The Science of Contemplative Practice & the Practice of Contemplative Science

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Agenda

• Science & Practice

• Conducting research in Contemplative Science (CS).

• Conceptualizing and communicating CS.

• Identity in CS.
Science & Practice

• Mutually-informative endeavors

• Areas-of-concern
  – CP in the laboratory vs. the classroom
  – Practitioner vs. scholar vs. scientist
  – Fidelity vs. freedom

• Basic & applied research, scholarship, and assessment are necessary components of a legitimate field of Contemplative Studies.

• Dichotomy vs. dialectic
Dichotomy vs. Dialectic

Dichotomy

• Limits communication.
• Leads to poorly-informed research & practice
• Limits mutual growth of CP & CS.
• Follows a traditional paradigm of bifurcating pedagogy and research.

Dialectic

• Fosters communication.
• Research informs practice informs research...
• Mutual growth and legitimacy.
• Honors a contemplative identity.
Conducting Research

• “You study meditation, right?”
  – Is a bit like asking a biologist if they study life.

• Component-process approach
  – Reduces methodological complexity
  – Explores both process and outcome

• Begins with intra-/inter-personal experience and intention.
  – Personal practice experiences
  – Collaborative conversations
Conducting Research

• Qualitative
  – An evaluation of motivation and process in a short course on Buddhism and meditation (Godlaski, 2011).
  – Applications of contemplative practices in Chinese language learning (Anderson & Godlaski, \textit{in preparation})

• Quantitative
  – Cardiac physiologic effects of brief breath awareness training (Godlaski et al., 2013).
  – Physiology of Emotion Regulation (Godlaski et al., 2014)
  – The Gratitude Project (pilot complete)
  – Physiologic and Immunologic effects of \textit{Forest Bathing} (森林浴) in the United States (\textit{in development})
  – The Gethsemane Project: A multi-method study of contemplative practice in Catholic monastics (\textit{call me if this sounds like fun.})
Lessons from Qualitative Research

• The intentionality of participants is important.
• Teachers should take the process slowly.
  – Personal practice
  – Meet students where they are
  – Recognize development at multiple levels
    • Within practice
    • Within person
    • Within project

• Exploration and understanding of 1st person experiences is necessary for effective quantitative research in contemplative science and pedagogy.
Lessons from Quantitative Research

• The intentionality of the researcher is important.
  – Extends to training with research students
• Reducing, categorizing, & labeling can be both productive and disruptive.
• Use of self-report can lack reliability & validity.
• Potentially fruitful future directions
  – Mixed-model
    • Neurophenomenology
  – Component process analysis
Putting Lessons into Practice

• Student training
  – Scientific literature
    • Object under study
    • Contemplative practice
  – 1st person practice
    • Contemplative practice
    • Object under study

• Project development
  – Collaborative and integrative
  – Student engagement in developing and piloting methodology
Putting Lessons into Practice

• Goals
  – Rigorous scientific training
  – Incorporation of 1\textsuperscript{st} person methods in personal development \textit{and} research practice
    • Recognition of personal and systemic biases in research

• Future directions
  – Multi-disciplinary contemplative science training for students
  – Collaborative assessment of undergraduate research experience
  – International research/practice collaboration

• Precedents
  – Brown Contemplative Studies
  – U. Michigan BA Jazz & Contemplative Studies
  – B. Alan Wallace’s work on “contemplative science”
Identity in Contemplative Science

• Challenges
  – Publication bias
  – The taboo of subjectivity
  – Quantifying the ineffable

• Science without ego
  – Being clear about intentionality
  – Sharing mistakes
  – Learning from errors
Conceptualizing and Communicating Contemplative Science

• Addresses problems in studying contemplative practice
  – Fuzzy terminology
  – Process of contemplative training

• Uses
  – Operationalization
  – Heuristic framework to map experience
  – Generate testable hypotheses

From Lutz, Jha, Dunne, & Saron, 2015
Conceptualizing and Communicating Contemplative Science

• Scientific data may be the most efficacious and accessible language for explaining potential positive effects.
  – Caveat: Not all findings are broadly applicable, much work remains to be done.

• Critical 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} person perspectives should be highlighted
Recommended Readings


