

Fourth Annual Conference of the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education: “Contemplative Approaches in the Diverse Academic Community: Inquiry, Connection, Creativity, and Insight”

September 21-23, 2012

Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts

At annual ACMHE conferences, members present research and exchange ideas about the ways contemplative practices serve teaching, learning, and knowing.

The Fourth Annual ACMHE Conference, “Contemplative Approaches in the Diverse Academic Community: Inquiry, Connection, Creativity, and Insight” was fully enrolled at 170 participants. Presenters and attendees reflected a diversity of cultural and racial/ethnic backgrounds as well as a diversity of disciplines, institutions and positions. There were 57 presentations during concurrent sessions and 25 posters.

Gaëlle Desbordes, research fellow at the Athinoula A. Martinos Center for Biomedical Imaging within the Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School presented “The Contemplative Brain,” as a plenary session. Musician and philosopher **David Rothenberg** gave a concert performance, “Bird, Whale, Bug: Music from Nature” and discussed his research on the musicality of nightingale, cicada and whale songs.



A World Café, facilitated by **Barb Catbagan**, Interdisciplinary Studies at Naropa University and **Rona Wilensky**, consultant on transformational leadership for educators, brought participants to the table on Sunday morning for conversations to consider the future of contemplative higher education and the direction of the ACMHE.

Rhonda Magee, President of the Center’s Board, Professor of Law and Co-Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of San Francisco, delivered the keynote address, “Contemplating Race, Law and Justice: Some Notes on Pedagogy for Changing the World.”



Recognizing that race is just one of the many kinds of diversity in the academic community, Magee focused on it as her area of research over the fourteen years she’s been teaching law.

Issues of race are still very much with us, she confirmed, although they are often put aside in educational settings. Well-meaning people may feel less than confident wading into conversations that involve race, and when it comes up, tend to move away, and look for ways to get out of it cleanly and gracefully (without looking like trying to get out of it).

For Magee, whose aspirations for education include helping every individual develop their talents to use for the highest and best for the world, the classroom offers rich opportunity to explore and learn from one another about these issues.

She challenged educators to “bring our best game”—these practices—and gradually deepen our capacity for discussions about race and diversity. This requires commitment, but by bringing narrative (storytelling), listening and self-awareness practices, and leading with her heart, she’s found that students will go a long way with her because they can see that she cares. Magee’s inclusive pedagogy engages students at various levels: personal, interpersonal, and as persons in a social/cultural position or context.

Contemplative approaches have transformed her courses. She gives students time to consider the implications of law and policies, such as stop and search, from multiple perspectives.

Contemplative methods offer a way to stay with the difficult conversations and sustain inquiries with a greater degree of openness. Her classroom has been her own ground of experimentation and exploration.

In classrooms, she observes, we have an opportunity to sit across the table from one another. When discussing racial profiling, she asks her students, “How many have been pulled over for traffic violations?” Many hands around the room are raised. “How many have had their vehicles searched?” Only the black and brown students raise their hands. “How many have had the police pull guns on them?” Only the black males are left with hands raised. In combination with an examination of the data on the number of searches that result in arrests, these personal experiences reveal, Magee suggests, a fuller picture of truth. For all the students in the room, both those who have been targeted and those who haven’t, there is a revelation that the world may not be how they thought it was, and an appreciation of their common humanity. She can “feel from their faces how community is created.”

These kinds of conversations help us recognize that we all have a piece of relevant experience—something we know—to share. With resonance, Magee struck the keynote for the weekend of listening, learning and sharing that was to come, as contemplative colleagues began to articulate a reconceptualization of education for inquiry, connection, creativity and insight.



Examples of presentations:

Contemplative Pedagogy and Intercultural Development

Vaishali Mamgain, Economics, University of Southern Maine

Roundtable: How can Mindfulness Practices be Integrating in Teaching and Learning about Diversity on Campus?

Laura Carmen Arena, Multicultural and International Affairs, Harvard University School of Education

Connecting the Curricular and Co-Curricular Elements of our Diverse Academic Community through Contemplative Practices

David O’Malley, Social Work, Bridgewater State University & Beth O’Malley, Hood College

Teaching Alternative Dispute Resolution in Culturally Transformed America

George Knox, Florida International University College of Law

Difference and Dialogue

Judith Simmer-Brown, Naropa University

What can Feminism offer Mindfulness Initiatives in the Classroom?

Beth Berila, Women's Studies, St. Cloud University

Mindful Email and Beyond

David Levy, Information Science, University of Washington

Mindfully Exploring Reverence and Compassion in a Highly Diverse Classroom Setting

Peter Dlugos, Religion and Philosophy, Bergen Community College

Body-Oriented Pedagogy: when body becomes subject and mind becomes object

Oren Ergas, Education, Haifa University

The full program and a video of the keynote address are archived at <http://www.acmhe.org/conferences>

