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Lectio Divina: A Contemplative Pedagogy for Promoting Embodied and Creative Learning in Higher Education Classrooms

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Lectio divina offers tools for creativity and discovery that engage students in embodied learning processes. This article explores lectio divina as an approach to teaching and learning in higher education that cultivates students' multi-dimensional engagement in the classroom. Professors from English, Teacher Education, and Art Education share portraits from practice that successfully use lectio divina with creative work such as poems, story, and visual images on an intermittent basis in the classroom. These examples offer additional approaches to the use of lectio divina and provide practical glimpses into this contemplative approach as a creative and embodied pedagogy. Once a monastic practice, lectio divina has emerged as a contemporary contemplative practice that offers a pedagogical method aligned with many efforts in the 21st century to cultivate and value all dimensions of being human: mind, body, spirit.

Introduction

Formerly a somewhat obscure monastic practice, *lectio divina* has surfaced as a contemporary practice that provides a contemplative ped-

agogical approach. This approach resonates and aligns with many attempts in contemporary education to cultivate and value all dimensions of being human: cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and creative aspects. Additionally, *lectio divina* offers tools for creativity and discovery that engage students in an embodied process, one that supports an integrated approach to learning and human development. *Lectio divina* pushes against the narrowing of the curriculum and pressure on faculty to teach to the test. *Lectio divina* enables learning as discovery, not right and wrong, and guides students to recognize their learning and meaning-making processes. This article presents how professors in English, Education, and Arts Education use *lectio divina* as a conduit for integrating the creative arts, including poetry, creative writing, and visual arts, to strengthen and deepen learning in higher education classes.

We see *lectio divina* as an embodied process, one that provides “an adventurous journey that can facilitate learning modes which are capacious enough to hold heart and mind, thoughts and feelings” (Waxler & Hall, 2011, p. 100). Embodied learning, as we define it, is encompassing emotions that are registered in the body as part of the learning process. Empathy and the opening of the heart toward others are added benefits to this learning process. Each professor uses *lectio divina* to enhance different skills that offer richness across disciplines; this article bases its process on words, but the outcomes vary per discipline: in art education, the visual enhances the word, and in English and teacher education, poetry encourages generative creativity, empathy, and understanding difference. By integrating text with poems and visual images through the contemplative practice of *lectio divina*, students learn not only to recognize and value more than cognitive responses and analysis, but also to expand this sense of cognition to include experiential embodied knowing that embraces the whole person. There is a freedom when using *lectio divina* because the process allows for different viewpoints and perspectives that result in participants recognizing the learning process as discovery.

Secularized steps of *lectio divina* will be presented across different content areas followed by examples of using creative work for *lectio divina* on an intermittent basis in classes and by student reactions to a

process that recognizes their whole self. Jake Wright's (2019) description of employing non-creative texts for lectio divina practices in every class meeting throughout the semester differs from our process. He argues that using creative work makes it harder to keep students in the realm of non-cognitive responses and that training students to apply lectio divina by employing it every class period is most effective (pp. 87-89). We, however, do find profound success in the intermittent usage of lectio divina with creative works. For those who cannot integrate lectio divina into every class session, we offer an alternative and share examples of practice.

The Monastic Roots of Lectio Divina

The Christian tradition of lectio divina originated in the Jewish practice of learning scripture by heart. In Jesus' time, Jews memorized scripture, then repeated the words until they were taken into the heart (Paintner, 2011). Some 600 years later, in his Rule, St. Benedict, founder of the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino and father of Western monasticism, prescribed daily periods of silent, private "prayerful reading" (The Order of St. Benedict, RB.48.1). Benedictines regarded sacred reading as essential to spiritual life (Casey, 1996, p. 3). Before it was secularized, the Benedictine monks used sacred texts for their lectio divina practice. The reading of sacred texts via the lectio divina process continues, but some who have seen the value of this approach have removed the religious focus on prayer and communion with God and Spirit in the text. Instead, they apply lectio divina to non-religious texts as a form of close reading that recognizes the emotional-embodied reactions to passages. In this way, the dispositional element of the "open heart" differs from reading scripture in a monastery and reading a text or image in an academic, higher education environment, where a "critical mind" is more often cultivated as a dispositional approach. Similarly, lectio divina offers another contemplative practice through slow interactions with images.

Lectio divina literally refers to "divine reading," which originated as an approach for reading sacred texts. It has sometimes been described as a "methodless method" of prayer, alluding to the fact that it is less a learned way of prayer than one which spontaneously "'flows' toward contemplation as its destination" (Hall, T., 1998, p. 9). Contemplation is

an experiential and embodied process where students can encounter words or images with an open heart, or as St. Benedict described them, listening or seeing with the “ears of the heart.” *Lectio divina* offers a secularized approach to learning that allows for the emotional and spiritual to work in tandem with the cognitive, offering multiple perspectives to shape meaning and strengthen learning.

Towards an Embodied, Creative, and Contemplative Pedagogy

Contemplative practices, one of which is *lectio divina*, have been a part of many world spiritual traditions as a means to deepen interiority and seek additional methods of knowing through experiential and direct learning (Dalton, 2017). These practices can be broadly defined as “the ways that human beings, across cultures and across time, have found to concentrate, broaden, and deepen conscious awareness as the gateway to cultivating their full potential and to leading more meaningful and fulfilling lives” (Roth, 2006, p. 1788). Yet, institutions of higher education, as Zajonc (2010) makes clear, often lack a focus on education as the process through which people become more fully human and consciously or unconsciously tend to treat the student as a “vessel to be filled or a person to be trained” (p. 101).

Furthermore, contemplation as an active and experiential tradition offers opportunities to draw upon the creative impulse that originates in the soul, giving voice, color, texture, and shape to the human experience through self-expression. Dissanyake, in her book *What is Art for?* (1988), makes clear that “art has been a part of the fabric of humanity from the beginning of time . . . , [therefore] it must contribute something essential to human life” (p. x); our ancestors painted on the walls of caves, told stories, sang, and danced through ritual and celebration. Dustin and Ziegler (2007) discuss that for many artists, “the ‘making’ of art is, fundamentally, an exercise in contemplative seeing” and for such artists the practice of art is “inseparable from the practice of being alive” (ix). Offering creative practices in higher education settings enables students to engage in an experiential activity that affects them internally and touches upon emotion and thoughts while also offering a tangible object that serves as a source of self-awareness (Dalton, 2018). With contemplation and creativity combined in classrooms embodied, experiential learning is activated.

Franklin (2017) explains how arts-based contemplative practice cultivates a finely tuned intuitive awareness to “listen, hear, and honor intangible interior processes” (p. xxiv) that offer uniquely transformative benefits of contemplative engagement with creativity, materials, and processes. He further explains how “imagination is closely linked to intuition, insight, and therefore to empathy” (p. 9), and coined a term, “imaginal mindfulness,” to describe the process of looking nonjudgmentally with moment-to-moment awareness to greet and explore evolving narratives. Through the classroom examples that follow, these emerging narratives are discovered whereby students, through contemplative and creative engagement, make connections that emphasize cultivation of attention, nonjudgmental observation, and imaginal mindfulness.

Creativity is considered as the highest intellectual level of cognitive functioning (Rich et al., 2014), and yet this word conjures a variety of associations, myths, and meaning where definitions abound. One simply has to do an Internet search to discover the multitudes of research, definitions, and theories of creativity. For the purposes of this paper, however, presented here are examples where the focus is on the creative process as a tool for meaning-making. To explain, we distinguish the *process*, in which the goal is to simply observe the mind, emotional states, and body sensations while engaging in the creative process (e.g., painting, reading, writing, etc.); and the *product*, where the focus is on the resulting object that is the outward form of an inward expression of the artist’s contemplation. In both elements, the intention of the practitioner is the same: to engage with contemplative awareness aimed at bridging the inner world with the external world (Dalton, 2016). For students, placing the emphasis on process facilitates the letting go of the thinking mind and judgment and opening to embodied knowing that is felt within, whether bodily sensations, emotions, or thoughts. Creating an environment that encourages a contemplative, creative, and embodied learning cultivates a focus on the present moment, valuing the learning experience of each student. Allowing students to explore creativity as a process and not an outcome or final product can be liberating as it allows students to focus on the experience and less on a graded outcome. This idea of alternative seeing, ways of knowing, and understanding is at the heart of creativity.

Through creative exploration of words and images, students can draw on their own lived experience using symbolism, memories, or stories, among others, and use these with course content to make meaning.

Undoing Mind/Body Dichotomy and Valuing the Body in Learning

In the twenty-first century, Western education remains rooted in the mistrust of emotions and physicality that we inherited from interpretations of the seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes' decree that humans are reason and, therefore, bifurcates the mind and body into cognition and the physical, threatening the essence of being human—embodied knowing and feeling (Kerka, 2002). Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), among others, has challenged such dualism and argues that the body and mind are integral in understanding and experiencing the world. In fact, the body is the primary site of knowing. The dismissal of the body as a central location for learning and knowing continues to dominate in our educational system, despite evidence that learning requires embodied engagement, not just intellectual (Kerka, 2002; Damasio, 1999). Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue, "Our sense of what is real begins with and depends crucially upon our bodies" (p. 17). Moreover, through *lectio divina* as an embodied process, learners "grow to know themselves and become educated as human beings through the narratives they create in the interaction of body, mind, and environment" (Waxler & Hall, p. 106). The valorization of the mind over the body inherited from the Age of Enlightenment no longer takes center stage. The *lectio divina* process, in contrast to the dominant educational model, invites emotions and physicality, making it into embodied learning.

Waxler and Hall (2011) point out that in mainstream higher education, "learning is viewed as essentially a cognitive activity, which often leads to the manipulation of abstract ideas or the memorization of bits of information, but rarely to the wisdom of embodied knowledge" (p. 99). Embodied, creative and contemplative pedagogies help us to see ourselves and our students with renewed capabilities as developed human beings (Gradle, 2011) and *lectio divina* offers an adapted and secular process that allows students to move slowly, creatively, and with awareness engaging multiple dimensions of self for deepened learning.

Approaches that underpin embodied learning promote self-directed learning. This kind of learning stands in opposition to current educational, societal, and cultural systems. Many of these current systems are designed for learning based on reward; this means self-directed growth is hampered. *Lectio divina* as part of contemplative pedagogical practice makes room for the meaning-making that Zajonc identifies, helping individuals to speak with their own creative voice, recognizing what is new and dispelling previous assumptions that have been accepted as given.

Contemplative pedagogy as an embodied learning adopts first-person introspective modes of thinking that reshape definitions of knowledge and values inner states. "First person inquiry places emphasis on the wisdom within one's own personal experience, in the form of personal, nonverbal insight cultivated through specific meditative and artistic disciplines" (Gunnlaugson, 2006, p. 25). It is this approach, contemplative and creative self-inquiry through *lectio divina*, that serves to cultivate intuitive and experiential forms of knowing "characterized by wholeness, unity and integration" (Gunnlaugson, 2006, p. 26). In the process of first-person inquiry, such as *lectio divina*, the individual becomes aware of themselves not only as a cognitive being, but also as an emotive, physical being who reacts to texts and images beyond the intellectual level. As Sharan Merriam (2008) states:

the body has become more visible as a source of knowledge and site for learning. But it is not that the body is merely a vehicle for learning; it is what the body feels, the affective dimension of learning, that combines with the intellect in significant learning. (p. 96)

Contemplative practices such as *lectio divina* invite students and teachers to be present to their own lived experience with greater awareness, as well as having a deeper connection to the material they study by allowing meaning to emerge through embodied experience (Dalton et al., 2018). Furthermore, Merriam points out that "The mind, body, spirit, emotions, and society are not themselves simply sites of learning; learning occurs in their intersections with each other" (p. 97). Dalton et al. (2018) remind us that for students to fully develop as whole human be-

ings, they must be engaged both emotionally and cognitively. This education of the whole person requires embodied and creative learning approaches. Employing *lectio divina* is one avenue to engaging these intersectional points of learning.

The Four Movements of *Lectio Divina* and Classroom Applications

Before outlining the four movements of *lectio divina*, it is important to note that this is not always a sequential or automatic progression. Once we enter the first step we are in the flow of the experience, which has an inner direction; each experience will be unique and individual (Hall, T., 1988, p. 32). Often there is a dance between movements: silence may precede reading, words before contemplation; it is about being, letting go and receiving insights and revelation. *Lectio divina* is an attempt not to fabricate insight, but to engage and respond to the gift from its first invitation (Hall, T., p. 32).

The four primary movements of *lectio divina* are: *lectio* (attention), *meditatio* (reflection), *oratio* (receptivity), *contemplatio* (transformation) (Lichtmann, 2005; Paintner, 2011; Keator, 2018). In the following paragraphs, we provide a brief description of the four movements or phases in the *lectio divina* process (Dalton et al., 2019, pp. 4-5). After each phase, participants may share their responses to the text. Quite often a poem is the text used for *lectio divina*, however, any text will work as we have seen from Wright's (2019) use of philosophical texts, and our own use of images and fiction in addition to poetry and narrative.

Lectio is the first phase of *lectio divina*, and *lectio* simply means "reading." Reading the text out loud and doing it slowly defines this first phase. Listeners are instructed to "taste" the text for the first time, noticing the sounds and textures of words and their various meanings and nuances. Participants are asked to listen to the text being read aloud and to see what word or phrase calls to them or captures their interest. They may share what captured their interest on the first reading. Each phase of *lectio divina* provides opportunities for participants to share their reactions to the (re)reading(s).

In the *meditatio* or second phase, the text is read aloud again. Participants are then asked to see if they have any thoughts or reflections

that they can personally relate to the text. The facilitator may encourage participants to see what arises, what connections may reveal themselves between the participants' lives and (parts of) the text itself. Participants may volunteer to share their connections and insights.

The third phase is *oratio*. This phase calls for a response from the participants. The passage or text is again read aloud. After the reading, there may be a minute of silence. Often, the facilitator will give the participants a prompt for this *oratio* phase—this may be a question, or an idea provided to help draw out responses to the text. Alternatively, there may be a simple and open invitation for participants to respond to the text.

The fourth phase of *lectio divina* is the *contemplatio* phase. After the passage or text has been yet again read aloud, this *contemplatio* phase is about resting in the word and letting the text (or images) wash over participants. No responses are needed; it is just about listening deeply to the passage. This phase is a culminating phase where the participants might come to some wisdom or insight, or they may have some new awareness of self or of others. The *contemplatio* phase is passive on the outside, but it may be where some revelation or wisdom comes to the surface.

Lectio divina in the Classroom

Learning spaces where students engage with each other during the process of *lectio divina* create an environment that taps into students' physical, intellectual, and spiritual capacities. These spaces also enable students to share their reactions to the texts used for the *lectio divina* process. In doing so, students listen to each other and learn that they have common experiences or perceptions. This connecting in class shows students that they can look beneath the surface and empathize with other people. Keator (2020) writes about building on Brown & Isaac's (2005) World Café approach and bridging into a "Listening Café" using *lectio divina* with her students. She writes about *lectio divina* as a creative conduit: "It is through this process of attentive listening, dialogue, and communal sharing of life experiences that new insights arise . . . the participants begin to discover a greater collective wisdom together" (p. 79). In addition to building empathy through listening to others' experi-

ences, the embodied experience of *lectio divina* also builds community and helps participants uncover creative ways of understanding a text.

Lectio divina: Three Portraits of Practice

In recent years, *lectio divina* has been modified into a secular process of communal and contemplative approach to reading. *Lectio divina* as part of the learning process provides a conduit for embodied interaction where “education can serve as the core of a lifelong journey towards wholeness, rather than merely an accumulation of facts, figures, or skills” (Glazer, 1999, p. 3). In the following sections, we three contemplative practitioners from English, Teacher Education, and Art Education will describe ways in which we integrate *lectio divina* into our spaces of teaching and learning and how students experience this embodied and creative learning process.

An English Classroom: Story-to-Poem Conversion and Lectio Divina

As Gunnlaugson (2006) explains, “Given that our bodies live within the spatial-temporal horizons of the present moment, developing the capacity for proprioception of thought helps learners experience a more integrated sense of self and expanded horizons of personal identity” (p. 5). This “heightened sense of self” and identity connect to the process of recognizing one’s embodied, emotional, and associative reactions to a text prior to engaging in cognitive processing. As students navigate the steps of *lectio divina*, they begin to realize the emotional and personal connections that they have to the word choices, figurative language, and images in a text.

My use of *lectio divina* is in university English classes, some for majors, but most often, for general education credit. Primarily, the students at the small university where I teach are serious and anxious to perform well in school. In fact, despite my teaching method being Socratic, students often will hesitate to participate for fear of being “wrong.”

I have been using *lectio divina* with story-to-poem conversion for a few years now intermittently in all of my classes. For this example, I will focus on only one instance of using *lectio divina* in a survey of British literature class with a mix of English majors and general education credit

seekers. The class length was 75 minutes twice a week. About a month into the class and after a disastrous session (because I believe a class in which I do most of the talking is a disaster), I decided the time was perfect for introducing students to lectio divina plus storytelling-to-poem conversion. I use these exercises when I want to move students beyond the status quo and shift their usual processes of reading an assignment to the higher level of metacognition about the feelings in their embodied responses and associations that they have with the material in the text.

Legitimizing the awareness of and validity of their emotional associations with language validates their ability as a reader to see their non-cognitive responses to language as an influence on their processing of text. The connection of emotion with the body increases the impact of their reactions to a text. Encouraging students to recognize that they have emotional and associative responses to a reading assures them that they have legitimate experiences which help them process their reactions to a reading. Instead of the separation of body from cognition, students recognize that the emotional and embodied responses are integral to their cognition. In other words, they are learning with their whole person, as Glazer (1999) advocated.

The class involves guiding students through the four steps of lectio divina and following that by student pairs sharing a story that relates to their associations and reactions to material in the poem we read. Students had recently finished engaging with William Wordsworth's poem the title of which we shorten to "Tintern Abbey" and "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" as part of a two-week focus on Wordsworth. The next reading was his "Ode: Intimations of Immortality." They read these texts outside of class as homework. We then discussed the texts in a Socratic format during class time.

In between these rather long poems, they read Wordsworth's "My Heart Leaps Up," the end of which provides an epigraph to the "Ode." The primary image in the poem is a rainbow. Since the text is short, students took turns reading it out loud before each step in the lectio divina process. The first and second steps of lectio divina, lectio and meditatio, which ask participants to note words that stand out to them and then their feelings and personal associations with the language in the text,

enabled students to recognize that they had family and childhood emotional responses to rainbows. In step three of the process, the oratio, students were encouraged to share their responses to the poem. Some shared their family stories about rainbows such as pots of gold at the ends or God smiling or simple awe. A few shared that they saw their parents not expressing as much excitement as they did about rainbows. The variety of perspectives on rainbows demonstrated that students shared common views as well as a richness of responses across their life experiences. They expressed these reactions voluntarily to the whole class.

After the fourth reading of the poem, students paired up to tell each other a story about their connections to the elements in the poem. They could not take notes as they listened. They had to be present, embodied in the process of deep listening and sharing. Then they each wrote a poem in reaction to the story they heard or a combination of their stories. (For more about this process, see Hoyser, 2019; Hall et al., 2016). After we completed the debriefing and sharing of their poems on a voluntary basis, we proceeded to discuss the implications of Wordsworth's words at a cognitive level. They could identify with Wordsworth's emotions, and then recognize the import of what he was expressing as two of several possible readings: he wants to die if he loses his ability to be excited about nature and the adult can learn from the child's spiritual connection to nature.

In a simple survey after the exercises were completed, students shared some stunning reactions to the lectio divina and story-to-poem conversion. One said that she enjoyed connecting to her student partner because it made that fellow classmate a person who had family and feelings. Prior to that, she had not really thought about others in class as being humans, despite my use of small group activities prior to this lectio divina approach. For a generation that has grown up connecting to screens rather than people (Wolf, 2018) and in academic settings that valorize tests as measures of knowledge, as Lewis (2006) has argued, lectio divina opens a realm of human connection and consciousness that society badly needs. Recognizing that people share similar reactions to a text and have diverse reactions as well helps students develop empathy and recognize that their cognition is also connected to their embodied, emotional reactions. As a result, they open their hearts and minds to others.

Another student reaction revealed during the debriefing and echoed by many students was that they felt as if there were no right or wrong answers to their readings. This liberation from a test mentality in which they have only correct or incorrect answers freed students to respond in class from then on with their insights into the poetry that we read. They could see that connecting their emotions and their embodied experience with their intellectual processing of a text helped them approach a text without fear of being incorrect. Removing that initial tension toward reading for class enabled them to engage the text with an increased sense of empowerment as a reader and shift them from vessels that receive information poured into them, as Freire (2004) describes educational practice, to active readers. In other words, lectio divina encourages the intersection of the physical, intellectual, and spiritual that students need for holistic learning and broadens learning from simply studying for a test.

In the future, because of the stunning revelations from the student about recognizing, through this process, her fellow classmate as being human, and the students' sense of freedom from a fear of right or wrong answers, I will introduce lectio divina earlier in the semester and continue to intersperse the activity. Instead of "brains on sticks," as Lewis (2006) describes them, texting their friends rather than talking to classmates before class, student reactions to the process of lectio divina and story-to-poem conversion resulted in an enduring sense of community and whole learning. Without a doubt, I will continue to intermittently use lectio divina along with story-to-poem conversion in my classes. I learned from this process to encourage students to acknowledge that their initial responses to a reading include their embodied emotional reactions as well as their cognitive understanding. Furthermore, I realized the intensity of student worry about giving a "wrong" answer.

A Teacher Education Classroom: Using Lectio Divina for Embodied Creative Learning and for Understanding Difference

I teach an undergraduate course that celebrates embodied learning and promotes educational awareness, creativity, and understanding difference. The course title is Perspectives on Education, and it is a "feeder"

course for our 4+1 Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) Program. There are three overlapping yet distinct modules designed for this course: 1) Philosophies of Education; 2) Contemplative Education; and 3) Impactful Education.

In the first module, Philosophies of Education, readings draw upon the ideas of educational thinkers from the U.S. and abroad, giving students an introduction to different ways of thinking about and “doing” education from the United States and around the world. I begin to set the stage for getting students to build trust and respect for each other as they interact with each other and with the readings.

In the second module, Contemplative Education, I introduce students to *lectio divina*. We read several articles about contemplative practice and its integration into teaching and learning. Of the twenty-eight class meetings, four sessions are dedicated to the practice of *lectio divina*. Using *lectio divina* intermittently, as a contemplative learning practice, allows students to begin to understand pedagogy as an embodied and creative process.

In the third module of the course, Impactful Education, I hold a class session at a local middle school, one where the undergraduates have been conducting classroom observations. I use *lectio divina* for this session with the Robert Frost poem, “The Road Not Taken” (1969). I choose this creative text and the embodied process of *lectio divina* to help these undergraduates recognize that learning can evoke emotional and creative experience(s) for themselves and others. It also helps them to understand difference. At the school, we arrange to have chairs set up in a large circle on the stage of the school’s auditorium. As undergraduates and middle-schoolers enter the learning space, they each get a handout with the Frost poem, find their places around the circle, and the learning process begins.

The format for *lectio divina* in my class sessions and the session at the school both involve four steps. First, for the *lectio* phase, the poem (or passage) is read twice aloud with a pause after the reading. Each participant is asked to choose a word or phrase that sparks their interest. They are asked to share the word or passage chosen. Next, in the *meditatio* phase, students would again listen to the passage or poem read aloud.

Then, after a pause, participants are asked to again choose a phrase. This time they are asked to share a thought or reflection that is evoked by their chosen word or phrase. Participants say aloud their chosen words or phrases and share what these evoked. Again, the group listens to all responses. In the oratio phase, the passage or poem is again read aloud (always asking for new and willing readers), and participants are asked to make some kind of a response. This could be in the form of a drawing, a short reflection, a poem, or any other form of response. Again, participants share their responses with the group. The last phase, contemplatio, just asks for one more deep listening of the piece. No responses were required; students are instructed to simply rest in the word.

As an assignment after the “The Road Not Taken” session, undergraduates were asked to write a reflective piece on how they experienced lectio divina as an embodied and creative learning process. What follows are some of the excerpts of what these undergraduates shared from this reflective writing assignment.

One undergraduate student shared this:

The lectio divina mindset for consideration when learning is one of the most powerful yet simple ways to absorb writing, especially shorter pieces...lectio divina reminds us to slow down and fully absorb what would be most meaningful to us.

This student resonates on how the slow embodied process of lectio divina allowed for learning as a kind of “absorption.” Through this process, the student was able to make personal and creative meaning of the lectio divina experience with Frost’s poem.

Another student reflected on lectio divina as a reading process:

With regards to lectio divina and its steps, I feel that each step allowed me to engage with the reading in a unique way...Although everyone has their own set of lived experiences and their own unique interpretation, many people chose similar words and had similar reasons for picking them.

Lectio divina allowed this student to engage in and reflect upon the communal reading and learning process itself, and how the experience of hearing others' ideas and responses can have both similarities and differences in the creative ways that meaning is made.

Another student shared a different perspective:

There was a joy found in the commonality of the human experience...Oratio and contemplatio both helped to solidify the peace found in the previous steps as well as bring it back to a personal level where you are crafting your own personal response and then sitting and resonating on that and taking it in as the session comes to a close. So, in a way I also felt the sense of a journey through lectio divina. It starts out on an individual level and very personal, moves to a collective resonance and unification in the commonality of the human experience, and then brings itself back and grounds itself once more on the individual level.

In the excerpts from students' reflective writings above, there is emerging evidence for lectio divina as an embodied and creative pedagogy. Some shared feedback about how they experienced specific phases of the embodied practice of lectio divina, while others shared broader views on the implications for lectio divina as a creative conduit for understanding texts. As students participate in the conversation that grows through the lectio divina process, they begin to "create an imaginative space, not quite in the literary text, not quite around the circle, but in that dream world of language itself" (Waxler & Hall, 2011, p. 63). Although all students read the same text, each reading is different. Students participate in the same flow of conversation, but each person makes sense of their embodied experience(s) and hears the varied responses of others. Creative meaning-making emerges from and through this embodied learning experience, and lectio divina nurtures a rich conversation with the text, with themselves, and with each other.

An Art Education Classroom: Engaging in a Creative Practice using Text and Image

“When we consider creativity, we are considering the most elemental and innermost and deeply spiritual aspects of our beings. Creativity constitutes the very meaning of being human, and our powers of creativity distinguish us from other species” (Fox, 2004, p. 2). In the course I teach entitled Creativity and Social Emotional Learning, a required course for pre-service K-12 art teachers, I introduce students to the *lectio divina* process and ask them to read assigned course material through the secular lens of sacred reading, or slow reading. I encouraged students to read the text slowly and let a word or phrase or even a paragraph “illuminate or shimmer” for them. Once students have read the article they are asked to engage in a creative and artistic response in their visual/verbal journal. A visual/verbal journal is a type of journal that shows visual thinking; both the image and words have equal importance. The aim was to find meaning in the words and explore content further through a visual response by creating a mixed media visual/verbal journal page using a range of materials and processes: collage, watercolors, found papers, pencil, markers, ephemera, etc. The journal pages allow students to think about their thinking in a creative and intuitive approach, and for the teacher these journals can provide insight into students’ emotional and cognitive experiences in ways words alone could not.

These weekly reading assignments became an opportunity to find phrases or words that resonated and provided insights that could shape their future pedagogical practice because students spent time with words, savoring, and diving deeper into the required reading content. Several students commented on how a certain educational theory or approach resonated with them and they would like to apply it in their future classroom; oftentimes reading was cursory prior to utilizing a *lectio divina* approach. Upon completion of the visual/verbal journal page I required students to write a one-paragraph summary that detailed what personal understanding emerged for them through this process and how it could connect with a pedagogical practice in their future classroom.

Student responses demonstrate a range of experiences that illustrate how learning emerged through a slow, contemplative, and creative

inquiry. What follows are some example entries from my students' journals that speak to cultivating awareness through lectio divina and the visual/verbal journal process:

Time is also altered for me when I am in a place of profound engagement with text. I lose track of time and time does not exist in the way it normally does. It is incredibly liberating to not feel bound by the confines of time or living from a scheduled and hectic minute to minute lifestyle as is usual for me during the week.

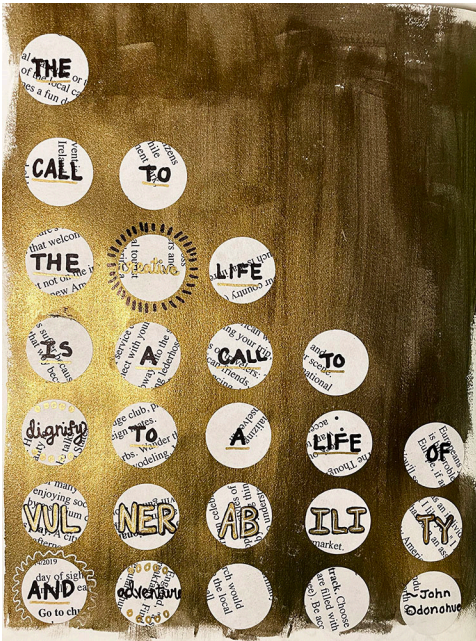
Allowing students to read assigned course articles deliberately cultivated a new understanding of content. Furthermore, students experienced a shifting awareness with time as they became more present with words, discerning meaning and making connections. By creating a visual journal page using both text and imagery, students' content knowledge was reinforced and at times strengthened; always, creative expression aided meaning-making.

One student spoke to a new awareness she has with words. Instead of reading text comprehensively to discern meaning, she experienced how a few words or a phrase can provide insights, connect with a personal experience, and evoke a visual response that deepened learning:

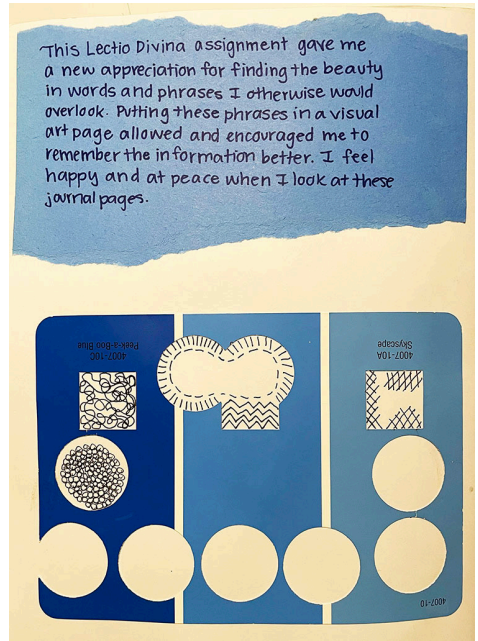
Lectio [divina] also provides an interesting kind of awareness to me. After considering a piece of writing and creating a lectio [divina visual response] from it, I rarely remember the bulk of the work; lectio [divina visual response] allows me to zoom in on a tiny passage and pick it apart without being overly influenced by the rest of the work.

Another student explained,

Lectio divina gave me a new appreciation for finding the beauty in words and phrases I otherwise would overlook. Putting these phrases in a visual art page allowed and encouraged me to remember the information better.



Student Visual/Verbal Journal #1



Student Visual/Verbal Journal #2

As evidenced by the comments and visual responses, students gained new information and insights by integrating lectio divina in their visual/verbal journals to increase understanding of assigned course reading as it related to pedagogy and practice in art teacher education. These pre-service teachers personally experienced and understood the value of reading slowly, cultivating mindfulness, encouraging silence, and focusing on process over product as valuable to the learning process; it supported their learning and in turn they understood how it could support their future students.

Visual art experiences involve multiple aspects of sensory experience, enabling pre-service art teachers to experience body knowledge, intuitive wisdom, direct experience, and emotions as valid ways of knowing that aid the cultivation of one's interiority. Through contemplative and creative engagement with materials, processes, and text, these future art educators gained opportunities to learn experientially and engage

in self-inquiry through creative and artistic processes. By opening up to what is being offered through images, colors, and sensory awareness, experiences in the arts can increase students' understanding of their inner and outer worlds and balance the precision of analytical thinking with affective knowing (Dalton, 2018). In this sense, the process of learning involves "looking not only at the outer data but also opening into ourselves" (Hart, 2008). At the core of artistic experience and central to self-awareness is first-person inquiry, enhancing the conventional educational landscape with its focus on external content.

Final Thoughts

As educators in higher education settings all three of us recognize and adopt the words of Parker Palmer, author, educator, and activist, who explains, "we teach who we are" (1997, p. 15). Teaching requires that we take responsibility for what, how, and why we teach, and who we are as teachers. Opening the door to contemplation through *lectio divina* and creative practices facilitates our own reflection as teachers and strengthens our interiority that deepens content knowledge, relationships with students, and self-awareness of the "I" who teaches. We know these practices work to shape and strengthen our interiority and pedagogical practices, and we offer these to our students in the hopes of offering valuable tools to cultivate their whole capacities.

Our beliefs align with Zajonc (2010, 2013) and other aforementioned educators, theorists, and practitioners who argue for a more integrative approach to education, for learning that is grounded within individuals and relationships among individuals (Klein, 2005; Pianta et al., 2012). Educational approaches should create openings for teachers and students to explore universal and collective values that support the whole person: cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and creative aspects. While other attempts to address improving education focus solely on the curriculum itself, our work weaves together creative and embodied dimensions of teaching and learning. Without attention to myriad dimensions of the whole person, the educational process is rendered incomplete and overlooks the complexity of what it means to be human.

Here are our pedagogical wishes: May we use classrooms as spaces for embodied learning that underline intellectual discovery and creativity. May we open our textbooks, our notebooks, and ourselves—alongside our students—with renewed sensibilities and courageous capabilities. May we encourage students and ourselves to value the intersection of body, mind, heart, and emotion. Using *lectio divina* with our students provides a path toward accomplishing these wishes.

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