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Elective #5:

Literature Review and Analytic Essay (parts 1 and 3)

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Literature Review

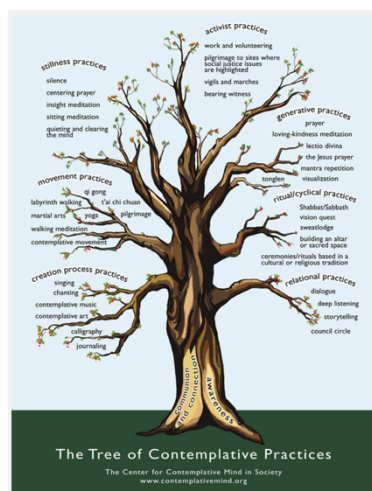
This review examines research on the use of contemplative or mindfulness teaching methods in college classrooms. It examines whether including these practices affects students' academic performance at community colleges. The review also asks if practicing contemplation makes students more thoughtful and considerate. Additionally, it explores the experiences of students who have used contemplative teaching methods.

Mindfulness, or contemplative teaching, is about training the mind using simple, secular methods. It helps develop focused attention and a calm, clear awareness of the present.¹ This training can promote ethical behavior by encouraging a healthy mind, leading people to naturally recognize what is right and act accordingly.² The approach also aims to answer practical questions through a scientific perspective.^{3,4}

- What are the specific, measurable effects of mindfulness on cognitive and emotional health?
- How can mindfulness be integrated into curricula (for example, STEM, physical education) to improve learning outcomes?
- Which components of mindfulness (for example, attention monitoring versus acceptance) are responsible for specific mental health benefits?
- How can mindfulness practices be adapted safely and effectively for different populations and contexts?⁵

I intentionally (unintentionally) position the phrase

contemplative practices as an umbrella term that includes mindfulness practices such as meditation. Reflecting on the scope of contemplative practices, Duerr developed a metaphor called "The Tree of



Contemplative Practices." Her model is grounded in communion, connection, and awareness, with roots representing these qualities and branches comprising practices such as movement, stillness, creativity, generativity, activism, ritualism, and relationality.⁶

Likewise, Lemon promoted contemplative pedagogy employing *poetic* representation in a study of pre-service teachers' self-care.⁷ This author suggests: "Through poetry we can communicate concisely and with intensity to ignite a response from the audience; the poems are representative of both the process and outcome."⁸

I have always been struck by the term *contemplative revolution*, which refers to quieting the mind to increase an individual's capacity for self-awareness, attentiveness, openness, and connection.⁹ I also immersed myself in Cleveland's works, noting that the conceptualization of mindfulness is "more than a mere state of mind, but conscious moment-by-moment awareness of emotional, cognitive, and physical experiences."¹⁰ Noticing or observing each moment with openness and acceptance enables an unbounded sense of awareness. Contemplative exercises can be used in the classroom and vary widely, as the *Tree of Contemplative Practices* guides mindfulness techniques in higher education, including:

- *Stillness Practices*: Moments of Silence, Quieting the Mind, Meditation;
- *Generative Practices*: Loving-Kindness Meditation, Beholding, Visualization, Compassion Practices;
- *Creative Process Practices*: Contemplative Art, Photography, Music, Poetry;
- *Activist Practices*: Community Work, Social Justice Initiatives, Examples in Higher Education, Implementation, Overall Benefits, Community Impact;
- *Relational Practices*: Storytelling, Autobiography, Free Writing, Journaling, Dialogue, Deep Listening;
- *Movement Practices*: Walking, Hiking, Connecting with Nature; and
- *Ritual/Cyclical Practices*: Creating Sacred Spaces, Rituals Inspired by Cultural and Religious Traditions.¹¹

Contemplative methods of inquiry lead to increased self-awareness, an enriched ability to focus attention, and a greater capacity to broaden attention without sacrificing precision or concentration. In

other words, they develop the skill of repeatedly and voluntarily bringing their wandering attention back. In their 2007 research article, *Contemplative Modes of Inquiry in Liberal Arts Education*, Burggraf and Grossenbacher highlighted the importance of incorporating attention training into liberal arts curricula.¹² Traditional inquiry methods in the liberal arts, such as analytical and critical thinking, typically involve intellectual engagement with texts, laboratory experiments, and similar activities. Contemplative pedagogical approaches, with their inward focus, can enrich and complement existing disciplinary methods by deepening learners' personal connection to the subject matter.

In numerous fields of academic inquiry, contemplative practices have been shown to enhance attention, creativity, open-mindedness, the capacity to embrace paradox, and compassionate civic engagement.¹³ Additionally, these practices foster specific mental skills and habits, such as sustained and focused attention, open-mindedness, the suspension of judgment, empathetic listening, and a sense of awe.¹⁴ Contemplative practices can significantly enhance students' academic performance and individual learning outcomes. Contemplative education supports students' holistic development as they practice mindfulness, a self-regulatory practice that supports stress reduction, self-control, self-exploration, self-expression, and creativity.¹⁵ Cultivating mindfulness deepens students' development of interpersonal social skills, awakens compassion, promotes emotional balance, and fosters various forms of intelligence,¹⁶ contributing to their physical, social, emotional, ethical, and spiritual growth.¹⁷

In line with these assertions, preliminary investigations into the relationship between mindfulness and ethics have demonstrated mindfulness-training-dependent improvements in moral reasoning,¹⁸ as well as an association between trait mindfulness and ethical behaviors.¹⁹ Shapiro and colleagues noted that "balanced education cultivates abilities beyond the verbal and conceptual to include matters of heart, character, creativity, self-knowledge, concentration, openness, and mental flexibility."²⁰ Evidence suggests that training in contemplative practices

offers an effective means to develop qualities valued by learners²¹ and others interested in human development.²²

Compassion and connection stand out as the most crucial qualities for today's educational landscapes, among the many attributes cultivated in contemplative education. As we collectively confront global challenges such as poverty, severe inequality, racism, intolerance, environmental degradation, and climate change, our survival depends on unparalleled levels of cooperation and mutual care. Therefore, education at every level must prioritize fostering these connections to effectively utilize the tools and techniques being developed to promote human and ecological well-being on our planet.²³

The contemporary movement to introduce contemplative practice into higher education has roots that stretch back 2,500 years. As Barbezat and Bush (2013) noted: "[T]he return of contemplative practice is a revival, not a novelty. Contemplation education was once an integral part of intellectual life, inherited from the monastic schools of the early Middle Ages, which are among the predecessors of modern higher education."²⁴ This approach creates a pedagogy for our time in which love becomes a way of knowing.²⁵ As Arthur Zajonc (2013) states, "One can know nothing beyond what one loves." The deeper and more comprehensive our knowledge, the stronger and more vibrant our love and passion must be. The gentleness, intimacy, and transformation within ourselves and our students are inseparable from the power of love.²⁶ Professor Arthur Zajonc dedicated his life to integrating mindfulness and contemplative practices into higher education. In his book *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love* (2008), Arthur Zajonc reflects, "We will progress from grounding ourselves in humility and reverence as foundational states of being, toward fostering inner harmony, emotional balance, and focused attention. With these inner achievements, we can engage in the selfless practice of meditation and contemplative inquiry, whose benefits can serve both ourselves and others."²⁷ According to Benefiel and Lee (2019),

contemplative education seeks to encourage the active, co-creative participation of all human dimensions at every stage of the inquiry and learning process. It values the body, vitality, heart, mind, and consciousness as equal partners in the exploration and formation of knowledge.²⁸

Likewise, Greta Gaard and Bengü Erguner-Tekinalp (2022) noted that

... contemplative pedagogy can be integrated into course content, activities, and assignments to invite reflective awareness of structural injustices, cultivate empathy, bridge or release the boundary of separate selfhood, and provide tools and strategies for both dismantling oppression and supporting our students' resilience.²⁹

Contemplative insight into our true selves can transform every aspect of life. Much of the goodness and creativity we experience already originates from this source; we need to bring it into consciousness, cultivate ways to practice it more fully, and honor it with our attention.³⁰

Contemplative education helps students understand the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit, as well as the importance of our relationships with others. Through mindful strategies, students can better manage stress, recognizing that we are whole beings whose mental, physical, and social health are interrelated and mutually influential.

Zajonc described contemplative education as a comprehensive approach that enables students to understand the world from within and through observation. Mindfulness techniques and reflective practices broaden the unlimited scope of contemporary intellectual life, encompassing a rich, multidimensional nature of reality, self, and the world.³¹ This approach goes beyond mere cost-benefit analysis and is the foundation for a more integrative form of higher education.³² Ultimately, contemplative education supports the development of the whole

person and provides a meaningful response to the current challenges in higher education, making contemplative pedagogy an essential part of this transformative vision.

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