

“Learning How to See”: Faculty Members’ Use of Unnamed Contemplative Practices

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As contemplative pedagogy on higher education campuses grows, so does interest in supporting additional faculty in using contemplative practices. At our small, liberal arts teaching university in the southeast USA, our faculty contemplative learning circle has steadily widened and worked to integrate mindfulness and other practices into our campus activities. We became interested in how contemplative practices are already happening in our classrooms without being named as such, and if finding out about them might elucidate opportunities to support faculty in deepening and expanding current efforts. This paper presents the findings from an interview study with 35 faculty members not formally participating in faculty activities involving contemplative pedagogy. Faculty spontaneously mentioned some activities that may be considered contemplative in their descriptions of effective teaching strategies, such as class discussions, experiential activities, and journaling. Among a provided list of contemplative activities, the most frequently used were discussions/debates, journaling/reflective writing, and beholding, though the ways in which faculty implemented the activities varied. Faculty offered many examples of activities that could be considered contemplative or introspective, and the ways they used the activities differed by discipline. When asked directly, 18 participants reported that they used contemplative practices or pedagogy in some way, nine reported that they were uncertain about the definition and/or whether they used them, and eight responded that they do not use them. Many faculty members also indicated interest in learning more about how to incorporate contemplative practices in teaching, suggesting an opportunity for enhanced faculty development efforts.

Largely due to fellowships, conferences, retreats, and educator sessions organized by the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACM-HE) of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMind), faculty from institutions across the USA and in other countries have deepened their use of contemplative pedagogy (Zajonc, 2013). A survey from the first 10 years of CMind’s fellows program suggests that the number of faculty who use contemplative pedagogy and its acceptance on campuses are growing, which is concomitant to the finding

that communities of support are important for faculty success (Craig, 2011). In addition, the number of contemplative studies degree programs, concentrations, and centers for contemplative teaching and learning has increased over the past decade (Zajonc, 2013).

Somewhat organically, higher education faculty are weaving contemplative practices into their teaching, pedagogy, and curricula (DuFon & Christiansen, 2013) in an effort to counter the emphasis on third-person and objective knowledge common in 19th and 20th century classrooms (Coburn, 2013). Thomas Coburn, director emeritus of Naropa University, argues that the realization among educators of the importance of students cultivating an ability to look inward has stimulated the contemplative education movement in America today. First-person inquiry is a key element of critical thinking and the values of liberal arts education (Sable, 2014). According to Burggraf and Grossenbacher (2007), “Due to their inward focus, contemplative pedagogical methods can enrich and complement the disciplinary modes of inquiry already used in the liberal arts by enhancing the learner’s personal connection with the subject matter” (p.1). Further, as Arthur Zajonc states, liberal arts classrooms adopting contemplative methods can help students develop a “comprehensive and deep understanding of self and world” (Zajonc, 2013, p.91).

Zajonc (2013) describes contemplative pedagogy as “a wide range of educational methods that support the development of student attention, emotional balance, empathetic connection, compassion, and altruistic behavior, while also providing new pedagogical techniques that support creativity and the learning of course content” (p.83). Accordingly, contemplative practices are activities that “cultivate a critical, first-person focus, sometimes with direct experience as the object, while at other times concentrating on complex ideas or situations. Incorporated into daily life, they act as a reminder to connect to what we find most meaningful” (CMind, 2015a). For the purpose of the present study, contemplative practices are activities employed with the intention of assisting students to look inward and contemplate their personal experiences when relating to ideas, situations, and the meaning of course material. Barbezat and Bush (2014) describe several such examples, including a social work professor employing a compassion and resilience exercise to help foster empathy for clients, a chemistry professor using a beholding exercise to help students contemplate their own impressions of electron wave functions, and an economics professor inviting students to reflect on personal experiences with gains and losses before leading a discussion on standard definitions of abstract models. Contemplative classroom practices clearly vary widely in terms of the activities they involve as well as in their goals, relationship to course content, and frequency of use.

Research provides evidence of the beneficial impact of contemplative practices on students. For example, studies suggest that students exposed to contemplative classroom practices have a greater connection to course material, fellow classmates, and instructors (Bagshaw, 2014); can better manage emotional stress (Bamber & Schneider, 2015), and maintain stronger focus on course material (Ramsburg & Youmans, 2014). Similarly, the incorporation of mindfulness-based techniques into classes improved professional practices among students in social work (Hick & Furlotte, 2009; Thomas, 2017), teacher preparation (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012), sociology (Song & Muschert, 2014) and medical (Dobkin & Hutchinson, 2013) programs.

Buoyed by the potential of contemplative pedagogy, at the current authors' public liberal arts institution, the University of North Carolina Asheville, we developed a learning circle on contemplative pedagogy for faculty and staff in 2010. A biweekly gathering including both meditation and discussion, membership in the learning circle has grown since its inception, as have the activities we introduce in our classrooms and other settings with students. Circle members have contributed to biannual faculty trainings on reflection in critical thinking, the focus of our campus's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). We also have offered workshops on different aspects of contemplative pedagogy through the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). For four years, we have organized A Mindful Campus, an annual 2-day event open to individuals from our campus, community members, and others across the USA. In 2014, we began offering a one credit-hour course, team-taught by four faculty members, on the *Art & Science of Meditation*, which we offer every spring. Recently, our faculty senate approved an interdisciplinary cluster in contemplative studies, which will support students in taking a set of courses threaded together with explicit teachings and practices that cultivate contemplation and introspection.

While our core group at University of North Carolina Asheville is growing to include more faculty, we are interested in introducing contemplative pedagogy to a range of colleagues. Encouraging such an interest can be challenging because of the wariness around pedagogies that are seen as “new” or “required” in academia (Hodges, 2006). Certainly, as Zajonc (2013) points out, contemplative pedagogy is not an “add-on” and should not be perceived as one. The interest in recruiting newcomers to contemplative pedagogy is further complicated by concerns about the extent to which an instructor must have a personal practice in order to engage students in contemplative activities. In their introductory text, Barbezat and Bush (2014) assert that a personal practice is necessary for understanding what students are experiencing and for leading them through the processes of self-discovery. Charles Burack of John F. Kennedy University (2014)

recommends that instructors with less experience with a personal practice lead simple contemplative exercises that they understand and value. A personal practice often refers to a meditation practice, however, contemplative practices may involve any of a range of activities as referred to earlier in this section and in the CMind Tree of Contemplative Practices (CMind 2015b). Burack also recommends that instructors “genuinely value the contemplative growth and holistic transformation of their students” (pp.45-46), which we believe is desired by the majority of faculty at our small, teaching-focused university.

In several informal conversations about teaching with faculty members who are not part of the contemplative learning circle, one of the paper co-authors (Batada) has listened as colleagues describe contemplative practices among their effective teaching strategies; however, they do not call the activities, or perhaps know to call them, contemplative practices. For example, one colleague in the Health and Wellness Department starts an Active Learning course each semester with students keeping a journal of how they are feeling physically, emotionally, and mentally, while in various states of activity or exercise. They then discuss what they wrote about in class and share insights. Another colleague, in the Education Department, teaches about diverse learning through a series of activities that invite students to remember and examine their own experiences of difference—along class, race/ethnicity, and other lines—in their K-12 education. These descriptions prompted us to consider whether contemplative practices are already happening in our classrooms without being named as such, and if finding out about them might elucidate opportunities to support faculty in deepening and expanding current efforts.

As such, the research questions of the current study were:

1. What contemplative practices, if any, do faculty members mention when describing their effective teaching strategies?
2. With what frequency and in what ways do faculty members report using teaching strategies that may be considered contemplative practices?
3. What does “contemplative pedagogy or practices” mean to faculty and do they believe that they use them?

Our investigation focused on the use of contemplative practices by instructors who would not likely define themselves or their teaching styles as especially “contemplative.” Their decision to incorporate contemplative teaching activities in classes may have been more serendipitous than deliberate. This leads to an important question: Must faculty be intentional in their use of, and commitment to, contemplative teaching strategies if they are to have an impact on students?

METHODS

To determine faculty use of contemplative practices, this study utilized a cross-sectional design and semi-structured interviews of faculty members at University of North Carolina Asheville. The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the interview guide was piloted in December 2016. After obtaining a list of currently employed faculty members, the research team excluded anyone who did not have a full-time appointment, was on professional or personal leave during the data collection period, and/or had been involved in the on-campus faculty contemplative learning circle or related workshops. A total of 40 faculty members were randomly selected from the full list of 213 names (18.8%), with approximately equal numbers across the three divisions (humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences), and contacted for interviews during the spring semester of 2016. The director of the CTL, also a study researcher and interviewer (Himelein), sent out an e-mail invitation requesting participation; if willing to be interviewed, faculty could indicate their availability using an online form. After the initial interviews were complete, up to three additional email messages were sent to faculty members who did not respond. Final response rates varied from 78.5% among natural sciences faculty to 92.3% among humanities and social sciences faculty. Interviews took place in the offices of the interviewees and spanned the period from February to July 2016. During the spring semester, the student researcher (Chichester) conducted interviews, and in the summer, two of the faculty (Batada and Himelein) conducted interviews.

Faculty members who agreed to participate in interviews met with one of the researchers for 30-60 minutes and received a \$5 gift card to an on-campus or local coffee shop. The interview was scripted and semi-structured, consisting of four main sections designed to provide opportunities for participants to mention contemplative teaching strategies and practices voluntarily, prior to being asked about them specifically. The first section included open-ended questions about the faculty member's most frequently taught courses, the core concepts in those courses, and the teaching strategies the faculty member found most useful in instruction of the core concepts. Analysis of responses to this first section included a summary and identification of concepts and strategies that may be considered contemplative.

The second section included closed-ended questions about the frequency with which participants used specific contemplative practices, though not named as such, in their courses. The list of contemplative practices was developed from existing inventories and examples, including Barbezat and Bush's guide for instructors (2014), the Tree of Contemplative Practices (CMind, 2015b), and other approaches used in studies found in the literature review. We intentionally kept the

number and types of practices as broad as possible, with the goal of capturing a representation of relevant activities. The frequency options ranged from: never, 1-2 times/semester, 1-2 times/month, to 1 or more times a week. Participants were also asked for more information or examples about how they used the strategies in order for researchers to determine whether there was a contemplative aspect. The third section included two questions: the first asked whether the faculty member used contemplative pedagogy, and the second, what the faculty member thought of when someone says “contemplative pedagogy or contemplative practices.” These questions were purposely placed after the other questions so as not to reveal the intent of the study prior to inquiring about their practices. The fourth and final section of the interview included demographic-type questions, including years of college-level teaching, years at the current institution, age range, self-identified gender, and self-identified race/ethnicity.

We categorized information and tabulated frequencies in order to conduct bivariate analyses exploring the relationship between the number of contemplative practices used (from the list) and participants’ self-reported use contemplative pedagogy or practices (categorized from the open-ended question). We also conducted inductive analyses from responses to open-ended questions, and include in the paper several illustrative quotes. The results are presented using gender-neutral pronouns and refer to division affiliations (rather than department affiliations) in order to maintain as much anonymity of participants as possible.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

A total of 35 faculty participated in interviews. Twenty-two participants (62.9%) identified as male and all but two participants were between the ages of 31 years and 64 years; one was younger than 31 and one was older than 64. Thirty-one participants (88.6%) identified as Caucasian/White and three of them specified another race (American Indian) or an ethnicity (Cuban, Hispanic). Two participants identified as African American and two participants identified as Asian/Asian American. The number of years participants had been teaching at the college level ranged from two years to 43 years (average of 18.6 years) and the years they had been teaching at the current institution ranged from one year to 39 years (average of 14.1 years).

Disciplines & Courses

Twelve of the participants were primarily humanities faculty, 12 were social sciences faculty, and 11 were natural sciences faculty. Twenty-one departments were represented, with between one and three participants from each. As is custom-

ary at UNC Asheville, participants reported regularly teaching a wide range of courses both within their own departments and across campus (such as humanities courses and introductory and capstone colloquia). Twenty-two participants (62.9%) reported regularly teaching an introductory course and 13 (37.1%) reported regularly teaching a capstone course either in or outside their departments.

Course Concepts

We asked participants to share the core concepts in the three courses they most frequently teach. In general, the core concepts mentioned by participants aligned with the titles of their courses. While many faculty members discussed discipline-specific knowledge students should learn as part of their courses—some so they may pursue higher levels of study—several faculty also discussed skills and attitudes that were important to the course and discipline. Some faculty emphasized an attitude or orientation that was important. For example, a faculty member in humanities department emphasized a desire for students to understand how history is told (by whom and from what perspective) rather than learning names, dates, and a simplified description of events that took place in the past.

When asked about other concepts or skills they considered important in their courses, almost half of the participants mentioned a life skill, such as how to search for a job or implement effective time-management. Others discussed personal skills, such as resiliency and self-sufficiency. Also frequently mentioned were concepts around diversity and inclusion, communication skills, critical thinking, applications of course material to other areas, and civic engagement. Other concepts that participants mentioned, many of which may be considered outcomes of contemplative practices, included: love/passion for content/profession, noticing/seeing, holding/sitting with discomfort, belonging, and creativity.

Teaching Strategies

When asked to describe the teaching strategies they find to be effective in assisting students to grasp course concepts, faculty respondents mentioned a wide range. After grouping together similar strategies, the most frequently-mentioned strategy was discussion using prompts (mentioned by 19 or 54.9% of respondents). Table I contains the full list of teaching strategies mentioned by respondents.

Table 1. Effective Teaching Strategies Mentioned by Faculty Respondents (N=35)

Teaching Strategy	Faculty Mentioning Strategy	
	<i>n</i>	%
Discussion/Probing questions or inquiry-based prompts	19	54.9
Lecture/ PowerPoint	13	37.1
Experiential activities (role plays, simulations, etc.) Journaling or reflective writing in class Socratic seminars/method Writing assignments (other, unique)	8	22.9
Outside projects or special assignments Real-world application (anecdotes, analogies, stories, examples)	7	20
Group activities or discussions Lab activities Multimedia (audio, video, documentaries) Specific readings	6	17.1
Graphs/pictures One-on-one dialogues Guest speakers/visitors Student presentations or performances	5	14.3
Flipped classroom Quizzes Student-driven/led topic selection	4	11.4
Innovative technology Peer-instruction Writing feedback	3	8.6
Hands-on activities Maker principles (outside of art) Problem-solving/inquiry-guided learning Scaffolding of projects/assignments Silent reflection (without writing) Class critiques	2	5.7

Copying a model Creating comfortable classroom environment Debates Humor Readings (traditional) Repetition of ideas Teaching how to read	1	2.9
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Although no respondents explicitly named contemplative practices among their effective teaching strategies, some of the strategies they mentioned may be considered contemplative.

One example of an unnamed contemplative practice described by a social science faculty member focused on learning about the complexities of historical periods. They invite students to “Try to put themselves in their [historical figures] shoes...and I’ve had students come up and tell me: ‘I’m getting very uncomfortable [with] the conclusions that this is leading me to’...which is good because they begin to realize the complexity of the issues that these historical figures had to deal with.” In this example, students may develop an appreciation for the content of the course as they engage in perspective-taking and sustain contradictions. Similarly, another humanities professor described a core pedagogical goal permeating all of their classes, which they termed “instructive discomfort. As the faculty member explains to students on the first day of classes, the faculty member believes that “The most formative learning experiences almost always involve a profound experience of discomfort—discomfort prompted by new conversations... by new ways of experiencing the world, seeing the world, interpreting the world, and knowing the world.” This faculty member shared that they hope that through questioning, prompting, and discussion, students will “examine and reexamine” their presuppositions and assumptions about humanity.

Another interesting example of a brief contemplative activity included chanting. A statistics faculty member has their students chant, “We accept/reject the null hypothesis” all together after they review p-values for a particular statistical significance test. This faculty member mentioned that they thought students better remembered the information because the chanting allowed them to slow down and think. Though in and of itself, chanting does not involve first-person inquiry, it may be a method for focusing on the present moment and has the potential for reflection if discussed with the class.

The majority of the teaching strategies mentioned by faculty were used to teach concepts related to the course content rather than other concepts, though

for many faculty these concepts seemed to overlap. This overlap was clear among faculty members teaching visual arts and music, which are creative contemplative practices themselves. However, beyond the contemplative arts, there were additional layers. For example, one faculty member discussed preparing students to “become engaged, enlightened students” as “what drives” them.

Among those who did report strategies to cultivate other concepts or skills, some reported using assignments to assist students in creating portfolios (to build professional skills) or asking questions on tests that require students to use knowledge from the course in a new way (to foster real-world application). A few also discussed more deeply how they cultivate these skills or dispositions. For example, a social science faculty member discussed their hope that students would develop a “more flexible approach to knowledge...and a sense of how diversity matters.” This faculty member went on to describe the use of group activities to teach about these concepts, explaining that, “there’s value in having more awareness of one’s interiority and value in that interactive capacity.”

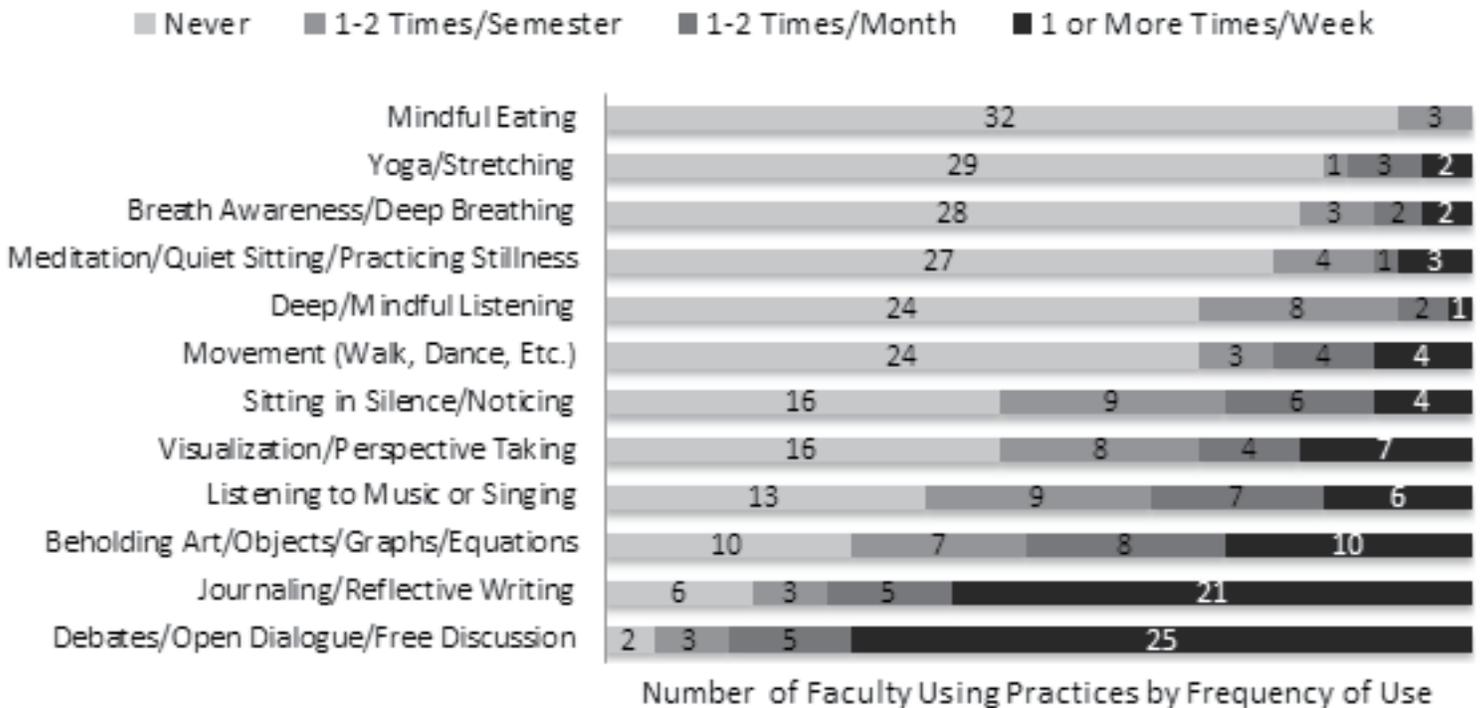
Frequency and Ways of Using Contemplative Strategies

Participants described the frequency with which they use 12 specific contemplative activities in their teaching. The number of participants using the strategies ranged from 3 (mindful eating) to 33 (debates/open dialogue/free discussion) (see Figure 1). The most frequently used strategy was debates/open dialogue/free discussion, used one or more times/week by 25 (71.4%) participants, followed by journaling/reflective writing by 21 (60%) participants, and beholding art/objects/graphs/equations by 10 (28.6%). The ways that faculty members used the strategies varied.

Journaling and/or reflective writing appeared to be more commonly used among humanities and social science faculty than among natural science faculty, and in courses for upper-level or senior students more than in intro courses. Many faculty mentioned that they provided prompts and some mentioned that they asked for reflective writing regularly throughout the semester. One natural scientist who reported incorporating writing in all of their classes occasionally introduces artifacts as a type of prompt: “I ask students to reflectively write for a set period of time on a particular object.” One humanities faculty member explained how they used journaling about life experiences, as well as free writing, to help students develop ideas for independent projects in upper level courses.

For the participants, visualization and/or perspective taking took various forms in the classroom. Some mentioned asking students to consider a hypothetical situation in which they imagine or visualize how they would personally interact with the material, such as a historical event they are studying. Natural science faculty mentioned asking students to visualize how their bodies or other entities (like particles or muscles) move and to imagine what is going on inside of their

Figure 1. Frequency of Using Specific Contemplative Practices by Faculty (N=35)



bodies. Some faculty members described activities in which students imagined what something might look like, such as a quilt of colored construction paper pieces reflecting the choices of everyone in the class.

Meditation or quiet sitting, without material or information to consider, was used by about a fifth of participants. Several of these participants mentioned that they take a couple of minutes at the beginning of or during class to allow students to sit quietly or pause. Sitting in silence and noticing was more common, with more than half reporting that they ask their students to sit in silence and notice what they are feeling about the material they are studying, including in some cases sitting with discomfort around challenging situations and/or conditions such as, in a couple of reports, students’ “privilege.” Several social science faculty members mentioned that they asked students to sit in silence prior to, or after, writing or sharing their own perspectives with classmates. Some faculty mentioned asking students to sit in silence and notice how they felt as they viewed other students’ artwork.

Beholding art, objects, graphs, or equations, prior to discussions or instruction, was used by two-thirds of the participants. Most used beholding to invite students to focus on the content of a visual image, such as graphs, works of

art, images/photos from historical events, with a few faculty mentioning that they wanted students to develop skills for looking at such images. One faculty member described beholding a piece of short writing. A social science faculty talked about the importance of careful examination of photographs in their discipline. They described a class assignment in which students are instructed to take pictures that they believed contain “a human element” while on a field trip. Later, students share their photographs in class, explaining the story they believed each picture revealed, as well as considering how their decisions about whether to take pictures from a distance or close up changed the narrative.

Listening to music or singing was used by nearly two-thirds of participants, the majority of whom described listening to music with a specific connection to the course material at that time. However, some did mention using songs or chanting to assist students in learning. For example, one faculty member used singing and reciting poetry to help students develop their language skills.

Less than a third of participants responded that they use movement such as walking or dancing in their classes. One faculty member mentioned using a walking meditation, and another described their purpose in trail hikes: “I would like them to become intrigued with nature and passionate about it. I want to ignite in students a passion to know, noticing plants instead of just walking through the woods to get somewhere.” A few participants mentioned using movement by asking students to enact or role-play scenarios rather than just having them sit in their chairs and discuss the scenarios.

When asked about yoga or stretching, some participants responded that they used stretch breaks; one modeled specific stretches. A natural science faculty member used stretching as an instructional tool to foster better understanding of muscles. Another faculty member, in the humanities, likened yoga to the poses needed for performing music. A faculty member in the humanities used stretching as an opportunity for the class to practice comprehending action verbs and parts of the body in a different language.

Breath awareness and deep breathing were grouped together because they often were confused with each other during the interviews. One in five participants responded that they used this strategy and most used it at the beginning of the class or as a technique for preparing for an in-class test or presentation, as well as a faculty member who mentioned reminding students to take some breaths after receiving critiques of their work. Another faculty member highlighted the importance of breath awareness when playing many instruments. A natural science faculty member has a topical unit on stress that includes the practice of breath awareness in a lab exercise.

Mindful eating was rarely used in participants’ classes. One natural science faculty prepared and drank with their class a tea made from wild twigs after a hike. While drinking the tea, which was made from a local shrub that grows on campus, the faculty member asked students to consider, “If we like it, why do we like it and what does it remind us of?” A natural science faculty member had a more academic purpose when they engaged students in mindful eating, without naming it as such, during a lab on the sense of taste. The third faculty member who used mindful eating mentioned offering chocolate to students as a means to slow things down in class.

Over the course of these interviews, it became evident how contemplative practices may manifest differently across divisions and disciplines. For faculty in the humanities disciplines, particularly in the arts, contemplative practices were mentioned as part of their intended content, strategies, and outcomes. For example, one faculty member described wanting students to “learn how to see” as the main goal of a course. In the natural sciences, observing one’s self and the environment was mentioned by faculty in biology and atmospheric sciences. Labs on taste and respiration involved practices that invited students to pay attention to their physical selves, often with and without technological aides, and labs on weather invited students to pay attention to the sky, the sun, and the movement of plants to gain insight about the content. In the social sciences, contemplative activities were relational, with faculty mentioning how they encourage their students to personally reflect on how they relate to the world and how their realities are constructed. For example, one professor invited students to reflect on their own social locations and to look deeply in readings for praiseworthy points before critiquing the arguments.

“Seeing” to do, to learn and understand, and to situate, came across as a theme across our interviews. Perhaps, this “seeing” may be interpreted as first-person inquiry, a type of inquiry that is different from simply having first-hand knowledge or an opinion. In this type of seeing, contemplative practices may cultivate an awareness of, and connection to how one’s knowledge and/or opinions arise.

Perceived Meaning and Use of Contemplative Pedagogy/Practices

Following the list of contemplative teaching strategies, we asked faculty whether they think of themselves as using contemplative teaching strategies in the classroom and if so, how. Given the wide range of responses to this open-ended question (referred as open-ended question one), we post-coded them into two broad categories and several sub-categories, which are presented in Table 2. Just over half of the respondents report that they use contemplative teaching strategies.

Table 2. Responses to Open-Ended Question One: “Would you say that you use any contemplative practices in your classes?”

Response Category	N	%
Use contemplative teaching strategies when teaching	18	51.4
Employ strategies intentionally with their students	7	
Aim to inspire contemplation or contemplative themes but do not directly use practices	7	
Would say “yes” based off the interview and practices described in the list	4	
Partial, unknown or no use of contemplative teaching strategies	17	48.6
Either uncertain whether they use contemplative teaching methods or that they use some, but not enough to confidently say yes	5	
Lacked a definition of contemplative practice	4	
Did not use contemplative strategies	8	

Among faculty who reported that they aim to inspire contemplation but do not use practices, one faculty member said that they encourage students to consider their own thought processes. Another discussed how the ideas of mindfulness, slowing down, and self-reflection were implicit in their course. In both instances, mindfulness concepts were touched upon but no specific practice was used. Some of the faculty further clarified that they would have ordinarily said no, but that their answer changed when they found themselves answering yes to the techniques from the previous section.

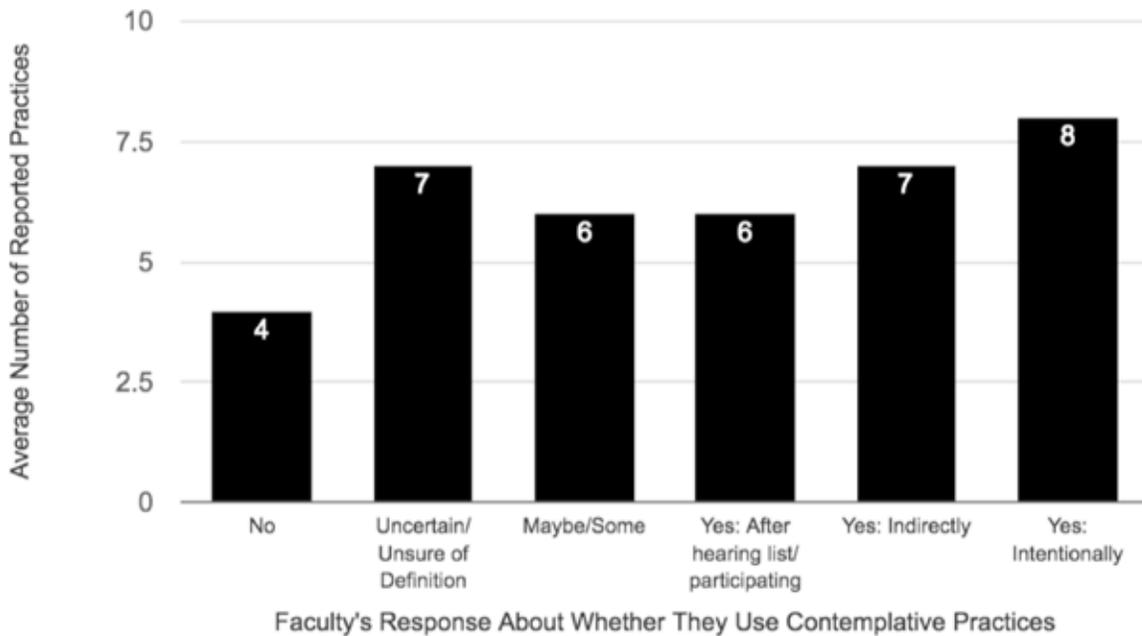
Among the eight faculty who reported not using contemplative strategies, several did add that they do want their students to be contemplative. For example, as one social scientist said, despite not reporting to use contemplative teaching strategies per se, “To me all thinking is contemplative...just the process of considering the instructor’s question and trying to generate a reasonably comprehensible answer is contemplative.”

The faculty members who described themselves as purposefully using contemplative strategies also utilized the highest number of the practices included in the list (see Figure 2). The average number of practices used decreased in an

expected, incremental pattern from group to group with those who reported not using contemplative practices averaging the least number of practices (roughly 33%). The only deviation from this pattern was the group of four faculty members who did not have a definition for contemplative practices. This group, on average, used seven of the 12 techniques mentioned in the list despite lacking a working definition of contemplative practices. Overall, there was a significant mean difference of average number of reported practices between groups ($F [5, 29]= 2.66, p= 0.042$), which suggests that there is an association between faculty members’ beliefs as to whether or not they use contemplative practices and the number of strategies that they report employing in the classroom.

Participants also were asked what they think about when someone mentions contemplative practices or contemplative pedagogy. Responses ranged from mentioning yoga, meditation, or reflective thought, to specific disciplines such as sociology or the humanities. Whether or not participants reported that they used contemplative practices in the classroom (the previous question) was not related to the descriptions of their responses when asked what comes to mind when contemplative practices are mentioned.

Figure 2. Average Number of Reported Practices as a Function of Faculty Responses to Open Ended Question One



An Unexpected Finding

An unexpected finding that emerged from our interviews was that of receptivity to contemplative practices. Although not our intent, many respondents mentioned during or at the end of the interviews that they were interested in learning more about or experimenting with contemplative pedagogy. In response to questions about use of specific practices, participants frequently responded, “I have thought about it,” or “That could work.” Some also commented that they had previously used practices on the list, and that the interview motivated them to revisit those techniques. Several faculty members also indicated that they were aware of the group on campus that is engaged in contemplative pedagogy, and some volunteered that they would be interested in attending it or related activities. At the same time, a few expressed concern about potential expectations to learn about or adopt new pedagogies, contemplative or otherwise.

DISCUSSION

This research project explored the use of classroom contemplative practices by faculty with no or limited involvement in contemplative pedagogy activities at our small, public liberal arts college. We believe the implications and potential strategies for our campus may also apply to other campuses, taking context into consideration.

The study revealed overlap between the content and other concepts (academic, professional and interpersonal) that faculty members wished for students to gain in their courses and the benefits/outcomes of contemplative pedagogy. Course content that focused on the arts, such as drawing what one sees or observing the breath in jazz improvisation, aligned with contemplative concepts of awareness and noticing. Awareness was also an element in the labs mentioned by natural sciences faculty, which—though they didn’t express it this way—was intended to assist students in developing insight about how the body or environment “works.”

In terms of other (non-core) concepts that faculty respondents wanted their students to learn/gain, several aligned with those cultivated by contemplative practices, such as communication skills, life skills, critical thinking, working with diversity and inclusion, love/passion for a profession, sitting with discomfort, belonging, and creativity. Interestingly, most respondents could not provide examples of how these skills and dispositions are cultivated in the classroom. An implication of this finding is the potential for helping faculty who are not explicitly using contemplative pedagogy to see how their hopes for their students align with contemplative pedagogy. This approach may provide an opening for sharing specific practices that build content and non-content skills already valued by faculty.

Among the many effective teaching strategies mentioned by faculty, many could be considered contemplative, including inquiry-guided learning and discussion, experiential activities, journal/reflective writing, lab activities, study of graphs/pictures, and silent reflection. Further, all of the specific contemplative activities asked about in this study were used by at least three respondents, and over half reported using six of the activities at least once or twice a semester. Given the format of the interviews, which did not allow time for deeper discussion or provide definitions for the activities on the list, it is unclear the extent to which faculty process the activities with students (i.e., what they are experiencing physically, emotionally, mentally and what they might learn from it), which would make an activity (more) contemplative.

The question of to what degree instructors take time for deeper discussion of the practice is critical. Given that the roots of contemplative practices are awareness and connectedness (CMind, 2015b), assisting students to process the experiences in the classroom is important for realizing the potential of the contemplative practice, in the moment and likely in the future. Many of the faculty in the study discussed their desire for students to cultivate lifelong professional and life skills. For students, developing awareness of how contemplative practices—such as observing or beholding, engaging with what is happening in the moment, and reflecting, among others—may provide them with a way to connect more deeply with course material, themselves, and each other is necessary for such skill development. The explicit nature of this type of processing with students is what distinguishes courses in our institution’s newly approved interdisciplinary certificate in contemplative studies from other courses that may use contemplative practices.

The momentary impact of a classroom reflective writing assignment or visualization activity on students may be similar regardless of whether an instructor introduces the experience as a distinctly contemplative exercise or not. However, as with any teaching activity, discussion of the purpose, goals, and likely outcomes of an exercise makes the experience more meaningful for students. In the case of contemplative practices, students might profit more deeply from greater understanding of the experience, perhaps leading to recognition of potential benefit in other areas of their lives.

Consider an analogy from the literature on teaching critical thinking skills. In a recent review of research on the impact of critical thinking (CT) instruction, Tiruneh, Verburch, and Elen (2014) found that CT instructional approaches that explicitly address CT language and principles (as opposed to assuming students will gain CT skills more implicitly) are most effective in enhancing students’ CT abilities. Similarly, direct teaching strategies, in which CT principles and procedures are deliberately explained through a variety of instructional methods, outperform implicit teaching strategies, in which instruction involves no explicit focus on CT develop-

ment. If our hope is for contemplative pedagogy not only to deepen student learning of the content at hand, but also to generalize beyond the classroom, intentional emphasis of the “what” and “why” of contemplative practices seems critical.

The findings also may suggest an opportunity to work with faculty to incorporate more contemplation into the teaching strategies with which they are comfortable. In his article on *Reason in Service of the Heart*, David Sable (2014) describes a set of contemplative activities that at first glance seems to include many of these (e.g. directing attention to an image, journaling, and dialogues), used in a combination that, in his experience, “enabled undergraduates to reflect on their thinking processes to become more aware of their own mental habits and how they form; inquire with open-minded curiosity, including suspension of assumptions long enough for them to be challenged; and generate justifiable, contextual understandings and judgments, individually and in collaboration” (p. 2). Most faculty members, including those at our institution, would be overjoyed with these outcomes.

Given that many of the faculty respondents already engage students in activities that could be developed as contemplative practices, and that many of the respondents demonstrated receptivity to contemplative pedagogy, it is encouraging to consider how contemplative pedagogy may continue to grow on our campus. Helping faculty to see how the personal practices in which they are already engaged, such as art, music, observing weather patterns, hiking, origami, reading, and studying, can be cultivated and expanded through our learning circle or individually, would be an important first step. As David Kahane (2013) reflects, “As I learn to bring contemplation more fully into my own life, and my own in teaching, I gain a sense of what it means to be authentic in my role as teacher, and to hold this seat with the authority of someone who is not hiding from himself” (p.59).

A next phase may be approaching faculty by discipline, department, or individually to provide opportunities for coaching on ways to enhance their existing effective strategies with more opportunities to guide contemplation and introspection. Numerous examples and resources are available to assist with bringing contemplative pedagogy to specific disciplines. As a few examples: Charles Burack (2014) describes how four faculty members in the psychology department at JFK University collaborated to bring contemplative pedagogy to their students; David Borker (2013) explains how contemplative practices can be used in economics, to teach about grasping abstract concepts, seeing beyond obvious economic consequences, and finding one’s own ethical economic framework; and Ed Sarath (2003) describes a contemplative program and curriculum in jazz composition. A fellows program on one campus, similar to CMind’s decade-long program, or a mentoring program in contemplative pedagogy may also provide faculty new to this pedagogy with support tailored to their content and styles.

This research project had several strengths and limitations. One strength may be that ours is a small campus and consequently our connections may have helped us gain closer access to and trust from participants. We also had on our team faculty members of varied experience with contemplative pedagogy and disciplines, and one current student (Chichester), providing multiple perspectives in developing the protocol and interview guide. However, because three of us conducted interviews, we likely engaged with participants differently based on our experience and roles, which may have influenced the level of detail and/or type of information shared by the respondents. Interviews with the student researcher took on average about 10-15 minutes less time than those with the faculty interviewers (which also included collegial “catching up”). The student researcher also conducted interviews earlier, with possibly more receptive faculty members, during the academic semester. The faculty researchers conducted interviews after the semester, during summer months, with faculty who didn’t respond earlier.

The order of the questions on the interview guide was planned with the purpose of not revealing the intent or topic of the study until the end, so that researchers could look for contemplative practices within what faculty members mentioned was effective for them. This approach worked well in principle. However, some participants may have surmised the focus of the research simply because of knowing the interests of research team members, which may have then affected their responses to subsequent interview questions. Another limitation of the guide was that we did not ask about whether the respondents had some type of a personal practice in contemplation, which might have provided us with additional insight when considering the results.

To our knowledge, this is the first study of the use of contemplative teaching strategies from the perspective of faculty members not already involved in contemplative pedagogy activities. Given that this study focused on a small, teaching-focused public liberal arts campus, similar research at other types and sizes of institutions may yield different results. The differences may indeed be very interesting. For example, perhaps colleges with smaller average class sizes may be more conducive, or perceived as such, for conducting contemplative and related activities, such as sharing reflections, going outside, or sitting in a circle.

The current findings that many faculty already engage in activities that could be considered contemplative, with some room for deepening the guidance and processing, and that several were receptive to what contemplative pedagogy can contribute to their courses, were extremely encouraging. Now that the “innovators” and “early adopters” of contemplative pedagogy’s diffusion (Rogers, 2007) have planted the seeds on many of our campuses, it is time for us to consider ways to engage and support the next groups of faculty, who will renew what Palmer and Zajonc (2010) call the “heart of higher education.”

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