certain skills already developed to engage with mindfulness.

1 All student writing excerpts have been provided with the permission of the authors.

As my students expressed, focusing on emptying our minds is almost impossible; it is like being told not to think of a white bear. The "White Bear" studies by Wegner and Schneider highlight the paradoxical effect of thought suppression which leads to a preoccupation with the suppressed thought. Jon Kabat-Zinn (2016) states, from a meditative perspective, mind does *not* mean thinking; it means "awareness—the capacity of mind that knows non-conceptually" (p. 54). In his article "Meditation is not what you think,"he defines mindfulness meditation as "simply dropping into *being* in the only moment we ever have—this one—rather than it is of doing something or getting someplace" (2021, p. 785). Because many of my students had been intimidated by past efforts or preconceptions of cultivating mindfulness, I needed a pedagogical tool to help them understand that mindfulness was different from what they expected. "Slow looking" provided me with such a pedagogical approach. My students were less intimidated by "mindfulness" when they were guided to develop their "capacity of mind that knows non-conceptually" and practice "being" by engaging in the present moment, which helped them transition into their own path of self-discovery.

Shari Tishman (2018) makes an important distinction between mindfulness and "slow looking" from an educational standpoint and states that the idea of slow looking is spiritually less ambitious than mindfulness, and it is considerably more inclusive (p. 46). Although the term "slow looking" uses the vernacular of the visual, she emphasizes that "learning through prolonged observation can occur through all of the senses" and "whatever sensory form that it takes, slow looking is a way of gaining knowledge about the world" (p. 2). Slow looking is a powerful pedagogical tool in guiding students of Generation Z—who have grown up in a culture of distraction and multitasking—to switch from constantly hopping around to being with just "one thing at a time." It is a restorative counterbalance of the deleterious effects of "fast looking." Tishman articulates that slow looking is a "healthy response to complexity because it creates a space for the multiple dimensions of things to be perceived and appreciated" (p. 7).

Frederick Franck (1993) conveys the insights of "slow looking" by saying that "not seeing what we look-at" can be "the root cause of the frightful suffering that we humans inflict on one another, on animals, on Earth herself" (p. 4). He expounds:

> The glaring contrast between seeing and looking-at the world around us is immense: it is fateful. Everything in our society seems to conspire against our inborn human gift of seeing. We have become addicted to merely looking-at things and beings. The more we regress from seeing to looking-at the world—through the ever-more-perfected machinery of viewfinders, TV tubes, VCRs, microscopes, spectroscopes, stereoscopes—the less we see. The less we see, the more numbed we become to the joy and the pain of being alive and the further estranged we become from ourselves and all others. (p. 3)

It is important to note that this statement was written almost 30 years ago. With the arising of social media over the past three decades, technology has advanced much more than Franck ever imagined. Social media has conditioned us to constantly attend to "important" updates for our social connection and seek out novel forms of stimulation and entertainment. The "seeing" involved in social media is a passive activity of watching a screen ("looking-at") rather than an active capacity of understanding what is seen. Franck emphasized that we could rediscover the lost art of "seeing" by reawakening our childhood capacity to draw and to enhance our capacity for experience in the world by "seeing it from the belly" instead of "looking-at it from the conditioned head" (p. 9). The expression "seeing it from the belly" illustrates the insights of slow education which highlight the importance of engaging the whole student (bodily senses, emotions, and minds), not just their head, in their learning process.

Transfer of Learning Across Contexts

In their book "The Heart of Higher Education," Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc (2010) echo the insights of slow education and criticize the academic culture that neglects the inner dimensions of education. They call for an integrative approach to education that cultivates the full scope of human experience—both the outer and inner dimensions of human life. They argue that "academic culture needs to embrace the simple fact that cognition, which is our business, is intimately linked to affect, no matter how much we think emotions are not our business" (p. 41). Citing the neuroscientist Candace Pert, they assert that "thinking is not done solely by the brain, an organ housed in the cranium. Thinking is done by the mind, which is not an organ but a process that is distributed throughout the body and draws on every faculty we have" (p. 41). Their integrative approach highlights a view of education which is less about acquiring skills and knowledge and more about cultivating the dispositions and habits of mind that can transfer beyond the classroom context.

Arthur Costa and Bena Kallick (2009), who are well-known for their scholarship on "Habits of Mind," strongly support the integrative approach to education. They argue that the keys to learning are "dispositional" in nature because the true meaning of success is not knowing the right answer but in knowing what to do when we don't know the answer. They use the term "Habit of Mind" to mean having a "disposition" toward behaving skillfully and mindfully when confronted with challenging situations. They make a strong case for dispositional learning as essential for citizens of the future. Their scholarship on "Habits of Mind" is widely recognized not only in the K-12 context but also in higher education, especially for writing instruction. The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (which has been developed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project) presents the eight habits of mind that are essential for success in college writing: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition.

The emphasis on cultivating a student's dispositions and habits of mind—rather than teaching certain skills and knowledge—reminds us of the importance of augmenting the cognitive paradigm of education with an approach that embraces the emotional, existential, spiritual, social, and physical contexts of the learner. Published studies repeatedly highlight that cognitive skills do not transfer beyond the context in which they are taught, and we should not assume that skills taught in one context can easily transfer to another (Barnett, 2012; Davies & Barnett, 2015; Perkins & Salomon, 1992). Well-known academics on the transfer-of-learning scholarship David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon (1992) argue that "the transfer of learning occurs when learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts on performance in another context or with other related materials" (p. 3). They articulate "positive transfer" occurs when "learning in one context improves performance in some other context" (p. 3). King Beach (1999) expounds his view of transfer by using the term "generalization" which is characterized by "multiple interrelated processes rather than a single general procedure" and "the continuity and transformation of knowledge, skill, and identity" across various contexts (p. 112).

As I recognized the importance of reorienting my approach to college writing from skills-oriented teaching to developing my students' dispositions and habits of mind, I recognized the importance of integrating practices of contemplation and mindfulness in my writing curriculum. In order to facilitate "positive transfer," it was essential to help them refocus their minds from the usual thinking-mind orientation and pay more attention to all of their senses and direct experiences by guiding them to be more fully engaged in the present moment. The "slow looking" pedagogy allowed me to engage the whole student (bodily senses, emotions, and minds) by refocusing teaching on the development of each student as a human being, not just a human doing. In essence, "slow looking" became a guiding framework for my integrative approach to education which ultimately enhanced their capacity for experience leading to "learning" and enriched their ways of understanding the world (ontology) and ways of knowing (epistemology).

Reconnecting Our Mind and Body

Thich Nhat Hanh (2021) says, "To see deeply, we have to first learn the art of stopping." Applying his wisdom, I began each class meeting on Zoom with a five-minute guided meditation which I called "arrival practice." When my students said they were becoming "addicted to their cell phones" and starting to feel "guilty" of their on-line behaviors and habits, I realized that the first step toward helping their learning was to create some space between them and their phones and help them reconnect their mind and body. When we define meditation as the intentional act of focusing the mind on something, mindfulness is one way of doing that by reorienting to our sensory awareness.

Thus, before beginning class, as part of arrival practice, I created space to guide my students to listen to their bodies and practice coming to their senses. I guided my students to notice the way their body was feeling, how they were sitting, what their breathing felt like, and what else they were noticing. Our body posture has a huge influence on our breathing practice, so we began with yoga stretching to help them feel more grounded, calm their minds, and improve their focus. Some days, I asked them to look around their room and describe their location, and some days I asked them to choose an item in their location and describe it. I led them to notice the ordinary scenes with all of their senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste) and to describe them with words or in simple line-drawing. The process of simple line-drawing allowed them to better see an image with their hands and hearts, which anchored them into the present moment. As they were describing and drawing the ordinary scenes of their lives and sharing them with classmates, they were learning to slow down, see familiar scenes with fresh eyes, notice little details, and feel themselves more fully alive. The act of describing—whether in words or in drawing—is "an engine of slow looking" because "the process of description provides a structure that allows slow looking to unfold" (Tishman, 2018, p. 64).

After several sessions of such practices, many students reported their anxiety leading up to their Zoom calls was reduced, and the practices helped to calm their minds and reduce their anxiety. The positive

influences of such practices on their moods and focus in class were significantly noticeable, especially for those who joined our class from their quarantine hotels as well as those with learning disabilities or with difficulty managing their anxiety. By practicing mindful breathing, my students were reconnecting their mind and body and recognizing the benefits of such practices for their physical and mental health. As Christy Wenger (2012) explains, mindful breathing is a useful practice for teaching emotional flexibility especially in the writing classroom because "it asks writers to pay attention to how the body feels and what the body does in order to develop writing habits that apply the strengths and flexibility of the yogi to the writing process" (p. 29). The five-minute arrival practices in various forms—through mindful breathing, body scanning, stretching, observing ordinary scenes with fresh eyes, describing them in words or in line-drawing—are very simple. However, I noticed that they helped reduce their zoom Zoom fatigue and enhance their capacity for learning during remote instruction.

Noticing Exercise

The first step for practicing mindfulness is "What am I noticing right now?" If we have an experience without paying attention to what's going on, then we don't notice how it makes us feel or even what we just did. We could just repeat the experience and still be unable to learn anything from it.

For this exercise, I guided them to notice their sensations, emotions, and perceptions when they were engaged with digital media in comparison with being in nature. For the "digital media" component, they browsed their favorite social media for 10 minutes making note of headlines, messages, images, colors, and shapes that caught their attention. For the "natural media" component, they went outside and practiced a five-minute meditation, choosing one or two practices they wanted to try from the list of meditation tracks which were uploaded on the course website. They sat outside for 10 minutes noticing any changes of their feelings along with what they saw, heard, smelled, and touched. In their weekly journal, they wrote about any effects they no-

ticed on their physical sensations and emotional state when they were engaged with natural media in comparison with digital media. Here are some students' reflections:

> The most important thing I learned from this practice is that social media evokes many emotions inside of me that do everything but make me happy. Majority of the time I am looking at social media "influencers" doing crazy things that I can only dream of or looking some type of way that is "better" than me. All this does is to create jealousy. When I am jealous, I get anxiety because I feel like I should be doing something better with my life. This jealousy stemming from social media is then constantly on my mind distracting me from the present and what actually is important.

> One of the most eye-opening experiences was seeing how I felt after 10 minutes of browsing social media and 10 minutes of being in nature. When I am scrolling through social media my brain becomes almost faded or clouded. I no longer have complex thoughts or can make inquiries. Instead, my brain reverts to simplicity, and I find myself scrolling for hours on end. Just continuing to watch another 6 second video so that my brain can feel the momentary release of dopamine. When it comes down to it, it is an "addiction."

Most students reported that the content they were distracting themselves with on social media was contributing to the chaos and stress they had been feeling the past several months. They acknowledged the influence of meditation practices by quickly noticing significant differences between digital media and natural media and described its impacts on their sensations, emotions, and perceptions. All students expressed a deep yearning for connection with nature.

Slow Looking Practices

I had my students practice "slow looking" with an artwork, image/photo, object, and natural environment. I invited a visual experience coordinator from our campus museum for the slow looking exercise with artwork. We had the students observe an artwork for 10 minutes and discussed their observations and interpretations. The next class, I had them observe the image of a tree reflected in a lake at a sunset which was used as a banner image for the course website. We began our slow looking exercise with peaceful music to help them calm their minds and rest their gaze upon the image for one minute initially and then longer for eight minutes. They described the image at the levels of what they saw and the feelings the image evoked in them, and discussed differences between their initial looking and prolonged looking.

For their homework, they practiced slow looking with an object which they could easily move around with their hands in a quiet location indoors or outdoors. Following the same procedure as before, they began with a guided meditation or peaceful music before gazing upon their object. They picked up their object, touching, smelling, and noticing how it felt. As they investigated their object with all of their senses, they were attuned to observe more perceptible features and details of their object and how they responded.

In their journals, they documented progressive observations of what they were noticing with their object. The act of describing the object facilitated the process of their closer observation as it provided language and visual structure to deepen their looking. They wrote about what they noticed, how they noticed things, and what they learned from the exercise in their papers. Here are some students' reflections:

> When I chose to use my water bottle for this exercise, I felt kind of silly, but I did actually realize a lot after just looking at it slowly. If I learned this much just by using slow looking to look at my water bottle, I can't even imagine how much I would notice about art, the world, and the many other things I could view with slow looking. I really appreciated this exercise and I have a newfound appreciation for "slow looking."

> I love how something so simple as an apple can have such beauty without being perfect, and like people, it's what's on the inside, and not the outside. Apples aren't the best looking, but are so sweet and amazing behind the skin, and there is such an important and simple lesson we can all learn from something as ordinary as an apple. I feel as if this slow looking exercise wasn't just about what we see in objects on the outside, but to also be able to see what's on the *inside*.

Through this exercise, my students recognized that they were not as present as they had initially thought, and they tended to take a quick glance and assumed they knew everything worth knowing about the object. As they engaged all of their senses through slow looking, they noticed many unexpected elements of their objects. They realized how much detail they missed in their everyday lives and how much better they could understand the meanings behind them, if we as a society made time to better appreciate opportunities for slow looking instead of just quick glances. As we spent more time with the practice of slow looking, they were gradually starting to switch their attention from compulsively hopping around to being with just "one thing at a time." They were beginning to unlearn the typical overactive way of thinking and being, which helped them become more self-aware and experience more of what "being in the present" felt like.

As they investigated the familiar and the ordinary with the new lens of slow looking, they began to defamiliarize themselves with their everyday assumptions. They discovered that we often are stuck in our typical ways and see things habitually patterned by our brain's past associations instead of more novel, creative ways. A student, who used a plastic succulent plant for the exercise, realized that slow looking could retrain these tendencies. In his essay, he explored how "perception" affects our daily lives and how much more we can notice if we can break out of the habitual ways our brain is used to interpreting things:

> During this practice, I had a *huge* epiphany on the concept of "perception." This "plant" I was looking at was

> not a plant at all, yet multiple different pieces of plastic were put together in a way that gives the perception of a plant. I saw it as a plant because my brain recognized the physical features and shapes of the plastic to be a plant. But how much more could I learn about this plant if I looked at it with a fresh pair of eyes, focusing more closely and breaking down each little piece of it.

I was deeply inspired that my students were discovering the insights of Frederick Franck as they were beginning to "see" instead of just "looking-at" things with their conditioned head. They were becoming more aware of how their habits of mind shaped their understanding of the world and how human perceptions were shaped by our backgrounds and experiences. When I asked them to take the practice of their slow looking out to their communities and local environments, my students' real act of discovery continued:

> I started trying to use "slow looking" as a way to look at the world with a new lens. As I took my daily walks, I tried to keep my brain from jumping to conclusions on what I was seeing, and instead try to make my own experience of it. Instead of looking at a car and thinking car, I would try and find all the little parts that make it what I see as a 'car.' I would think about the frame and how it must've been formed, I would look at the rubber circles that encased the metal spiderweb that made it a wheel...Every day I was learning more about life, just by engaging more with the world around me. Instead of letting what I originally perceived as concrete, I would look past this and try to see more.

Slow Looking With Reading Habits

As my students developed insights about slow looking, I guided them to apply their insights to their reading habits. The Internet has trained us to be distracted "information buffet" consumers of short, varied con-

tent that catches our attention. We engage only briefly with each "buffet item" before moving on to the next, without taking much time to reflect on what we were just reading before craving the next "hit." As we discussed the impacts of the Internet on their reading habits, many students immediately recognized the trap of multitasking facilitated by digital technologies. Here is a student's reflection:

> When I was younger, I used to spend hours of my day reading, but as I grew older, I completely stopped making time for it and instead started opting for the audible versions of every text that I would come across. At first, I was convinced that I was doing something smart with my time management. Exchanging reading for listening allowed me to multitask. I could listen to a chapter of a book while cooking pasta or while running at the gym. For a long time, I thought that I was onto something that I was achieving more by getting a couple of things done at once.

Many students acknowledged the cognitive illusion—they are doing a good job even when they are not—as well as the impacts of multitasking on their engagement with reading. They usually rushed through the words in text, a hard copy or a soft copy. They barely skimmed over readings in preparation for class and wrote essays on texts they didn't fully read by forming opinions after just a quick look. All of these became habits for them. They were conscious that they were in the trap of multitasking, which creates "a dopamine-addiction feedback loop, effectively rewarding the brain, for losing focus and for constantly searching for external stimulation" (Levitin, 2014, p. 96). As Levitin reports, even after a short period of multitasking, we feel disoriented and exhausted simply because multitasking causes the brain to burn through fuel so quickly and deplete its nutrients.

As my students started to see the tremendous impacts of digital technologies on their reading, I guided them to apply the insights of slow looking to their reading habits. For the first slow-reading exercise, we used the potent poem "Who Understands Me But Me" by Jimmy

Santiago Baca. After a short guided-meditation with peaceful music, I asked them to take turns reading aloud each line, feeling each word, sentence, and punctuation, visualizing the powerful imagery and empathizing with the writer's ideas, emotions, and energies. They focused on what the author evoked "in them," savoring and appreciating the reading experience. After that activity, they practiced slow reading with their classmates in a small group using their favorite poem or song lyrics. For their homework, they continued to practice slow reading as we did in class with a text of their choice. In their papers, they wrote about the powerful impacts of slow-reading practice on their academic performance as well as their own well-being and mental health. Here are some students' responses:

> Earlier this year I took some tests strictly based on readings. I would skim through the textbooks the night before and in return 'bomb' the test. For my past exams in high school and college, I would wait until the night before to go over all my reading material. It's like the saying 'in through one ear and out the other.' It makes a pit in my stomach because I knew what I did wrong ... After learning about slow reading techniques, I now give myself a week to slowly read the material being covered. When I open my exams, I don't feel lost like I did before. Slow reading has changed my emotions while taking tests because I know the material and I know that I put in the time to get there.

> After the guided meditation, I sat down at my desk with my geology homework and spent about an hour and thirty minutes on it which was three times the usual thirty minutes I would rush through the assignment in. Taking the time to look at the graph much more slowly allowed me to break down the graph in order to fully understand what I was looking at. Normally, I would just take a quick glance at a graphic like this and move

> on because I didn't understand it. But this time I took the time to use slow looking and even took a screenshot so I could revisit it later if I still didn't understand. This proved to be incredibly useful and the continued use of this practice in class improved my understanding and overall grade in the class.

By applying slow looking to their reading habits, my students discovered that they were actually following the thoughts rushing through their minds—instead of the words on the page—during reading. They discovered that reading at a fast pace did not give them the time and space to imagine themselves in the place of the author and understand different perspectives, which is crucial for them to become effective readers. As they focused more on the actual words—not on random thoughts—they noticed significant improvements not only in their reading comprehension but also in their emotional health and well-being. In their papers, many students wrote about their "A-ha" moments and the results of their experimentation of slow reading with their studies in other classes. The insights that they were developing—especially those who suffered from exam anxiety, procrastination, and learning disabilities—were extremely powerful.

It was about twenty years ago when Robert Scholes (2002) pointed out the reading problems of our students should be understood as "a symptom of a larger cultural problem" (p. 167). He expounds the importance of "seeing" our students' reading practices:

> We normally acknowledge, however grudgingly, that writing must be taught and continue to be taught from high school to college and perhaps beyond. We accept it, I believe, because we can see writing, and we know that much of the writing we see is not good enough. But we do not see reading. We see some writing about reading, to be sure, but we do not see reading. I am certain, though, that if we could see it, we would be *appalled*. (p. 166)

When I saw the impacts of digital technologies on their reading—especially during pandemic remote learning when they had to access textbooks digitally including our own writing program's textbook—I too was appalled. When I saw the powerful impacts of slow reading—facilitated by their insights of slow looking—on their literacy practices and academic performance as well as on their physical and emotional health, I was assured of the significance of cultivating the humanistic and affective dimensions of reading to nourish their minds and spirits.

As Maryanne Wolf (2007) says, "We are not only *what* we read. We are *how* we read." Wolf looks into how the style of reading the Internet promotes—for the sake of immediacy and efficiency—has weakened our students' capacity for deep reading that is inseparable from deep thinking. They have become mere "decoders of information who have neither the time nor the motivation to think beneath or beyond their Googled universes." In his article "Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains," Nicholas Carr (2008) states "the kind of deep reading that a sequence of printed pages promotes is valuable not just for the knowledge we acquire from the author's words but for the intellectual vibrations those words set off within our own minds." By applying the insights of slow looking to their reading habits, my students recognized the effects of digital technologies on their hearts and spirits as well as on their minds. They saw how slow reading could promote not only intellectual vibrations but also emotional and spiritual vibrations, which are essential for developing resilient and enduring dispositions in times of difficulty and isolation.

Slow Looking With Eating Habits

As my students started to develop a deeper understanding of slow looking, I guided them to apply their insights to everyday activities, especially their eating habits. Each student brought a food item to class. Using Thich Nhat Hanh's video on mindful eating, I led them to notice the color, shape, size, smell, texture, and taste. As they practiced slow looking with eating habits, they recognized many automatic processes

became more noticeable to their attention. The impacts of such a practice were most evident with my international students, especially those who attended our class meetings in the middle of the night in their time zone. My Chinese students joined our 9:35 morning class at 11:35 p.m., 12:35 a.m., and 1:35 a.m. My students from the Middle East joined our 11:10 morning class at 9:10 p.m., 10:10 p.m., and 11:10 p.m. Describing this style of late-night remote learning as "living in the world upside down," they often talked about the impacts of their nighttime studying on their eating habits. They prepared boxes of instant noodles, snacks, and drinks in case they were hungry at night. A Chinese student, a big fan of bubble tea, had an entire box of instant bubble tea ready to satisfy his craving when he was attending his Zoom classes. When he practiced slow looking with his favorite bubble teabag, he realized:

> The very first thing that was brought to my attention is the sugar amount. By observing the teabag one night, I found almost every food I love consuming contains a huge amount of sugar, not even honey—it is white sugar. By practicing mindful eating, I feel the present and observe every step of making the instant bubble tea. My attention goes to the fact that I have put a full bag, which contains at least 10 grams of extra sugar, to the bubble tea, while the milk tea powder is already originally well-mixed with a sufficient amount of sugar … I reduced the extra bag and only putting a half bag of bubble tea powder to make it less sweet.

My students who attended our class from the quarantine hotel shared their stories of recovering their ability to taste food and their realization of how precious each mealtime was to appreciate the pleasures of eating and feel their connection with the web of life. Students who had eating disorders and negative feelings about their eating habits expressed how their mindful eating practice helped them begin to heal their relationships with food and feelings of shame and guilt.

Cultivating Compassion, Gratitude, and Well-Being

As they looked into their own anxieties, struggles, and losses by practicing slow looking, my students started to find empathy and compassion for themselves and others. I was deeply moved when my students began to reflect on problems in their lives not just through a negative lens that was disempowering but also through a more positive lens that was uplifting. In her paper, my student who earlier had a cynical outlook on life because of the pandemic wrote about how she was using slow looking as a tool to promote gratitude and manage her troubling emotions:

> I have been writing down in my personal journal obstacles and challenges that I face in my daily life. Utilizing the technique of slow looking, I deeply consider and list out what attributes a situation has beyond its classification of a problem … When I list out all of the alternative ways that I can view a problem, I am using slow looking as a tool to promote gratitude … It can be difficult to see problems as anything more than negative but putting the time into reframing them in a positive light allows me to interpret them as necessary pieces of my life's story that will make me stronger in the future.

In his book "Who Ordered This Truckload of Dung?" Ajahn Brahm (2005) uses the analogy "digging in the dung" to express a way of welcoming tragedies as fertilizer for life. Applying his wisdom, my students were "digging in the dung" by trying to reframe the problems in their lives in a more positive light while cultivating gratitude and self-compassion. They were coming to see their writing as a tool of healing, not just fulfilling their writing requirements. As they were learning to slow down, they were beginning to see the inestimable value of empathy and compassion for themselves, developing their capacity for inner strength, resilience, and self-love. These are the most crucial insights they were developing by practicing slow looking.

Deep Yearning for Slowing Down

Throughout the semester, my students' responses about slow and mindfulness practices were *enthusiastic.* They had been suffering from all kinds of stress and anxiety brought on by the "hurry virus"—which is deeply engrained in our society—even more than the coronavirus during this pandemic. It is very clear that young people across the globe are *very* hungry for slowing down. Even a few weeks into this unit (Power of Mindful Learning), they expressed their pent-up feelings about slowing down:

> Slow methodology, it seems like a forbidden word in the world we live in. Everything is dictated by speed, how fast you can complete assignments or how fast you can memorize information for a test only to lose it all after. For so long I thought I was stupid. All throughout high school I struggled and fought for mediocre grades, and I realized one day that I came out of those four years with very little knowledge. These last few weeks of school, especially in our writing class, have without a doubt been some of the most informative and useful weeks of my life.

> Sometimes, when I am pensive for a moment, nothing planned on my schedule, I find myself looking for work I can do. Be it homework due in the future or even levelling up in a video game, it is almost impossible to do nothing. Why do so many people, young and old, feel burnt out all the time today? Our society urgently has to face this issue if it must survive and not harm nature, and more importantly, us.

My students' growing sense of efficacy about slow and mindfulness practices was clearly reflected in their writings. Compared to other writing classes I had taught with different themes and topics in past years, their writings in this unit were much more original, more mature, more

insightful, and more powerful. In the following unit (Power of Collaborative Learning), drawing on the insights of their experiences with slow and mindfulness practices, they explored their impacts on educational curriculums, ecological crisis awareness, learning disabilities, racial tensions, eating disorders, political divisions, gun violence, etc. Their group research projects demonstrated their growing awareness of the need for slowing down in our society to respond to the larger crises we face more effectively, expressing their desire to share the insights of slow education with the students of Generation Z and the public.

Slow Looking and Transfer of Learning Across Contexts

Through slow and mindfulness practices, my students explored their habits of mind and the changes such practices could bring in their daily life, especially their relationships with digital media and schoolwork, food and eating, engagement with nature and local environments, and their outlook on life. Learning to switch their attention from "multitasking" to being with just "one thing at a time," they began to develop insights and knowledge that they could use not only in educational settings but also in their personal lives. Cultivating a student's capacity of mind to know "non-conceptually" by engaging the whole student (bodily senses, emotions, and mind) also facilitates their capacity of mind to know "conceptually," which ultimately enhances their academic performance as well as physical and mental health during pandemic remote learning.

One of the main goals of education is to help students cultivate good habits of mind that can transfer beyond the classroom context (Costa & Kallick, 2009; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Yancey et al., 2014). Slow looking facilitates "positive transfer," wherein "learning in one context improves performance in some other context" (Perkins & Salomon, 1992, p. 3); it promotes "generalization," wherein the student applies their insights and knowledge across various contexts through "multiple interrelated processes rather than a single general procedure" (Beach, 1999, p. 112). It demonstrates how slow looking can cultivate the student's capacity for learning through their own self-discovery not only

for their reading and writing practices, but also for other fields of study and important lessons from challenges in their personal lives. As they transfer their knowledge and insights about slow looking across many contexts, they can become not only mindful readers and writers but also mindful learners, and most importantly, mindful people.

The key concept in the transfer-of-learning scholarship is "metacognition," which is regarded as "the hinge upon which transfer depends" (Carillo, 2016, p. 10). I want to argue that the idea of "meta" in metacognition should be extended beyond "meta" (which literally means "thinking about thinking") toward "metta" (an ancient Pali word which means "loving and kindness, benevolence, and good will"). We should remember the importance of reconnecting a cognitive dimension of learning with an affective dimension of learning in order to facilitate "positive transfer" to help a student's learning in one context improve their performance in other contexts. Einstein cogently stated, "The problems that exist in this world today cannot be solved by the level of thinking that created them." When we are concerned with the practice of metacognition in the thinking-about-thinking domain, we focus on helping students develop the knowledge they can bring with them into other courses and other disciplines by facilitating their self-reflecting, self-monitoring, and self-evaluating of their own thinking. However, when we extend "meta" toward "metta"—beyond the thinking-about-thinking domain—we can provide opportunities for students not only to reflect and monitor their own thinking but also to cultivate compassion, love, and empathy for themselves and others, which is critically important to enable students to effectively learn the material and mitigate the crippling effects of digital technologies and pandemic isolation. Once we attend to our own individual healing, we have a greater capacity to connect with others, eventually creating a circle of more healthy, balanced, compassionate, and insightful people around us and building the foundation to respond appropriately to the local, national, and global crises facing humanity. This is ultimately the most profound goal of a true education and the key idea of the integrative approach to education.

Ending Notes

The global pandemic has presented practitioners in higher education with a critical moment to reflect on the very meaning of education and what higher education *can* do and *should* do for our future. Although the future appears increasingly perilous in multiple aspects for humanity, it also contains great potential if we can collectively respond wisely. Even if the risks of spreading COVID were to end and remote teaching became a distant memory of the pandemic days, the insights of slow education that embrace the "whole student" and their impacts on our academic and personal lives will reverberate in the years to come.

There were particularly impactful moments in my experience of teaching on Zoom during COVID. The day after the Boulder King Soopers massacre, my student who attended the same high school as the shooter found herself unable to control her shaking body and trembling voice as she fought hysterical tears, while sharing stories from her high school days with that person. My student from Lebanon, who was usually soft-spoken and quiet, shared with us a video of the districts in his neighborhood being bombed, while his body also trembled and visceral, internal pains were clearly visible on his face. Those days brought home the true value of slow education in meeting such tumultuous times. I want to end my essay by citing the ending paragraph of Ronald Barnett's (2012) insightful paper "Learning for an Unknown Future":

> Part, therefore, of such a learning is acquiring the capacity to live with the existential angst that derives from an awareness of the gap between one's actions and one's limited grounds for those actions. Understood in this way, a pedagogy for an unknowing future becomes a pedagogy with the unknown built into it as living principles of educational exchanges and accomplishments. Designing a curriculum and practicing a pedagogy of this kind is not a set of practices that we readily understand. They are, in turn, matters about which we need to go on learning. (p. 76)

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