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Preface

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Preface

In this issue we explore new opportunities and approaches to deep-seated problems in academia that pre-date the pandemic: the knowledge and wisdom we are trying to convey is not always accessible to students and sometimes we are perpetuating a culture of disengagement. These problems became acutely highlighted over the years of the pandemic, and our authors demonstrate the remarkable resilience that emerged in classrooms, online, and in relationships that extend beyond the academy. Through application of their own contemplative practice each of them reengaged with compassion and creativity in their own way.

In the reflection by Ana Fonseca Conboy, **Transition in the Era of a Pandemic: An Exercise in Mindfulness**, readers will resonate with how COVID-19 took over the world in March 2020 and overturned our practices, customs, and perspectives. She writes of a "...reawakening of the necessity to focus on the present moment, intentionality, and a non-critical attitude towards myself and others. Before each class, I consciously took a moment of *statio*, of intentional pause and silence to prepare and to be present before clicking on the 'Start meeting' button on the Zoom platform." But for Conboy, mindfulness is more than silent meditation or stillness; it leads to actions that show courage, vulnerability, and humility: "I shared with my students that I had lost my last living grandparent in late March. The pandemic had made it impossible to travel overseas to be with family, as they grieved and were deprived of the possibility of a proper funeral." This reflection explores how the transition to remote learning was lived by an instructor and her students of French at a liberal arts institution in the Midwest. It illustrates that as we live through life's challenges, we find opportunities for personal and communal growth.

In the next reflection, Neill Korobov advocates for the integration of poetry into our teaching as part of a contemplative orientation to pedagogy. In **Poetry as a Contemplative Pedagogical Practice**, Korobov discusses poetry both as a way of awakening a relationship with truth that lies at the periphery of our awareness and as a form of language that disarms us and opens the way to a robust form of vulnerability and

courage. “Good poetry and good teaching are both forms of engagement that invite us to move elegantly between noticing the peculiarities of a given topic or moment in time and the recognition of broader universal truths.” As a prime example, the poem “Living Together” by David Whyte is explored to illustrate the ways poetry can invite us to think about teaching as a unique type of apprenticeship, as a call to maturity and love, and as a unique form of ripening. What unites these themes is the clear, committed, and whole-hearted call to multi-level engagement through the instructors’ and students’ participation.

In the critical and challenging theoretical essay, **Transformative Nonattachment: Unraveling the Prison of Perfection in the Neoliberal Academy**, readers are asked by author Charles T. Lee to look at how the current state of academic capitalism leads faculty to live in a self-imposed prison of perfection that is detrimental to our holistic well-being. Imposed academic goals of faculty performance and productivity are questioned. Lee discusses how the logics of academic capitalism are typically embedded in the evaluation of faculty performance in areas such as research and teaching. Drawing on the concept of nonattachment from the Buddhist tradition and mindfulness practices, Lee introduces the term *transformative nonattachment* to signal an internal political way to dissolve and transform this mental prison of perfection. We may use the practice of transformative nonattachment to ground our intellectual work, thereby undoing our conformity to such logics and unlearning “perfection” in the everyday life of academia. This intervention adopts a two-pronged approach, working both from the inside out (i.e., working on our body-mind to effect change in the external world) and from the outside in (i.e., working on the external world to generate effects on everyone’s body-mind).

In **Slow Looking: Powerful Tool of Mindfulness to Facilitate Transfer**, Young Kyung Min and students faced more than the pandemic. For them there was also an intense period of danger and extensive smoke from raging wildfires followed by a mass shooting in a nearby grocery store. Yet Min illustrates how teaching through a “slow looking” pedagogy helps students of Generation Z who have grown up in a culture of distraction and multitasking. Students apply mindfulness not

only to cultivate the positive habits of mind that can enhance their academic performance, but the dispositions that lead to physical and mental health during pandemic remote learning. Their experience revolves around important lessons that COVID has taught the world: “thank you for stopping us and making us see how lost we were in the busyness of our lives not having time for the most basic things.” Drawing on students’ practice of slow looking in freshman writing courses, Min highlights the insights of slow education that embrace the “whole student” (bodily senses, emotions, and mind). This approach expands the significance of reconnecting cognitive learning with an affective dimension. Once the cognition and affect are recognized in the context of improving learning it transfers to other contexts.

In another approach to pedagogy, **Dialogic Reciprocity and Contemplative Mentorship**, Beth Connors-Manke theorizes mentorship philosophically and contemplatively by considering Martin Buber’s understanding of the *I-Thou* meeting. While widely recognized as an important part of education, mentorship is rarely presented as a pedagogical practice. Connors-Manke offers a taxonomy of mentorship, arguing that organic-intentional mentorship can recognize students’ personhood and prefigure the *I-Thou* encounter. “If we do not recognize and openly affirm our students’ capacity for agency, we have little of value to offer them.” The final sections offer praxis-oriented discussions on listening and grading as a way to prepare students for intersubjective encounters.

Focusing next on what performance means in teaching, we turn to Amy Pucino’s descriptive case study **Lessons from the Blurring of the Frontstage and Backstage: Community College Personnel’s Experiences and Use of Contemplative Practices During the Pandemic** using Erving Goffman’s theory of dramaturgy. Goffman emphasized the *frontstage* and *backstage*. The frontstage is where the performance occurs. “Participants have a good idea of what will be performed: students will sit in chairs facing the professor, and each person will perform according to their socially defined roles... With the many rules of the frontstage, actors need rest. When a professor returns to her office and students leave the classroom to go home for the day, they leave

the frontstage and move to the backstage or off stage altogether... Socially defined behavior standards appropriate for the frontstage and backstage of college settings changed during the pandemic.” When frontstage moved online in 2020, there was a blurring of the public and private spheres. Via semi-structured interviews, this research explored the pandemic and contemplative practice experiences of 23 faculty and staff at a Mid-Atlantic, multi-campus community college. The research shows the impacts the blurring of public and private spheres and how participants found contemplative practices useful when integrated throughout the workday. Both Pucino and participants discovered new and creative ways to incorporate contemplative practices in campus and virtual environments. Pucino and the faculty she studied are now advocates for contemplative practices as necessary for work.

While people interested in mindfulness can access teachings in many ways, the benefits of learning mindfulness through meaningful interactions can enhance a broader awareness of relationships. In the article **Teaching Mindfulness Across Generations: A Case Study**, author Mary Ann Erickson points us to intergenerational groups and how they can provide an important context for increasing generational awareness and decreasing ageism, even during pandemic restrictions. In this case study, students and elders participated in a semester-long class about mindfulness including reading, discussion, and practice. The quantitative and qualitative data in this research show that an intergenerational learning community is not only effective for teaching about mindfulness, it can serve to enhance understanding across the generations.

Although higher education often seems to be a world of its own, in **Transformation Literacy to Transformative Unity: A Noble Experiment from Me to We**, Lisa Napora, Rosa D’Abate, Layla Providente, and Angeline Cooper present a learning journey that led to co-creating a unique non-profit organization. The Mindfulness Alliance is committed to applying mindfulness to social change among educators, mental healthcare workers, and business and legal professionals. In 2016, The Mindfulness Alliance was conceived after a successful inter-institutional conference on mindfulness and health. Participants were inspired to build a cross-sector initiative including mindfulness professionals in K-12, health care, and higher education. In 2020, as the pandemic shifted ev-

everyone's lives, The Mindfulness Alliance initiated a collective practice space called Community Mindworks, an online monthly public offering supported by a nine-member group of women and men ranging in age from their 30s to 70s, members of the LGBTQ+ and Black communities, people with disabilities, a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic class backgrounds, and diverse contemplative traditions. In this article Napora and her colleagues share how collective intentions and commitments to awareness-based social change can address such questions as, "How do we develop the transformation literacy needed to meet our urgent intra- and interdependent societal challenges?" This descriptive article shares the underlying principles, practices, and processes used for co-creating new ways of organizing, challenging our inner and outer inherited structures, and building our connectedness. Napora and colleagues trace the journey from me-to-we and share insights regarding the "me-work" required in doing interconnected "We-work." They share the practices and processes used for challenging their inner and outer inherited structures, and for building connectedness. Through this journey The Mindfulness Alliance develops new common language and experience to reposition their inner knowledge and inner work as valuable and critical 21st century skills, relevant within higher education and across institutional domains.

This is a volume replete with suggestions and perspectives for all of us, seasoned and new, who teach. With sensitivity to intercultural communication, the mental health of faculty and students, and the need for change, each author inspires us to look, listen, and inquire to discover next steps in each moment of our journey.

With best wishes for health and well-being,
David Sable
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Editors