Using Contemplative Practices to Promote Well-Being and Social Justice Awareness

Michelle Chatman, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor,
Department of Justice Studies

University of the District of Columbia

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Order or Presentation

- Introduction
- Brief History of UDC
- What is Contemplative Education?
- Campus Practices
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  - Day of Non-Violence & Well-Being Wednesday
- Social Justice and Contemplative Education
  - The Food Stamp Challenge
  - Tally’s Corner Revisited
- Practice
  - The Coltrane Meditation
- Questions and Feedback
Evolution of Public Higher Education in Washington, DC

- Miner Normal School for Colored Girls, Founded 1851 by Myrtilla Miner.
- The Normal School & Wilson Teachers College merged in 1955 to become DC Teachers College.
- Federal City College and Washington Technical Institute, were founded in (opened in 1968).
• Diverse student body of approximately 5,000 students.

• Three campuses: The UDC Community College (UDC-CC); The Flagship (main campus); and The UDC School of Law.

• 75 undergraduate and graduate degree programs across five colleges.

Source: www.udc.edu
Profile of UDC Student Body

UDC students are:

• Residents of DC, MD, and Virginia
• First generation college students
• Professionals, retirees, and recent high school graduates
• International students from 93 countries
• Transfer students
• Full-time and part-time employees
Black Women and Psychosocial Barriers to Breast Cancer Treatment

A frame from video footage of the dance workshop Moving Stories, Moving Bodies, at The Smith Center for Healing and the Arts, Washington, D.C.
Three Spheres of Influence

- Deep & Engaged Learning
- Breast Cancer & Psychosocial Well-being
- Social Activism
These approaches cultivate an inner technology of knowing and thereby a technology of learning and pedagogy without any imposition of religious doctrine whatsoever. If we knew a particular and readily available activity would increase concentration, learning, well-being and social emotional growth, and catalyze transformative learning, we would be cheating our students to exclude it (Tobin Hart 2004).
The Tree of Contemplative Practices

www.contemplativemind.org
Contemplative Practice is not:

- Prayer in schools
- Psychotherapy
- A violation of rights
- Confessional
- Trendy for the moment
Contemplative Practices at UDC
Goal: Help students connect to their inner lives

- Inspired by the Muslim Prayer practice
- Sit in silence for 5 minutes, 5 x per day, 4 days
- Journal about your experience daily
- Check in on Twitter at 9:20pm

During Spring Break 2013!!!
Student Reactions

- We used to meditate in primary school and I enjoyed it. I will start the practice again. (Minoko).

- I think this would be helpful in managing my lupus (Cynthia).

- I am under so much pressure all the time. This was a great way to calm down (Snezana).

- I thought meditation was only people sitting cross-legged on the floor but it’s not. I think it might actually help me get things done (Rashad).
Students take a moment to center and presence themselves in class.
On September 11, 2013, students were asked to observe a twenty-four hour period of peace and non-violence.
Today I had to reassure myself at least a dozen times that I’m at peace today. My co-workers noticed right away that I was much more cool, calm, and collected. I work as a server and a constant stress level is almost assumed when you’re dealing with a 10 table section. I didn’t let the little things bother me like the rude customers, or the kitchens mistakes or my fellow employees stress get in the way of my peaceful journey. When I got home from work I noticed that I wasn’t as exhausted as I normally am. (Sarah R.)
Well-Being Wednesdays

- Students were asked to devote one hour to an activity that promotes personal well-being, taking notice of how they feel. Students then shared their experience on Blackboard and commented on the experiences of their classmates (LMS).
What did students do?

- A diabetic student took time to prepare a healthy breakfast for herself.
- One student played Frisbee on the lawn with a friend.
- One student cleaned out her car.
- One student Watched 30 minutes of gospel videos on Youtube.
- Several went to the gym or exercised outdoors.
Today...I intentionally left my iphone at home while I ran around a lake nearby. I take the phone to listen to music as I run but sometimes I get distracted by phone calls. When I don’t have my phone on me I feel free but I need it at times, it’s like a love hate thing. Also it was different to not listen to music, [it was] kind of peaceful. Life is better without cell phones!

- David, Sociology major
Social Justice Concerns
The mission of the ACMHE is to advocate for contemplative practice in higher education; to encourage new forms of inquiry and imaginative thinking; and to educate active citizens who will support a more just and compassionate direction for society.

Source: www.achme.org
Washington, D.C., is the seat of our country’s government. Yet, here in DC:

- Nearly 110,000 District residents live in poverty.
- 37% of District adults function at the lowest level of literacy.
- 33% of District children live in poverty, about double the national average.
- Cost of living in DC is three times that of the national average.
- The income gap in DC is at all time high.

Source: So Others Might Eat (www.somedc.org)
Through interviews, deep listening, and storytelling, the project seeks to understand how community members maintain their connections to the past, while engaging critically around present day issues of equity and access.

This project is supported by the Washington D.C. Humanities Council.
Many families in American subsist on just a few dollars per day. For this challenge, your group members will spend only $7 per day on meals for four consecutive days. The purpose of this challenge is to heighten your awareness about income disparities and food insecurity in our country. Each group member must contribute to the Food Stamp Challenge journal twice a day during the exercise. Feel free to upload video journals and written journal entries.
PRACTICE
Following a mini-lecture on contemplative education, students are guided in a brief meditation while listening to the soulful sounds of saxophonist John Coltrane. The exercise is designed to help students become attuned to their breathing, their bodies, and their thoughts.
Many faculty currently use contemplative strategies in their classes such as journaling, and attentive listening. A core of faculty are interested in exploring these modalities further and incorporating them into their instruction.

I learned new ways to incorporate creativity into my courses without additional effort. Great job!

Contemplative pedagogy is a new term for me, so I was happy to learn about it.

Contemplative learning! It's a very exciting idea. I want to incorporate this into my classes.
Why is this important?

- Deepens student learning
- Awakens us to our inner lives and that of our students
- Restorative

- It’s just good stuff!
Thank you!
mchatman@udc.edu

Please complete the feedback survey!
• Richard Brady, Learning to Stop, Stopping to Learn: Embarking on the Contemplative Learning Path (2005)
• Arthur Zajonc, Love & Knowledge: Recovering the Heart of Learning through Contemplation (.pdf format), Physics Department Amherst College and Director of the Academic Program Contemplative Mind in Society.
• Shapiro, Brown, and Austin Toward the Integration of Meditation into Higher Education: A Review of the Research (2008)
• Websites
  • The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (www.contemplativemind.org)
  • The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (www.acmhe.org)
  • http://brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_Education/common_college_health_issues/mindfulness.php
  • Welcome by John Coltrane http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dhj9X0THMAk
  • ECM Records http://www.ecmrecords.com/Background/2099.php