



The Meeting of the Contemplative Practice Fellows, June 18 – 20, 2010

By Beth Wadham, Academic Associate

This gathering of the 2009-2010 fellows occurred at the close of the fellowship year, and many of the professors had already taught the courses they'd developed in prior semesters. They arrived with much to share about what arose from their experience. The weekend promised many opportunities for contemplative engagement, to learn from one another, and from the moment, in a quiet, spacious way.

During the circle of introductions on Friday evening, each participant was invited to share, in addition to a standard professional identity, an insight, or "aha" moment, gleaned from their work in the classroom. These realizations, sometimes revelations, set a tone for spontaneity and discovery that resounded in the days that followed.

On Saturday morning, Eric Nelson welcomed the fellows on behalf of the Fetzer Institute and expressed his excitement for learning about the challenges and breakthroughs in higher education. Arthur Zajonc, in a continuation of the theme of harvesting insights from the night before, invited the group to sit for a few minutes to recollect a "mentoring moment" that could then be described to a partner in a deep listening practice. He suggested that the gesture of listening during this practice can be a kind of offering—the gift of attention.

In "**Bringing Contemplative Practice into the Classroom,**" a panel of 3 fellows described their approaches to teaching courses that integrate the contemplative dimension. **John Makransky**, Associate Professor of Theology, had the opportunity to teach "Meditation, Service and Social Action" to Masters of Divinity students at

Harvard University in addition to his students at Boston College. The meditation he teaches is adapted from Tibetan Buddhism's loving communion and connection



practice, but is accessible to those with any (or no) faith background. He finds most students have some foundation of faith, even if they've rejected it, and that his invitation to identify the "ancestors" of one's spiritual foundation begins to unearth many benefactors, those who have been loving, or had a wish for one's deep well

being. In addition to readings from Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, Aung San Suu Kyi and other social activists, he assigns a daily meditation practice that involves "being held in the wish for well-being." Each week students write about the specific way the meditation informs the reading and the reading informs their meditation. They are also asked to reflect on how their daily meditation and reading informs their individual development and social action.

This approach has emerged from particular needs of social service work, which often results in feelings of exhaustion and anger. Coming back every day to be "cradled in compassion" allows practitioners to be present for themselves, and discern their own hidden strengths and underlying capacities. They do this for themselves so they can do it for others.

Professor Makransky finds that social service professionals need to acknowledge that the dynamic of fighting oppression, on behalf of the oppressed, can often break down to a duality that is too limited, defining their role as "I am the helper, and these people are to be helped." The meditative practices he introduces can foster greater unconditionality and the recognition that all are caught in the predicament of an unjust situation. Martin Luther King and Mohandas Gandhi embodied this truth, and their work was oriented toward the amelioration of suffering for all, not on behalf of some, against others.

Jill Schneiderman, Professor of Earth Science at Vassar College had not yet taught her course, but she used part of a sabbatical this year to prepare for teaching "Deep Time and Slow Violence, or what does it mean to be secure in time and space?" The primary experience she wants to convey to her students is a sense of the 4.8 billion years of the geological record of the earth, what John McPhee calls "deep time."

She proposes one metaphor—time for time—that compares the history of the earth to a calendar year. Not until November does multi-cell life emerge. Another metaphor she's developed takes students on a body scan through geological time, which begins at their feet, rises through the calves (when the earth still had no solid form) to the knees, during which time the oldest rocks in existence were formed. Traveling upward

through the early Archean , they reach their waists, where out of colonies of bacteria the nuclei for multi-celled organisms came into being. Only at the neck is there anything with a hard bone—a trilobite—and at their brow line the Cretaceous period (dinosaurs) is reached. The crown of their heads corresponds to the advent of human life.

The sense of how short a time humans have been active, when set against the great epochs occupied by the earth's development, and the magnitude of the changes we have wrought, brings important concerns about our impact to the foreground. Some geologists have proposed that our human-influenced environment, even though it appeared relatively recently, should be referred to as a new epoch—the Anthropocene—because the influence has been so dramatic. Someday, the Anthropocene will also become part of the geological record, perhaps represented by rusty appliances and other non-biodegradable detritus in the strata. Humans, Schneiderman relates, are acting as geological agents in non-geological time.

A feeling of awe and respect for the earth's development is a natural result of cultivating this feeling for deep time, and Schneiderman finds this to be an important counter balance to the risk of "burn-out" that can be an issue in teaching environmental science. On the brink of an abyss of futility about the future, she finds that geology can reveal that the earth demonstrates powerful capacities for change and rejuvenation.

Renée Hill, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Virginia State University, related the progress of the Master's degree program in Justice and Transformation she is developing with **Wesley Hogan**, Associate Professor of History. The "Transformation" part of the program refers to both the transformation of the community and of the self. At this point, the curriculum has been designed and they are seeking institutional support.

In the meantime, they have been experimenting with meditation, reflective writing and deep listening in their classes and have created an "ad-hoc sangha" of students and professors to cycle through additional contemplative practices including yoga, drawing, drumming and chanting.

When initiated, the program will introduce students to theories of justice and give them opportunities for reflection on what it means to be fair, equitable, and just. They will study the historical roots of contemporary political, economic, religious, and ethnic strife, as well as current trends and hot spots. Students will specialize in a specific area such as Healthcare Equity, Peace Studies, Conflict Resolution, Community Organizing, Urban Quality of Life, Education, the Environment, GLBT Rights, or Disability Advocacy, etc., and work with nonprofits in those areas to gain community organizing experience. The contemplative practice component will support their inner personal transformation as well as outer community transformation.

In the afternoon, a talk from **Daniel Barbezat**, Professor of Economics at Amherst College, addressed some specific questions posed by Arthur and Mirabai about

bringing contemplative practice into the classroom. Barbezat said the questions: "How does the question of what type of practice to use in the classroom arise from the discipline itself?" and "How do we not "instrumentalize" the practices?" left him slightly overwhelmed. But he proceeded to rise to the challenge with characteristic aplomb and addressed them thoughtfully and energetically.

When contemplative practices are employed, he said, a variety of outcomes are possible. When using them in a classroom, Barbezat finds it important to be conscientious about the separation between his own practice (Buddhist) and what he does with his students. He also wanted to emphasize that as a contemplative educator, what he's doing when he's not doing contemplative practice is just as important as when he does engage the students in the exercises. The wonder and openness that practice fosters has to be modeled by the teacher's attitude throughout the class.

Although Barbezat has a Vipassana practice and a great respect for the integrity of the tradition, he doesn't teach this meditation to his students. The fundamental asymmetry of the student teacher relationship doesn't, in his perspective, allow for it. His use of contemplative practice in the classroom arises from his pedagogical and practical concerns—"out of the discipline itself," as the question put it. In behavioral economics, for example, his students need to be able to understand complex theoretical material. To demonstrate how practices can help, he suggested his that his listeners participate in the one of exercises he's developed for a class on consumption.

Barbezat asks his students to explore the difference between what they say they want and what they do. As the students consider their own consumption behavior, he asks, "Is there anything you believe you should consume less of?"

All of them can identify something. Their assignment then is to give it up for a week. After a week, the exercise has helped them understand the "complexity of their wanting." Some remark, "there seem to be two of me," and they are confronted with the paradox of desire and self-control. When presented with a theoretical model that shows this duality, their comprehension of it is informed by their own expertise.

To answer the second question, "How do we not instrumentalize the practices," Barbezat stepped back into the moral space where the teacher's wish for the students' learning motivates him or her to include practice as part of pedagogy. He finds it helpful to identify both material and immaterial goals that teaching can foster. If the intention, in addition to giving them the tools to master the course content, is to create an



openness to learn, the reality that many students are filled with fantasy and preoccupation has to be addressed, and there is a role for the teacher to create a space to learn. Otherwise, there's just a "small cubby hole," where the teaching can be "slotted in," and the course could just as well be a set of CD Roms.

To be responsible to this aspect of teaching and learning, practices that help students find stillness and develop self-awareness have huge implications. When practices are used skillfully, the space that they create for students to encounter the emotional content, moral and intellectual aspects, and even physical effects of what they are learning can bring about positive outcomes both material and immaterial.

"Contemplative Practice in Higher Education: Growing Networks Within Institutions,"

a presentation by **Mirabai Bush** and **Patricia Wallace**, Professor of English, Vassar College, looked at ways that a culture of contemplation can be developed across the campus. In addition to many professors making use of contemplative pedagogies, there is a growing awareness of the value that awareness and attention practices have from coaches, librarians, dance professors, and those working in counseling centers and offices of spiritual life.



Mirabai related her experiences in the continuing education department at the University of California at Davis, which introduced mindfulness at its annual meeting, hosted a workshop with Arthur, and is developing resources for a mindful workplace, including a library; suggestions for bringing mindfulness into the working day, and posters reminding staff of its value. She spoke about her work with the Smith College School for Social Work, which now includes an advanced certificate program in spirituality and social work practice called "Contemplative Clinical Practice."

Among the 23 colleges and institutions that are part of the City University of New York, the CUNY Contemplatives have emerged as an informal association of professors dedicated to the use of contemplative practices in academia. They maintain a network and share thoughts, papers, research, resources, and collaborate on projects. Members of the CUNY Contemplatives have presented together and individually at several conferences and envision the eventual formation of some type of contemplative center or institute within CUNY as well as a contemplative concentration, certificate program, or major.

At Brown University, the Contemplative Studies Initiative is a group of faculty with diverse academic specializations who are united around a common interest in the study of mental states that exhibit characteristics that include focused attention, deep

concentration, and complete absorption in activity. They are working towards receiving formal recognition as a program or a center, and have recently introduced the Scholarly Concentration in Contemplative Studies. The Scholarly Concentration is in the Warren Alpert Medical School and focuses on the clinical aspects and applications of contemplative practices.

At Amherst, the college instituted a Day of Mindfulness—a series of events inviting members of the college community to explore various contemplative practices. Across campus, from a yoga class given in the athletic departments, to a meditation session in the Japanese garden, staff, professors and students led exercises demonstrating the many ways contemplation can be practiced.

Patricia Wallace offered Vassar College as another example of how to begin making the connections in an institution. As part of her program development fellowship, she invited faculty members to a semester long seminar that explored the creative process and made use of contemplative practice. The creative process is an issue in teaching and research that doesn't respond to conventional educational strategies, so there appeared to be openness to an innovative approach. Every 2 weeks, 15 faculty members from sociology, chemistry, literature, Italian and student advising met to explore visualization practices, labyrinth walking, and other meditative practices. The seminar was valuable, Wallace found, because as well as fostering a commitment to integrating practices, the professors and administrators discovered their colleagues outside of departmental divisions. This kind of interdisciplinary exchange has a way of integrating increasingly divided campuses and this group found their work together generative and rewarding.



On Sunday morning, **Jeremy Hunter**, Professor, Peter F. Drucker Graduate School of Management, Claremont Graduate School presented **“Developing the Executive Mind: Teaching Managers to Manage Themselves”** based on a course he teaches to a diverse group of students, including sheriffs, neuroscientists, and small business owners. He makes use of techniques to support what a manager, in all these and any arena, does: gets results.



His mindfulness-based approach develops the “Executive Mind,” a mental state which demonstrates the power of attention; the mastery of emotional reactions; the facility to

manage transitions and move forward; and the ability to manage oneself.

Management as a discipline arose from the need to coordinate activity, originally industrial work, which aggregates processes performed by many, but where no one person knows how to make the whole thing. The increased productivity and efficiency that effective management realized created great wealth and allowed for rising standards of living.

Although industrial ideals of productivity still govern knowledge work, some tenets can be reasonably challenged. The model breaks down when increased stress begins to result in less productivity at a particular inflection point.

Hunter shared his personal experience of how a health challenge caused him to reexamine the standard productivity models. Now, teaching at Drucker, he's found a way to balance management questions, such as "how do I get the results I want?" with an awareness of the need to manage oneself.

His self-management class includes mindfulness training and makes use of a "reactivity map" that allows students to chart their responses to phenomena. In class they choose two results they didn't want and study them. When they understand how effects generated by their actions are often based on reactions that are habitual patterns rather than responses to what is actually happening, they can explore alternative routes through the map, and consider positive interventions that create the desired results.

The weekend's meetings concluded with a gathering of questions from the group organized by open space technology. At the closing circle, the participants expressed great appreciation for the range of approaches that were shared and a clearer sense of their common project as contemplative teachers.



Participant List

Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, Fetzer Institute Participants, and Guests

Arthur Zajonc

Director, Academic Program, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society
Professor, Physics, Amherst College

Mirabai Bush

Senior Fellow, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Sunanda Markus

Academic Program Coordinator, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Beth Wadham

Academic Program Associate, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

David Scott

Board member, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society,
Former Chancellor, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

Eric Nelson

Program Officer, Fetzer Institute

Jeremy Hunter

Professor, Peter F. Drucker Graduate School of Management,
Claremont Graduate School

Barbara Craig

Senior Project Evaluator, Center for New Designs in Learning & Scholarship,
Georgetown University, and Evaluator for the Contemplative Practice Fellowship
Program

Fellowship Recipients & Guests

Daniel Barbezat (2008 Fellow)

Professor, Economics, Amherst College
Board member, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Loriliai Biernacki (2009 Fellow)

Associate Professor, University of Colorado, Boulder

Melissa Goldthwaite (2009 Fellow)

Associate Professor, English, Saint Joseph's University

Bradford Grant (2000 Fellow)

Associate Dean of the College of Engineering, Architecture, and Computer Sciences

Director of the School of Architecture and Design, Howard University
Board member, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Wesley Hogan (2009 Fellow)
Associate Professor, History, Virginia State University

Renée Hill (2009 Fellow)
Associate Professor, Philosophy, Virginia State University
Betty Kramer (2009 Fellow)
Professor, Social Work, University of Wisconsin-Madison

John Makransky (2009 Fellow)
Associate Professor, Theology, Boston College

Layli D. Phillips (2009 Fellow)
Associate Professor, Women's Studies, Georgia State University

Jill S. Schneiderman (2009 Fellow)
Professor, Earth Science, Vassar College

Gregory Price Grieve (2009 Fellow)
Associate Professor, Religious Studies, University of North Carolina

Meena Sharify-Funk (2009 Fellow)
Assistant Professor, Religion and Culture, Wilfred Laurier University

Leslie Paul Thiele (2009 Fellow)
Professor, Political Science, University of Florida

Mark S. Umbreit (2009 Fellow)
Professor, Social Work and Conflict Resolution, University of Minnesota

Patricia Wallace (2006 Fellow)
Professor, English, Vassar College

