

# Journal of Contemplative Inquiry

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Volume 7 | Number 1

Article 1

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2020

## Editor's Preface

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### Recommended Citation

Sable, David and Sable, Trudy (2020) "Editor's Preface," *Journal of Contemplative Inquiry*. Vol. 7: No. 1, Article 1.

Available at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/joci/vol7/iss1/1>

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# The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry

Volume 7, Number 1

2020

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The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry  
<http://journal.contemplativeinquiry.org>  
ISSN 2333-7281 (online)

The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry (JOCI), founded by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, is an online peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary journal publishing articles, reflections, and book reviews to support the scholarly exchange of ideas regarding the understanding, development, and application of contemplative and introspective methods in all aspects of higher education. Our intention is to share knowledge that is theoretically grounded and practically useful for teachers, students, staff, and leadership in higher education and related contexts.

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cover photo by Jeremy Bishop

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## Editors' Preface

In this issue of the *Journal of Contemplative Inquiry* we highlight many ways that contemplative practices are deeply affecting awareness and attitudes toward social justice, grief during the pandemic, ideas about democracy, and even the whole purpose of higher education. We explore contemplative practices that engage embodied learning and trauma-informed instruction that focus on grief, democratic values, equality, mental health and self-compassion. We look outside the classroom, inside the classroom, into intergroup dialogue, online learning and virtual communities, leadership development, and sustaining practice over the long term. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures and our authors have clearly been responding with insight, creativity, and compassion.

We begin with a case study by Audrey Lundahl and AnaLouise Keating: "Embodied Pedagogies for Transformation: Bringing Yoga Strategies into College Classroom." The authors present their experience of working with students to intentionally connect personal transformation to collective transformation through what the authors term "resonance practices." Through the working with the body first "to discover how our bodies hold physical and psychological wounds," students open to embodied learning. Then, through invitational pedagogy and post-oppositional classroom techniques, students challenge hegemonic views of knowledge to understand the reality of social injustice through their interconnection.

In our 2018 issue, Valin Jordan wrote about embodied learning in "Can You See Me? Eye-Gazing: A Meditation Practice for Understanding." In this issue, Jordan expands on her experience and gives us "Yoga for Social Justice: Developing Anti-Oppressive Tools for Change through Yoga." In this profound, moving and beautifully written reflection, the reader follows the educator's journey and comes to feel deeply informed: "We haven't moved our gaze inward yet as a society. Not until we are truthful, not until we untangle the dualities that consume us will we be liberated."

In "Reflections on Developing a Campus-Wide Workshop Series on Contemplative Practice and Social Justice," Jennifer Daubenmier, Christo-

pher J. Koenig, Maiya Evans, Lisa Moore, and Michele J. Eliason share the development, execution, and evaluation of a campus-wide workshop series held at San Francisco State University (SFSU). While student responses were clearly positive, the authors themselves were also transformed and developed more than a dozen recommendations for faculty setting out to address social justice issues. Typical power hierarchies between students and faculty were blurred, allowing faculty and students to participate more equally as co-creators of knowledge.

In “World Café to Listening Café: Creating a Community of Listeners and Learners,” Mary Keator engages diverse students to develop the courage to share their perspectives in light of their own experiences using assigned texts. Then, they develop the capacity to listen to the perspectives of others without judgment: student-led, intersubjective listening. They become a community of students who learn to listen to the voices within the stories, to each other, and expand their worldview. Keator has also written for us before. In 2018 she wrote “Lectio Divina as Contemplative Pedagogy: Re-appropriating Monastic Practice for the Humanities.” Here she goes further and expands her approach to a very different type of practice that is now popular outside the university in community development and leadership training: World Café. The café model creates conversations “designed on the assumption that people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges.” Intersubjective dialogue (literally between subjects) uncovers an active, conscious, and communal field that people can access and cohabitate.

Laura M. Hill describes how she transformed her biology classroom in “Contemplative Pedagogy in Times of Grief and Uncertainty: Teaching in a Global Pandemic.” With explicit recognition of how differently the pandemic has affected different groups, she points to the fragility of the unsustainable systems abundant in modern society. Hill points out “If not engaged with intention and precaution, contemplative practices can cause further damage by exacerbating trauma.” Yet she remains a strong proponent of contemplative practice in the classroom and provides context for two specific practices with instructions in her appendices.

The question that Michelle Iten asks at the heart of “Contemplative Practices in Rhetorical Democracy” is “how can we understand contem-

plative practices as vital rhetorical action for advancing the democratic virtues of equality and human flourishing?" Iten includes contemplative practices in an upper-division rhetoric course in Civic Discourse, and examines contemplative practices from multiple angles. "I was teaching the importance of equality and participation, while on the other hand I was teaching and grading students on skills not equally accessible across differences in class, culture, temperament, and recourse to technology." In this brilliant essay, the author presents a description of three classroom contemplative practices that focus on equality, and explores how contemplative practices can function as rhetorical statements of resistance to anti-democratic forces.

The next two articles are very different in methodology but both deal specifically with mental health in higher education. Miriam Liss, Mindy J. Erchull, Daniel A. Hirshberg, Angela L. Pitts, and David Ambuel contribute "Effects of a Meditation and Contemplative Practice Course on College Students' Mindfulness, Self-Compassion, and Mental Health." Most of the quantitative research on mindfulness training in college students to date has focused on interventions outside of the academic context. The authors investigated the benefits of a course focusing on contemplative practices that included mindfulness-based practice inside and outside the classroom. They conducted three linked formal studies on the impact of contemplative practice in the classroom and used the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire to assess mindfulness in pre- and post test measures. They used formal descriptive statistics in their analysis, and their results support the hypothesis that contemplative practice in the classroom is beneficial to the mental health of college students. The conclusion provides useful guidance for future research.

In "Experiences of Mindful Education: Phenomenological Analysis of MBCT Exercises in a Graduate Class Context," the authors use a qualitative research approach, but it is no less rigorous and rich in meaning than the linked formal studies done by Liss et al. Anton Sevilla-Liu, Teruhiko Honda, Atsuko Mizokami, and Hiroaki Nakayama use phenomenological psychology both as a qualitative inquiry and a pedagogic tool in order to understand how a small but dedicated group of graduate students experience the exercises of the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy program



in a classroom setting. They posit in-depth understanding is necessary for both teachers and researchers of contemplative pedagogy to ensure that students are helped and not harmed by these practices, as well as to tailor teacher responses to the variety of individual experiences:

The analysis suggests that as mindful educators we need to take care in understanding the limits of our ability to express matters concerning the subtleties of how we pay attention, consider the complex interplay in non-clinical populations between “being mode” and “doing mode,” and how that connects to our interpretation of “non-judgment” in mindfulness.

Each of these dimensions is unpacked through the unique and subjective experiences of the participants in ways that will likely resonate across cultural differences for practitioners of mindfulness meditation.

Having examined mindfulness in higher education from quantitative and qualitative research, we turn to its application online. Many of us are now unexpectedly teaching online due to the pandemic. In “Learning Mindful Leadership in Virtual Spaces,” author Wendy Griswold teaches online, but does not leave behind development of the whole person. Through qualitative research using grounded theory with diverse participants, Griswold documents students’ experience in a developmental sequence of mindfulness practices and interactions that take into account peer-to-peer learning, developing a sense of community, and emotional intelligence.

In “Mindfulness Practices in Online Learning: Supporting Learner Self-Regulation,” authors Agnieszka Palalas, Christina Karakanta, Anastasia Mavraki, Kokkoni Drampala, and Anna Krassa use a collective autoethnography to explore effects of mindfulness practices integrated into an online Master of Education course at Athabasca university, a school that pioneered online learning in Canada and around the world. While the M.Ed. program is designed to address challenges typically associated with online courses, such as spatial and temporal distance, lower levels of synchronous interaction with peers and instructors, balancing flexibility and autonomy, as well as feeling isolated. The co-authors initially found

themselves overwhelmed by the pressures stemming from competing responsibilities and emotional demands of being an online learner. They report on how the mindfulness practices, introduced mid-way through the program, impacted their online learning experience and their personal lives beyond the program.

We conclude with two unusual book reviews. The first, a review of *Sharing Breath*, edited by Sheila Batacharya and Yuk-Lin Renita Wong and reviewed by Jacquelynne Boivin, is as much a moving personal journey of the reviewer as she read the book as it is a positive book review. The second, a review of *Reconstructing 'Education' through Mindful Attention* by author Oren Ergas, is written as a revealing interview by Karlheinz Valtl and Dominik Weghaupt. Both these books are relevant to the ways that contemplative practices are deeply affecting awareness and attitudes toward social justice, grief in the pandemic, ideas about democracy, and even the whole purpose of higher education.

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Editors

