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Working Toward Beloved Community: Contemplative Practice and Social Justice In One Public University

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This paper offers a descriptive case study of the ways a group of faculty, staff, and students introduced contemplative practices into a medium-sized state university community, with the long-term goal of fostering justice and inclusion for all members of that community. Using documents and oral and written narratives from key participants, we detail the ways community has been fostered through shared contemplative practices; faculty learning communities (FLCs) focused on contemplative pedagogy, compassion, and social justice; and the use of contemplative practices to underpin and guide decision-making. Evaluations from students and faculty members involved in these initiatives suggest that the use of contemplative practices not only serves to create connection and belonging but also is laying the foundation for spaces where the hard work of creating inclusion and justice can happen. Though our work is still very much in progress, we document and share our experiences in the hope that they can be helpful to others interested in working towards more just and inclusive academic institutions.

We believe that a core goal of higher education is to foster the development of whole human beings, and we recognize that compassion is a clear, luminous, and dynamic force in our world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological, and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to

a fulfilled humanity. It is a path to understanding and is indispensable to the creation of a just, equitable, and peaceful global community. These values inform our interactions in this class and will guide our work throughout the semester.

—statement on compassion in our classrooms, developed by the faculty and staff of the Compassion Faculty Learning Community

The purpose of this paper is to present a case study of the collaborative creation of a contemplative community that aims to support the development of a more just and inclusive academic institution. To us this means an institution that prioritizes diversity—of thought, of demographic representation, of social location, and of professional rank; it also means an institution whose actual practices further belonging, compassion, ethical behavior, and transformative learning. We believe that the contemplative community we are building can help create the conditions for such a culture to develop and thrive on our campus, California State University San Marcos (CSUSM), a medium-sized public university. Our orientation has been process-driven, includes contemplative practices in decision-making and discussion, and, by fostering non-attachment, allows for openness to new ideas and acceptance that change is inevitable. In this paper, we describe the development of a contemplative community on campus, the process of building an organizational structure to support the goals of the planning group, and the ways that the group's activities serve the goal of fostering a more just and inclusive campus climate. Our work is based on the premise, best stated by Nelson Mandela (1994), that "if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love" (p. 542). Our focus is to provide tools for all members of the campus community to thrive and work together in harmony, a community that is capable of holding each one of us in compassion. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1957): "The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community" (p. 30).

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMind) has worked with universities and educators since 1997 through conferences, re-

treats, contemplative practice fellowships, summer sessions on contemplative pedagogy, and online resources. As a result of their efforts and those of other institutions, scores of universities and institutions now have centers devoted to contemplative practices and many more educators who are working individually and collaboratively to bring contemplative approaches to various disciplines, programs, and institutions. For example, Coutant and Caldwell (2017) describe the campus they studied as “loosely coupled, collaborative, bottom-up organizational system” involving a “key group of faculty, staff, students, and administrators” engaging in contemplative practices (p. 231). At James Madison University, researchers asked how a university moves from individuals engaging in various contemplative practices in their classes to “a campus-wide collaborative culture of contemplative study and practice” (p. 49) and described a process of formal strategic planning (Kipps-Vaughan et al., 2018). Napora (2017) describes efforts at SUNY-Buffalo to build and sustain contemplative educational approaches at that university, but also to collaborate with and create a bridge to other regional institutions. Our story chronicles yet another approach to building a just and compassionate campus community based on principles and practices of contemplative approaches, one which we call Mindful CSUSM. Our planning group currently has 22 members from across the campus including faculty, staff and students.

The authors of this paper comprise five members of our planning group. Marie Thomas is a professor emerita of psychology. She is a white, cisgender, heterosexual, upper-middle-class woman. One of the four founding members of the mindfulness group described in this article, she used contemplative pedagogical practices in her classroom from 2013 to 2016, when she retired. Jill Weigt is a professor of sociology, jointly appointed to the Department of Sociology and the Social Sciences Program. She is a white, cisgender, heterosexual, upper-middle-class woman who has used contemplative pedagogical practices in her classroom for the past four years. Jacky Thomas is an associate professor in the Department of Social Work. She is a white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-income woman who is particularly interested in secondary trauma and professional wellness among social workers (and

others) who provide direct services to persons who are suffering. Jocelyn Ahlers is a professor of linguistics in the Liberal Studies Department. She is a white, cisgender, heterosexual, upper-middle-class woman who has used contemplative pedagogical practices in her classrooms for five years and is currently in a mindfulness teacher training program. Ranjeeta Basu, professor of economics, is one of the four founding members of the mindfulness group described in this article. She is a first-generation immigrant from Mumbai, India. She is a cisgender, heterosexual, upper-middle-class woman who has used contemplative practices in her classrooms for the last seven years and is currently in a mindfulness teacher training program.

METHODS

In this paper we utilize case study methodology, “a research approach that is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context” (Crowe et al., 2011, p. 1, as cited in Schwandt & Gates, 2018). In particular, we use a qualitative descriptive case design to develop a holistic and detailed representation of our process to document our story for others who might benefit from its telling (Odell, 2001, p. 162). Descriptive case studies are not meant to be representative or “typical” but instead are helpful in providing a path for others to follow or learn from. Case studies are particularly suited to understanding relationships, behaviors, attitudes, and motivations within organizations (Berg, 2004).

To reconstruct and analyze our journey, this case study relies on multiple sources of data. We draw primarily from documents produced in the process of carrying out our work: institutional reports, minutes from Mindful CSUSM meetings, proposals for institutional resources, calls for FLC participation, workshop proposals, senior experience reports, and our mission and values statement. Additionally, we solicited oral and written narratives from key participants involved in the process of creating a contemplative community on campus. We analyzed FLC participant evaluations ($N=16$), open-ended questionnaires administered in one class in which contemplative pedagogy was used ($N=35$), and course evaluations from another ($N=30$). We also used data collect-

ed from a student survey ($N=481$). These data were initially coded using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990) and later more finely and concertedly coded based on our interests in building and fostering a just and inclusive community.

THE BEGINNING: A TALE OF TWO FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Our story starts in spring 2013, when one founding member of our group, a trained Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) instructor and a faculty member from Student Health and Counseling Services, offered an MBSR course for the campus community. The seed was planted. There had been individual efforts to offer mindfulness sats and workshops before then, but 2013 marked the year that these efforts started to take the form that they currently have on our campus. That summer, the three other founding members of our group attended the summer program offered by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. This week-long residential workshop focuses on the incorporation of mindfulness and contemplative pedagogy into teaching. It was a life-changing experience; the three of us returned to campus convinced that contemplative practices could help us create a learning environment where we felt a deep sense of connectedness to ourselves, to our students, to each other, and to the larger regional and global community. In short, we returned with a commitment to create a contemplative community on our campus. Not only did we begin incorporating contemplative practices into our own courses but all four of us also started offering a series of workshops to students, faculty, staff, and administrators on contemplative practices to foster deep learning, reduce stress, increase capacity for compassionate listening, and increase well-being. The response was overwhelming. Our sessions were always full, and the feedback was evidence that people on our campus and those at neighboring community colleges could see the value of these practices.

In fall 2015, two of the four founding members offered our first FLC, funded by the university's Faculty Center, around the theme of integrating contemplative pedagogy into the classroom. A group of nine faculty members were intentionally selected with the goal of creating a community across disciplines, ranks, and colleges. We chose *Contempla-*

tive Practices in Higher Education by Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush (2013) as the text for the FLC. We met monthly for a period of two semesters to practice together, discuss specific courses into which we would integrate contemplative pedagogy, discuss challenges and successes that we faced in attempting to incorporate contemplative pedagogy into our courses, and assess the efficacy of using these techniques across a wide array of disciplines. We presented our work at regional and national conferences.

This first FLC led to the development of the Compassion FLC the following year. We made a decision not to focus on teaching/pedagogy specifically in this next FLC, but to find a group of faculty who wanted to increase their own capacities for compassion as well as help increase compassion within the campus community. The leaders chose a text, Karen Armstrong's (2011) *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* as the FLC framework. As with the previous FLC, an invitation to apply was sent to the entire university faculty, and 13 faculty, representing every college in the university, agreed to participate. (In addition, one staff member asked to sit in on the FLC sessions and became a valued member of the group.) One of our initial activities was a group contemplative reading of a poem by the 14th-century Sufi poet Hafiz (trans. 2002), titled "With That Moon Language":

Admit something:
 Everyone you see, you say to them,
 "Love me."
 Of course you do not do this out loud;
 Otherwise,
 Someone would call the cops.
 Still though, think about this,
 This great pull in us to connect.
 Why not become the one
 Who lives with a full moon in each eye
 That is always saying
 With that sweet moon
 Language

What every other eye in this world
Is dying to
Hear.
(p. 175)

The poem is a beautiful reflection of what we found as we practiced in this FLC. We all have “this great pull to connect.” We are all vulnerable; we all suffer at times from self-doubt and self-criticism; we all swing between our need to affiliate and our need to isolate and protect ourselves. Karen Armstrong (2011) said that compassion is always, at its most authentic, about a shift from the cramped world of self-preoccupation into a more expansive place of fellowship, of true kinship (p. 77). Matthieu Ricard (2013) said that to integrate compassion into our lives, we have to cultivate it over long periods and anchor it in our minds through practice. We hoped that through this year-long intentional fellowship committed to communal study, discussion, and practice we would further integrate compassion into our lives and our teaching.

So, as FLC participants, we asked ourselves how we, during difficult times (like election season in the fall of 2016), could become people who are more open and honest and loving. The monthly FLC meeting provided a much-needed time-out-of-time and a safe space within our hectic lives to practice, take risks, learn from each other, and cultivate our own capacities for compassion. Additionally, most FLC members began incorporating compassion practices in our classrooms and collaborated on a voluntary syllabus statement which was adapted from Armstrong’s Charter for Compassion (2009) and made available for anyone in the university to use. (See syllabus statement directly under the abstract in this paper.)

Though the Compassion FLC officially ended after one academic year, nearly all members of the group decided to continue meeting monthly throughout the subsequent academic year, in order to further deepen our own capacities for compassion and to work on ways to bring compassion practices into the broader university community. This group, no longer a formal university-sponsored FLC, was run collectively by all members with the goal of developing our personal practices of compassion in order to better serve our university community. As most participants in the Compassion FLC felt that it was harder to generate

compassion and loving-kindness toward ourselves than others, we decided to use Kristin Neff's (2015) *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself* as our starting point; we then ended the year by reading Thich Nhat Hanh's (2013) *The Art of Communicating*, with the goal of expanding our ability to stay present and compassionate during difficult dialogue. The group was inspired to work on concrete ways to bring compassion into the broader university community. Some of the ideas we were able to implement in this regard included bringing the founder of the Forgiveness Project, Azim Khamisa, for the university-wide Arts and Lectures speaker series; facilitating difficult campus dialogues using compassion practices; and convincing the library to choose *The Book of Joy* by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu (2016) as its 2018-2019 Common Read book.

Not only did we successfully infuse contemplative pedagogy into our courses but we also created a community wherein faculty in these two FLCs and other faculty continued to meet on a regular basis to support each other and to promote these efforts on our campus. Evaluations from these first two FLCs highlighted the success of our efforts to foster greater community through contemplative pedagogy, across disciplines and rank and between staff and faculty and permanent and contingent faculty at the university. For example, one member of the second FLC, a white woman who worked as lecturer faculty, told us: "[B]eing part of the FLC made me more aware of thoughtful and like-minded faculty/staff throughout the university. When I see them at Senate or just in the elevator, I am reminded of that and it brightens my day." Similarly, one white female assistant professor felt that the FLCs, in addition to "legitimiz[ing]" her use of contemplative pedagogies in research and the classroom, brought people from across the University together:

Most importantly, the FLC was a refuge, a sangha, a community of people who shared similar values and who were willing to take the time to practice together and support each other....[The FLCs] have deepened and broadened my connection to the whole University. Because I have shared the intimate practice space with

faculty and staff from across all Colleges in the University, I feel more invested in programs I paid little attention to before; when I read or hear about news in the Math or Dance or Business departments, for example, I feel connected because I know and love some particular person there...

Academic environments can often foster separateness and isolation as we stay within our disciplinary silos. These comments from FLC participants highlight the way in which contemplative practices helped foster a sense of belonging and connectedness across colleges and disciplines.

COMMUNITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Beyond faculty and staff, the FLCs helped us to lay the foundation for community with our students through the pedagogical approaches we learned about, practiced together, and then brought into our classrooms. Because members of the FLCs came from departments across the university, students in a wide variety of disciplines have been exposed to contemplative pedagogy. One member of the first FLC, an Asian American female full professor, wrote in her evaluation: “Many of us have initiated mindfulness practices and introduced them to underserved (read skeptical!) populations like business school students.” Contemplative pedagogies have now been used on our campus (and, in many cases, continue to be used) in courses as diverse as computer science, social work, psychology, kinesiology, sociology, education, linguistics, economics, business management, global studies, child development, dance, music, and communication, with both graduate and undergraduate students. In course-specific evaluations, student comments suggest that contemplative pedagogy fostered connection within the classroom:

I felt closer and more connected to the instructor and my fellow classmates. The mindfulness practices also brought harmony and peace to the classroom.

[It] provided a warm, safe environment that students felt supported in. I liked that it reminded us that we are all

human and vulnerable, instead of denying this, these methods embraced that.

The use of contemplative pedagogy has also created openings within classrooms to have difficult discussions. The 2016 election season exposed tensions between students with different political opinions and threatened the safety and well-being of our Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) students. One faculty member was teaching a class focusing on gender and language during that semester; the dynamic of having a male and a female candidate for President for the first time in the nation's history was clearly a topic of conversation in the class, and feelings after the election ran high. Two days after the election, the professor opened the floor for students to talk about the election results. She reported that the conversation among students, many of whom expressed perspectives on the election that were completely at odds with one another, was deeply respectful, caring, and open. She believes that nearly three months of sharing mindfulness practices three days a week—practices which included mindful speaking and listening, as well as compassion practices—were fundamental in creating the space that allowed that conversation to happen. Semester-end student evaluations speak to this:

The class discussion, and incredible, safe, openness for students [were] amazing and made for an incredibly positive learning experience.

I like the structure of the class and how everyone can participate during discussion with an open mind. Mindful practices are very beneficial.

I felt more comfortable in this class as a speaker than I have in any college class.

Creating this contemplative and compassionate community among faculty, staff and students allowed us to make the transition from an individual practice to a communal one. Mindfulness practices can foster the ability to communicate with compassion; to listen to each other even

when it is painful to do so; and to allow us to speak our truth without fear. To that end, our contemplative and compassionate community provided spaces where we as a campus were able to use mindfulness practices to talk about issues raised by the #MeToo movement, the post-election, and President Trump's Muslim ban and anti-immigration policies.

USING CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES TO BUILD AN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

In the spring of 2017, the four founding members of our group recognized the need to institutionalize our efforts. Our first thought was to establish a center for contemplative practices. We developed a proposal and met with several administrators on the campus. Although they were broadly supportive of the idea, we soon realized that, unless we were able to obtain substantial financial support from a donor, our efforts would have to continue to be a grassroots initiative. Using the contemplative principle of non-attachment to outcome, we decided to change course and reached out to faculty and staff members who had been involved in the FLCs and workshops offered on campus, asking if any were interested in becoming part of a planning group.

We invited all interested faculty and staff to a half-day retreat where we discussed and used contemplative practices to reflect on the nature of this commitment. We started the retreat by guiding the group through a "*why am I here?*" practice in order to bring awareness to that which was truly of value to each of us. We then discussed the nature of the commitment in terms of time and effort. We felt that it was important for us as participants to align our actions with our intentions while honoring our multiple professional and personal commitments. We then guided the participants through an embodied practice of knowing how the commitment to join the planning group felt in our bodies, minds, and hearts. Then we invited the participants to sign the commitment card if they were ready to do so. 19 faculty and staff from across the campus signed commitment cards, and Mindful CSUSM was born.

We wanted to find a "home" for Mindful CSUSM within the university's organizational structure that would enable us to serve the entire campus community. This proved surprisingly difficult, however, given that the

institutional structure of our university is divided into areas focusing on specific constituencies, e.g., faculty and curriculum (Academic Affairs), students (Student Affairs), etc. The Office of Inclusive Excellence (OIE) on our campus reports directly to the President and, as such, serves the entire campus. In addition, our commitment to using contemplative practices to create a just and more compassionate campus community was a good fit with the OIE mission. To that end, we decided to collaborate with the OIE and committed to prioritizing activities that play a key role in advancing the goal of inclusive excellence for students and the faculty and staff that support them.

This commitment to using contemplative practices to foster justice and inclusion undergirded our process when we began the work of developing a more formal structure for contemplative practices at CSUSM. The planning group met regularly during the fall of 2017. The first and last items on the agenda for all our meetings were an opening and closing practice. This is typical of all meetings and events associated with Mindful CSUSM, as it is of the contemplative pedagogy practiced by group members who are teaching faculty. In this way, all such meetings and events become opportunities for the community to practice together, whatever the other goals of the gathering might be. Such practices ground the group in contemplative methods, bringing everyone's attention to the room and to what is in each moment.

Informed by those meetings, in January 2018, members of the group convened a half-day workshop whose goal was to articulate vision and mission statements for Mindful CSUSM. The visioning exercise, defined by the question "Who are we and what do we want to be?" was founded in contemplative practice. The group began with a lemniscate meditation, so termed to highlight the "contrasting aspects of focused and open attention" (Zajonc, 2008, p. 24). Members of the group alternately concentrated on the question and then relaxed their focus and attention, allowing the mind to simply rest in the present moment, in a practice which aimed to nurture "the receptive space that is required for new insights and creative initiatives to arise" (Zajonc, 2008, p. 24). At the end of the practice, members of the group freewrote the thoughts and inspirations that arose during the meditation before finally turning to

a group discussion. We observed and later recalled that this discussion was remarkable for its simultaneous passion and dispassion. Participants clearly cared deeply about the organization and its future success, and their ideas were a reflection of that passion. At the same time, the ensuing discussion suggested that no one was invested in specific suggestions, with the result that the mission and vision statements arising out of this practice remained (and remain) open to flux and change, not only in their writing but over time as different groups worked with them. Our experiences using lemniscate meditation highlighted the power of this practice, as observed by others in the third FLC who used it in the classroom. Its capacity to foster both depth and detachment deserve further investigation.

Our most current mission and vision statements are as follows.

- **Mission Statement:** Foster a community of awareness and appreciation for our own and others' experiences through contemplative practices, pedagogy, and research. Affirm that, in an increasingly interdependent world, learning to listen with kindness and curiosity generates compassion, connectedness, and the ability to see the world from diverse perspectives.
- **Vision Statement:** We aim to establish a center that will be the primary resource for the development of innovative contemplative pedagogical practices for the Southern California region and the California State University system. We are committed to nurturing an inclusive, compassionate, and connected CSUSM community through engagement in contemplative practices, pedagogy, and research. Recognizing the diversity and commonality of human experience, our center will be a communal fire—a warm, welcoming, safe space for all. This recognition is vital for creative generation, inspiring personal and societal transformation.

During the retreat, we also developed guiding principles which capture the sense that the overarching goal of the organization is to create the conditions for the university community to become a more just and inclusive space. The group framed them as a series of questions that

members could ask themselves in the future when trying to decide what projects to undertake:

1. Is this activity inclusive, accessible, and welcoming to all members of the community?
2. Does this activity inspire us to be fully awake and approach every moment with kindness and curiosity?
3. Does this activity expand our capacity to be vulnerable, to heal and be resilient in the face of human suffering?
4. Does this activity foster interconnectedness and help build a community based on mutual respect and compassion?
5. Does this activity have the potential to be transformative and to generate a kinder and more just world?

The mission and vision statements and the guiding principles were needed at that specific time because we had decided to work with a Senior Experience team from the College of Business Administration (CoBA) to help us develop a five-year plan for outreach, website design, and fundraising efforts. Senior Experience is a capstone project that all business students have to complete before they graduate from CSUSM. Students are put into teams of five members and each team is assigned to a client. The team works with the client to meet the stated needs of the client using their disciplinary expertise. Of importance to note is that the Senior Experience team itself represented the breadth of perspective championed by the planning group—three members were students in CoBA, while the others were students from departments in the College of Humanities, Arts, Behavioral and Social Sciences (CHABSS); they also had two advisors, one from each of the participating colleges. Furthermore, the cost of the Senior Experience team, typically borne by the organization where the students work, was underwritten by CoBA. In this way, the students in the team, and the colleges who participated in their work, also became integral to the fabric of Mindful CSUSM.

In order to better understand the student population we wished to serve, the Senior Experience team worked with us to conduct a stu-

dent survey in spring 2018. The results indicated that 74% of students surveyed expressed an interest in contemplative practices. In addition, the expressed need was higher among students of color than among white students: our campus is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), and the percentage of students identifying as Hispanic who expressed need was 81%, as compared to 66% of students identifying as white.

The guiding principles stated above became important touchstones as Mindful CSUSM worked with the Senior Experience team to articulate our fundamental objectives, which include:

- **Accessibility**: Create services and programs that are easily accessible to all CSUSM students, staff, and faculty. Work to ensure that the barrier of cost will not prevent participation by those who can least afford it but most need it.
- **Inclusiveness**: Create an inclusive space in which all members of the CSUSM community as well as the surrounding local community feel welcome, especially those from historically marginalized groups.
- **Interconnectedness**: Create services and programs that foster interconnectedness and reduce otherness.
- **Educational Effectiveness**: Create services and programs that promote academic excellence.
- **Transformative Education**: Offer activities that aspire to be transformative and move us towards a kinder and more just world.

We have worked with three Senior Experience teams. In each case, the students involved in the team participated in the contemplative practices that took place in our meetings, and they were encouraged to try to attend at least one of the regular mindfulness sits on campus. In this way, they, too, become part of the Mindful CSUSM community, and become more familiar with the use of contemplative practices within the context of the university. We have also had between 25 and 40 students each semester doing their service-learning assignments with us. In addition,

during the spring 2019 semester one student completed her internship course with us. Our intern and many of the students who worked with us are students of color. As stated earlier, we are fortunate to teach on a campus where the student population is majority Hispanic and majority first-generation college student. Their involvement in the development of our activities has greatly enriched our initiative. We are learning every day to listen without judgment and to be more open to experiences and voices different from our own.

FOSTERING A MORE JUST AND INCLUSIVE CAMPUS COMMUNITY

The interest in mindfulness and other contemplative practices has spurred a great deal of research and discussion in recent years about how to use these practices to foster social justice and inclusivity. For example, a team of researchers at Central Michigan University found that contemplative practices reduce implicit bias (Lueke & Gibson, 2015). Another study found that mindfulness practices can counter the negative impact of stereotype threat on the academic performance of marginalized students (Weger et al., 2011). As our own contemplative practices evolved, so did our thinking about social justice. Three members of our group attended the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE) annual conference in fall 2017 and came back with a renewed commitment to “radicalizing” our campus mindfulness efforts. Carla Sherrell and Judith Simmer-Brown (2017) pointed out that the mindfulness movement was mostly comprised of middle-class white women. We soon noticed a similar trend on our campus. We decided that we needed to be more intentional about reaching out to faculty and students of color. To that end, we began reaching out to the various centers and student organizations on campus, offering to provide sessions focused on contemplative practices to meet their specific needs. We have been gratified at the enthusiastic responses to our offers, and have conducted contemplative practice sessions with students in, to name a few, the Latin@ Center, the Gender Equity Center, the Pride Center, the American Indian Sovereignty Center, and the Tukwut Leadership Circle. We have also worked with student athletes, residents of university housing, and Latina sorority members. Our work with these students has focused

on using contemplative practices to build resilience, foster community, and reflect on self-identity. We have also been invited to participate in the annual social justice summit that is held on our campus for the entire campus community. As Mindful CSUSM's profile on campus grows, we receive more invitations to conduct workshops and contemplative practice sessions.

Another aspect of fostering social justice on campus is reflected in our awareness of the high cost of traditional mindfulness courses such as the eight-week MBSR course. Several of us thought about enrolling in MBSR teacher training so we could eventually offer the course to the university community at no cost. This proved to be unnecessary as we unexpectedly discovered someone who was looking for a way to do her practicum to complete her MBSR teacher training. With the help of CSUSM's human resources department, we organized the first free MBSR course on campus during fall 2016; we had faculty, staff, and student participants. We have since developed a relationship with the University of California San Diego Mindfulness-Based Professional Training Institute wherein their student teachers can complete their practicum with us for a modest honorarium. We have offered several MBSR courses and are currently supporting an eight-week course on self-compassion. Finally, three of our planning group members are currently participating in a mindfulness meditation teacher certification program, with the explicit aim of increasing our capacity to offer mindfulness courses at no cost.

We are continuing our conversation about how we might use contemplative practices in the classroom to promote social justice and inclusiveness. Magee (2017) has argued that contemplative pedagogy can play a central role in creating socially just and transformative classrooms. To that end, we offered a third FLC that focused on social justice and contemplative pedagogy in 2018-19. At first, we received applications only from white female faculty on our campus. As we had with the students, we decided to be more intentional about reaching out to faculty of color. As a result of our efforts we ended up with three faculty of color out of a group of nine faculty. Throughout that academic year, a group of nine faculty from a variety of disciplines met monthly to develop

contemplative practices designed to help create more inclusive, identity-safe student learning communities that have the courage and resilience to deal with issues of social injustice. We used Beth Berila's (2015) *Integrating Mindfulness into Anti-Oppression Pedagogy: Social Justice in Higher Education* as the text for this FLC. Some themes we explored in the FLC included developing the capacity to be vulnerable, self-aware, and reflexive about our own positionality; valuing the struggle together; and developing compassion, public love, and resilience. For example, in one of our sessions we used contemplative practices to explore our own privilege and lack thereof and how they played out in the FLC.

Because our third FLC has only recently concluded, it may be premature to measure the degree to which our work will translate into the reduction of suffering originating from race, class, and/or gender oppression. However, mid-year evaluations from the third FLC suggest that we are providing the tools to foster such work in multiple ways. First, participants report that the FLC has exposed them to contemplative practices and support in using them in the service of social justice. For example, two participants told us the following:

Participating in the FLC has given me a tremendous opportunity to feel supported by my colleagues who have the same vision and mission to help our students, peers, and community become more mindful, aware, and engaged in promoting social justice issues and learning about contemplative pedagogy. (White female lecturer)

The FLC has provided an incentive for me to focus specifically on contemplative pedagogy and social justice, and through this effort I have been able to focus my trainings and outreach in focusing on this across campus. I have tailored my outreach in these ways and I have gotten great feedback from students about how connected they felt to each other as a result of combining social justice with loving kindness meditation and exercises such as "Just like me." (Latino male working in student health services)

Others relayed that participating in the FLCs equipped them to better cope with inequalities manifesting at the micro level, in classrooms or one-on-one interactions. Our students often work long hours, balance multiple responsibilities, experience food and/or housing insecurity, and/or take course overloads to expedite graduation, all of which can lead to overwhelm and lack of focus, attention, and preparation in class. Practicing mindfulness has helped a number of participants to be calmer and more understanding in the face of these challenges.

Moreover, the FLC has helped participants train students to address oppression in the community; as one social work professor told us, “I see mindfulness and compassion strategies as survival skills. Social workers are tasked with being present, over and over, with people who are suffering, and doing so in such a way that they do not become numb or burned out.” Additionally, instructors learn about, practice, and apply techniques that facilitate discussions around difficult subjects related to social justice, such as family violence, racial wealth differentials, or gendered language patterns.

One goal of the third FLC was for the participants to work together, not only on their personal practices of contemplative pedagogy, but also on a group project whose goal was specifically to foster justice and inclusion on campus. As a result, the group discussed the best way to create affinity groups on campus. This arises not only out of a perceived need among our students, faculty, and staff, but also from the experience (mentioned above) of reaching out to organizations such as the Black Student Union, the Gender Equity Center, the Latin@ Center, and the Veterans Center to invite members to attend mindfulness events on campus. The response to such outreach has typically been to invite a Mindful CSUSM representative to conduct an event at the organization’s location instead. This is an important invitation to heed, reflecting as it does the importance of creating safe and welcoming spaces for practice, and the fact that, in the absence of an affinity group, such spaces tend to be overwhelmingly white, cisgender, straight, and abled.

The pedagogies emerging from our work in the FLCs, in turn, show early and positive signs of creating more just, inclusive, and transformative classrooms. At the conclusion of our third FLC, we asked students

in our classes a series of open-ended questions relating to mindfulness practices and classroom climate. Significantly, students of color frequently described feeling safer, more at ease, and more willing to engage in the learning process as a result of practicing mindfulness in class. For example, when asked whether he felt mindfulness practices helped to create a more inclusive classroom, one Black student replied, “I felt that the mindfulness exercises led to a classroom filled with students who felt comfortable having complex discussions.” Similarly, a Latina student, when asked whether the practices helped her to engage (e.g., verbally, intellectually, emotionally) more deeply with the course content, answered, “It made me comfortable and I didn’t feel so exposed when participating.” In some cases, students reported that these practices helped them to actively create more inclusive spaces, as one Latino student told us when asked whether mindfulness contributed to a safer, more compassionate classroom community: “Yes. This [mindfulness] helped in reminding myself to be more open-minded and tolerant.” Such answers are particularly noteworthy given that many of our students are the first in their families to pursue higher education and often feel a lack of agency and/or belonging in the classroom. These preliminary findings suggest that our mindfulness practices buoy inclusivity and the expression of diverse voices in the classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper has been to present the story of how a group of faculty, staff, and students have begun the work of introducing contemplative practices into the broader university community, with the long-term goal of fostering justice and inclusion for all members of that community. The fostering of a community takes place through shared contemplative practices; faculty learning communities focused on contemplative pedagogy, compassion, and social justice; and the use of contemplative practices to underpin and guide our decision-making. This is just one path; there are others. Early feedback from students and from faculty members involved in these initiatives suggests that the use of contemplative practices not only serves to create connection and belonging but is also beginning to create spaces where the hard work of creating inclusion

and justice can happen. This is a long-term project, and we still have far to travel.

We hope that others can learn from our experience that any endeavor, when placed within the context of a society in which racism, sexism and other forms of oppression are present, will necessarily replicate and reinforce those structures unless we are vigilant and intentional about our efforts to counter those forces. Contemplative practices offer us many ways of doing just that, offering love and compassion in the face of hate and fear; inclusion and acceptance in the face of intolerance; connection and community in the face of isolation and individualism; oneness in the face of divisiveness. If we had to offer one piece of advice, it would be to seek out and listen with an open heart and mind to the marginalized voices of those who have often been rendered invisible.

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