The Place of Practice in Contemplative Pedagogy and Writing

Karolyn Kinane, Ph.D., University of Virginia

Abstract: Contemplative pedagogy is part of the larger emerging field of Contemplative Studies. Louis Komjathy (2018) has observed three characteristics shared by various aspects of Contemplative Studies: practice commitment, critical subjectivity, and character development. This paper uses these three characteristics to describe and define a "contemplative course" and "contemplative writing." First, this paper describes a contemplative approach to the development of the General Education course "Curiosity, Playfulness, Creativity" in terms of the author's practice commitment, critical subjectivity, and character development. Second, the paper discusses these three characteristics as they apply to students' contemplative writing experiences and assignments in that course. These notes on theory and practice may provide inspiration for educators across disciplines to craft context-informed contemplative courses and experiences that tap into the radical, transformative power of contemplative traditions.

Introduction

Many of the goals and processes of contemplative pedagogy have long traditions and histories (Komjathy, 2015; Bush & Barbezat, 2014; Bush & Hill, 2006). Techniques such as meditation and reflection, the pursuit of questions of meaning, and first-person ways of knowing were central to medieval Christian monastic educational contexts (Orme, 2006; Ferzoco & Meussig, 2001). More recently, there have been a number of movements in education—particularly the teaching of writing—that share the techniques and aims of contemplative pedagogy as they are emerging: valuing personal stories, reflecting on experiences, building community, increasing social awareness, cultivating love, achieving liberation, etc. (Paxton Foehr & Schiller, 1997; Wilhelm & Novak, 2011; LaMay, 2016; Christensen, 2017). While the techniques and aims are not new, Contemplative Studies—of which contemplative pedagogy is a part—is itself a relatively new field. Practitioners are currently mapping the contours of the field and defining key terms as we practice them; we must rely on the next generation of practitioners, scholars, and educators to bring thorough critical reflection to the experimentation and exploration we are now undertaking. Nonetheless, I would like to flesh out a few ways to theorize what makes a course "contemplative" and what makes student writing itself "contemplative writing."

While honoring the currently eclectic, open, and diverse nature of the contemplative pedagogy movement, I also appreciate efforts to define the field without limiting its flexibility. In this essay, I draw from Louis Komjathy's *Introducing Contemplative Studies* (2018), which provides an

invaluable snapshot of where contemplative pedagogy, contemplative science, and other subfields were, are, and could be. In chapter 5, Komjathy identifies three aspects of contemplative pedagogy useful to this present discussion. He observes that "contemplative pedagogy" often refers to: teaching informed by a teacher's personal contemplative practice; a course that features contemplative practices such as meditation; a course that takes as its subject contemplative traditions, practices, and/or experiences. He notes that one or more of these elements are present to greater or lesser degrees within the approaches to education currently termed "contemplative pedagogy." This paper builds upon the first two criteria to discuss in some detail the development and teaching of a 1000-level General Education course entitled "Curiosity, Playfulness, Creativity." That is, I will describe how my approach to course construction has been informed by my own contemplative practice as well as how the course features students engaging in contemplative practices.[1]

Contemplative pedagogy is, as I've mentioned, part of the larger emerging field of Contemplative Studies. Once again, Komjathy (2018) has identified three characteristics shared by various aspects of Contemplative Studies: practice commitment, critical subjectivity, and character development. I use these three characteristics to frame the following discussion. First, this paper describes a contemplative approach to the development of the contemplative writing course "Curiosity, Playfulness, Creativity" in terms of practice commitment, critical subjectivity, and character development. Second, the paper discusses these three characteristics as they apply to students' contemplative writing experiences and assignments in that course. It is my hope that these notes on theory and practice provide inspiration for educators across disciplines to craft context-informed contemplative courses and experiences that tap into the radical, transformative power of contemplative traditions, to be discussed in the conclusion.

A Contemplative Approach to Course Design

While other approaches to teaching and learning share contemplative pedagogy's commitment to "transformation" or "character development," they may not share the practice commitment, so I shall start there. Komjathy summarizes:

> Contemplative practice refers to various approaches, disciplines, and methods for developing attentiveness, awareness, compassion, concentration, presence, wisdom, and the like. Possible connective strands or family resemblances include attentiveness, awareness, interiority, presence, silence, transformation, and a deepened sense of meaning and purpose. (Komjathy, 2018, p. 14)

My "contemplative approach" to teaching and course design is, therefore, *my particular way* of being rooted in and cultivating the above characteristics. This approach is also informed by my contexts: my personal practice, the training I have, the community of students I work with, the aesthetics of the space we share, the traditions of our university, etc. Another contemplative educator's course may look different in terms of the goals, techniques, and experiences that they craft, but we could perhaps share aspects of an "approach": we may both value attention, awareness, presence, etc., and we may both look to our practice for how to live and develop those values. Personally, I practice moment-to-moment, nonjudgmental awareness because of my grounding in "mindfulness" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; See also Consilio & Kennedy, 2019). I also develop the above characteristics through journaling and yoga and therefore have a personal commitment to these practices. Additionally, "Do unto others…" ("…as you would have them do unto you") has served as a kind of prayer or mantra that I turn to when confused or surprised by circumstances

and when I need to act swiftly in the moment. These contemplative practices and the insights that arise from them—along with other contexts such as my training, the classroom space, the university ethos—explicitly inform the shape of the contemplative course I designed, as will become clearer below.

The second characteristic Komjathy (2018) cites as common across Contemplative Studies is critical subjectivity, or "critical first-person discourse" (Roth, 2006). Here, I interpret that as engaging in practice and critically reflecting on those processes, experiences, and insights, if any. Such critical exploration of personal experience includes identifying biases and contexts that shape the nature of and the way we communicate those experiences. I—and perhaps other contemplative educators—subject my teaching experiences, assumptions, and habits, as well as my contemplative practices, to this mode of inquiry. This process, paired with third-person ways of knowing (scholarly study) clarifies my own desires, drives, ontological beliefs and epistemological processes that shape the course goals and student experiences.

For example, exploring my commitment to moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness led me to reflect upon the role of receptivity in my life as well as my relationship to control and outcomes. Such first-person critical inquiry led me to craft a relatively "open" course—that is, one designed with and by students as the semester progressed.[2] I had felt I had an uneasy relationship to the idea of "not knowing" and, until I made some peace with it, I could not fairly ask students to be comfortable with experimentation, playfulness, and "not knowing." And so, to leave room for the unexpected to arise in a course, to keep myself present with students, and to honor their voices, I provided a bare-bones outline for the course and we collaboratively created the details and contours of the class as our skills, community, and curiosity developed. At the start of the course, students knew they would maintain a weekly journal, write four reflection pieces, do a variety of creative writing assignments, and construct an Action Plan, but we did not know exactly what these prompts or processes would look like. I provided deadlines and grade breakdowns so students had some security and stability, but we spent ample time in and out of class crafting prompts, interrogating our desires and goals, and posting these to Moodle (our university's online Learning Management System), rather than having a static syllabus. Similarly, "Do unto others" informed my decisions both to build the course with students and to do all course activities/assignments that I required of students. I want students to honor my voice and time; I believe I should do the same to them. If I want them to value their experience, I need to have some sense of those experiences by having them myself. I have, therefore, been intentional about the ways my practice and the insights gleaned from first-person critical inquiry shape the course.

The third characteristic Komjathy cites as common across Contemplative Studies is character development. Here is where one may explore the "ethical and social, or at least an existential and psychological dimension" of pedagogy (2018, p. 15). As mentioned, contemplative educators seem to share the values of "awareness, empathy, interiority, presence, reflection, silence, wisdom, and of course, appreciation of the beneficial and transformative influences of contemplative practice itself" (p. 16). In bringing a contemplative approach to this particular course design, I considered both the aspects of myself I would like to develop as well as the dispositions I would like to cultivate in students to fulfill our teaching and learning goals. As a result, the course focuses on "awareness," (particularly noticing and re-seeing habitual ways of being), which is not only a contemplative value as identified by Komjathy above, but also a skill and disposition useful to the "creative process," the General Education designation for this course.

While considering ways that students can be surprised or transformed, I believe I need to understand my own relationship to those experiences. My contemplative practice informs this course design in that—through teaching—I am attempting to bring attention to my own ability to

be present, to be humble, to be supportive, to let go of outcomes, and to be curious about the people and processes I share space and time with. As a result, the course privilege process, requires collaboration, encourages reflection upon values and actions, features first-person critical ways of knowing, and uses meditation as one among many techniques that can enhance a creative attitude toward living and learning.

Some practice-informed goals that I sketched for myself before crafting specific course details include:

1.   The course is flexible enough to respond to students' needs and interests while being clear and stable enough to help students feel safe and informed;
2.   Students discover and develop tools to approach life creatively;
3.   Students experience regular, sustained reflection on who they are, what they are doing, and why;
4.   I practice and model "a creative process" while teaching this class, demonstrating how to gather data, collaborate, be playful, take risks, be fearless of failure, to listen, to express gratitude, to reflect, to let ideas simmer, to present new ideas, to allow them to be revised;
5.   We are contributing members of a community of thinkers, writers, and human beings;
6.   The course features enough variety in approaches and assignments that students could find something in it that spoke to them or resonated with them.

I would like to highlight my belief that it's not necessarily the goals or the technique—building an "open" syllabus, or participating in specific class activities—that made this course "contemplative." Rather, looked at more holistically, the disposition, process, and context—the way contemplative practice specifically informs course development—leads me to call this a "contemplative" writing course.

The Journal as Contemplative Writing

I will now turn to how Komjathy's three characteristics of Contemplative Studies—practice commitment, critical subjectivity, and character development— undergird students' contemplative writing experiences in the General Education course "Curiosity, Playfulness, Creativity." What follows will, I hope, inspire instructors across disciplines to explore the contexts and purposes informing their own adoption of contemplative writing techniques. In this way, instructors can engage their practice, subject it to first-person inquiry, and thereby employ contemplative pedagogy to tap into the transformative power of contemplative traditions, discussed in the conclusion.

In their discussion of contemplative writing, Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush note that:

> [W]riting is communication, but contemplative writing as a practice often emphasizes process rather than outcome. Journal writing and free writing encourage simple noticing what is in the mind and in the world and writing the raw truth as experienced, not crafted for communication until later. (2014, p. 124)

They then describe in some detail activities such as journaling, reflecting on practice, freewriting, and storytelling (p. 124-136). These activities, however, have been key aspects of writing classrooms for decades; it can be unclear whether all journaling is "contemplative" or whether there is some unique element that can make journaling "contemplative writing." I would humbly

suggest that journaling becomes "contemplative writing" when we treat it as a practice, subject it to first-person critical inquiry, and aim for character development.

While other pedagogies aim at transformation, contemplative pedagogy distinctively features a focus on *practice*, which is both a process and an end itself. That is, sometimes "the practice is just the practice" (Komjathy, 2018, p. 92). To treat journaling as practice, students in this particular course wrote once-a-week open topic journal entries with the simple goal that "Students will develop a regular, sustained (and sustaining) habit of writing that can last a lifetime" (from the Course Syllabus). If something beneficial or interesting emerges, great, but we do not focus solely on the (potential) outcome as we write. Further, in terms of the experience of journaling, it is important to remember that not all contemplative experiences are positive, and journaling may give rise to so-called negative states. In addition to increased feelings of empathy and relaxation, contemplative practice can give rise to "agitation, anxiety, boredom, contentment, depression, determination, disappointment, discomfort, discouragement, enthusiasm, focus, happiness, laxity, lethargy, loneliness, patience, relaxation, tension, and so forth" (Komjathy, 2018, p. 97). Writing as contemplative practice allows room for these various states to arise for examination.

Barbara Anderson-Seibert (Pennsylvania State University) offers a useful description of a journal process:

> "The journal will be a personal documentation of your process. We will be looking for signs of struggle, of moving beyond what you already know, of deepening the quality of your experience, evidence of work & thought outside of class, new insights & relationships between the course & your life" (quoted in Barbezat & Bush, 2014, p. 129).

In my experience, I could not simply ask students to "struggle," to develop new insights, or to focus on process; Rather, such experiences had to be crafted and provoked. I noticed that, for the first few weeks of the semester, students seemed preoccupied with journal *content* rather than process. They fretted, frequently asking: "What should I write about?" Some students found topics easily while others struggled, so the class collaboratively compiled a list of over 50 potential writing prompts ranging from the personal and reflective to the playful and fictional: Write about a tree you loved; "I knew I had to end it…" complete the story; Does your dog love you? Etc. However, offering topics did not successfully move students from product-focus to process-focus. Therefore, two-thirds of the way through the semester, we applied first-person critical inquiry to our practice—our Journals. And that is when things started to get really interesting.

Several times during the final third of the semester, students randomly opened their journal, read an early entry, and critically investigated their own experience. That is, rather than writing a summative reflective response to the process or product of journaling overall, students looked closely at one journal entry and simply noticed: Where is the writing interesting? Where do you, as a reader, get bored? Then I asked them: What do you remember about your contexts for writing this entry? Where were you? Why did you write on this topic? What mood were you in? What were your somatic experiences—hunger, thirst, sleepiness, pain, etc.? I was encouraged by the frankness of student-responses. Many noted they had been "checked out," or "just trying to get it over with." They noted they were "not present" for writing; some didn't even remember writing the entry at all.

Then, in class, we took time to write about what we thought and felt about these observations. Some of the most powerful responses came from students who, perhaps for the first time, were subjected to reading their own disengaged work from a critical distance. Several people noted what a "waste of time and energy" their entries were. To my surprise and delight, students did not blame the assignment but rather questioned *themselves* about why they did not put some attention and

energy into what they were doing. One student said that, if he had "just tried...something interesting could have emerged."

This ability for students to "own" their own levels of engagement—rather than blaming an assignment or instructor for their feelings—had perhaps been cultivated by a previous exercise I had developed on the fly, which I called "changing the grammar of our thoughts." In a previous class meeting, students wrote about a situation or experience that was mildly bothering them—nothing too radical or deep, just annoying. Some wrote about a boring class, others about an annoying roommate, etc. I then worked with them to look at where they were, grammatically, placing responsibility and agency and to see if they could, grammatically, put responsibility on themselves. Such a process may look something like this: "I don't like this book because it doesn't grab my attention. The reading is boring. The stuff is hard to understand." Then: "I get nothing from this book. I am bored by this reading. I can't understand this chapter." And finally: "I am not paying attention to this book. I am not getting curious about this topic. I am not really working to understand this text." While I had not intentionally planted this exercise as a primer for first-person critical inquiry of the Journal (practice), I believe it contributed to students' ability to own their responses during the Journal inquiry.

This inquiry brought *something* to students' attention—something about the way they worked, wrote, thought. I could not anticipate what each students' "something" would be during the course design process. However, with the hope that there would be "something" to explore further, I had held space for an end-of-semester Action Plan assignment. For the last third of the class, students could decide what kind of action to take in any aspect of their lives based on what they had observed of their practice (the Journal). They could continue to write checked-out and boring, dutiful journal entries or they could try to get present with their writing. They could continue to blame the Dining Hall for their poor eating habits or they could get intentional about their food choices. Students noticed something habitual about themselves, took responsibility for changing their attitude, and thereby changed an outcome.

The course's understanding and practice of "noticing" is influenced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work on "flow" (2008) as well as Barbezat and Bush's description of how focus and emotional regulation are learned rather than hardwired (2014, p. 29-32). That is, the Journal practice emerges from my belief that, while we may not have control over the external circumstances of our lives, we do have control over our responses to them. We write; we notice; we act. Our practice—the way we write—becomes the subject of study so that we may establish our own "patterns of action" rather than being merely reactionary or habitual. As James Moffett states in a passage I share with students:

> It's much harder to determine who you are and what you may do even in the worldiest matters when others are constantly forcing things on you and planning everything for you—when you are reactive. It's essential to assert feeling and will and thought proactively enough to establish your own patterns of action. Then you have something of yourself out there for you and others to respond to so that with their help you can chart past and future. (1997, p. 10)

This activity was much more successful at increasing the level of student engagement with writing than activities in my previous courses that did not feature first-person critical inquiry of the Journal, where instead I had just kept *asking* students to "get present" and "be real." With this contemplative activity, students had an experience of being bored by their own writing, were given space to reflect on the motivations for doing such work, and were given the opportunity to

transform that habit. These first-person experiences and critical inquiries, two hallmarks of Contemplative Studies, frequently led to the third hallmark, character development. Students took ownership of their work, responsibility for their feelings, and quite simply, wrote better. The Journal as contemplative practice helped develop students into writers aware of and present for their writing. It also became a tool for creatively approaching life outside the classroom—that is, for thinking and behaving beyond habit in how they ate, exercised, talked to their roommate, or did homework for other classes (through the Action Plan).

Context

I share with Komjathy a "holistic and integrated approach to contemplative education, that is, one in which contemplative practice is not reduced to techniques" (2018, p. 195 n. 29). Therefore, I'll speak here briefly about an additional context for this course's contemplative—as well as creative and critical (not discussed here)—writing practices.

Teachers of writing will be familiar with the positive and important role of "community" in writing classrooms. Building a community of supportive, curious, and game students takes time but is essential for the success of a writing class. Shy writers thrive when there is a sense of collaboration rather than competition. Bold writers thrive when their classmates respond eagerly to new ideas. And creativity is risky. In order to take risks with their ideas and their writing, to truly re-think and re-see their relationships to their work, themselves, and their worlds, students need to feel safe and supported. Community-building techniques not only increase comfort for creative risk-taking but can offer enriched opportunities for human connection, self-understanding, and meta-cognition. To build community, my mantra is "early and often." When students work in dyads or small groups from the very first day of class and consistently experience the value of such work throughout the term, they become more adept at creating meaning with one another and taking themselves and each other seriously. "Community" becomes simply who we are and what we do. In this course, I scaffolded community building first to humanize students to one another, then to create a safe space, then to unleash playfulness. By week five all three of these elements worked with one another simultaneously.

One early technique I offered students was a modification of a typical icebreaker designed provoke active, compassionate listening and to help students become humanized to one another. For the second day of class, I asked students to bring in something that inspires them and to be prepared talk to the class about it. One student brought a photograph of her aunt who recently died. Another brought a seashell. Another, a necklace. Students shared stories of these objects, revealing to each other what moves them rather than the usual, dutiful, easily-forgotten "major and hometown" identifiers.

As each student presented, the rest of the class took notes, writing down the students' names and key features of what they shared. At the end, I asked students to write three-part notes to at least three people in class. The first part, which I called "mirror," reflects back to the speaker something they said. The second part, "connect," links something the speaker said to the writer's own life experiences. For the third part, the writer expressed gratitude to the speaker for something: for being willing to share, for giving us new ways of thinking, etc. One note looked something like this: "Thank you, Sharon, for talking about your brother as an inspiration. I also have a family member with autism and not everyone can appreciate what that's like. Thank you for helping me feel less alone." I collected these notes and then handed them out to the speakers during the next class. Students connected with one another on many levels: a sick relative; a passion for dance; a longing for direction; an untimely death. This activity not only built a community among the students; it

enriched my understanding of the students as individuals and expanded my capacity for compassion for them.

Next, to create safety, we focused on process rather than product and expressed gratitude often. For example, on days when students shared their creative work, we left equal time to inquire into each other's creative process as well as comment on the product. Students asked each other: How did that idea come to you? Why did you choose to organize it this way? Did you write it all at once or in stages? Additionally, in the peer-feedback process, students first "noticed" something about the piece—similar to how they "mirrored" something back to a speaker on the second day of class. For example: "I notice there are a lot of colors in this poem." Then, they "inquired" about something, which means simply asking a genuine question about the piece. To close, the reader "offered a gift," which is constructive feedback. This language of "gift," I found, freed up students who didn't want to be evaluators or critics; suddenly one is not criticizing but rather making loving offering. I was frankly quite surprised at how quickly student feedback became more interesting and useful than it had in my previous courses wherein we were not perceiving it as a gift given in the spirit of generosity and connection. As a final example of creating safety: students wrote weekly or every-other-week anonymous validations to each other. That is, we wrote "thank you" notes to a few people from class, identifying *specifically* how they were contributing to our learning: "Thank you, Paul, for sharing such a daring creative project. That inspires me." "Thanks, Sheila, for the thorough input on my photograph piece. I didn't know what do to next and you had great ideas." Again, I collected these, typed them, and handed them back out the next class. Students felt mutually supported by one another and knew their contributions were valued. Additionally, these validations allowed me to see what students value about each other's contributions, which is often surprising and illuminating.

As mentioned, community-building activities create a context within which our contemplative writing practices occur. In addition to focusing on process, expressing gratitude and offering generosity, many activities I designed emphasized playfulness and surprise: we did the "human knot," brought in and created instruments for a drum circle, and played "exquisite corpse." The technique of "juxtaposition" helped us to see the familiar in a new way and elicited much silliness, so we performed many juxtaposition activities. For example, we wrote five nouns, five adjectives, and five verbs each on separate index cards. We then moved around the room swapping nouns, adjectives, and verbs so that we each had fifteen new words. We then linked each noun to an adjective and verb to make interesting pairings such as "a gorgeous cookie that scolds," "a little dog that flies," and "a bizarre crayon that exercises." We may know what it means for a cookie to crumble, a dog to bark, and a crayon to break. But what would it mean for a cookie to scold—for a *gorgeous* cookie to scold? For homework, we wrote brief stories from the point of view of a new "adjective noun that verbs." We also performed other juxtaposing and remixing activities such as swapping several lines of song lyrics to make a new song, pairing a photograph with a line from a course textbook to create a story, making "blackout poetry," and visiting a museum so we could "Steal Like an Artist" (Kleon, 2012). These exercises were very successful at breaking down habitual patterns of thinking, moving us out of our comfort zone, and provoking playfulness.

At the start of the term, students had participated with varying degrees of "gameness," but playfulness and sense of community really hit home in week five. For homework, students had to color mandalas I had printed out as well as visit two online sources: a campus wellness website that discussed the relaxation benefits of mandala-coloring and a video on the Tibetan process of mandala creation and destruction. In class, students shared their completed mandalas and talked about the process and their color choices, with many students focusing on aspects of relaxation and creativity. After much mutual admiration of our fabulous creations, I asked what the mandala

represents in Tibetan contexts. A few students noted "impermanence." I grinned and nodded as a look of realization fell on a few faces. Students then asked incredulously, "Are we going to destroy them now?!" Indeed, we took the mandalas outside and burned them in a large bowl I had brought for the occasion. I don't think I can explain exactly or sufficiently how radically this simple activity had launched us into "community." Perhaps it was going outside, or the element of fire, or the collective experiences of surprise, dismay, and letting go, but from that point on, the class consistently and enthusiastically felt and functioned as a playful, curious community.

Again, I would like to emphasize how these community-building techniques, as well as course-emphasis on gratitude, process, and playfulness, were informed by my contexts—personal practice, student-dynamic, university ethos. Another contemplative educator's community-building techniques, developed from and practiced in different contexts, may feature completely different tones and foci.

Conclusion

At the heart of "Curiosity, Playfulness, Creativity" lie writing practices that develop habits of awareness. Through journals, collaborative writing, spontaneous story-telling, and other process-oriented activities, we noticed our first-person responses to texts, people, situations, and issues. Creating space for community building, playfulness, and trust, we valued process over product. Through in-class activities and Journals we practiced re-seeing and acting intentionally. By bringing generosity to the work of others, we saw our own work as a gift. We created an environment for collaboration rather than competition. Engaging with private and public writing experiences, students overcame binary thinking to learn how reflection and action, process and product, private and public mutually support and inform one another. These elements aren't always necessary for writing or a course to be "contemplative;" they are merely the features of *this* course borne by my practice and inquiry. They grew from my traditions, contexts, and training.

Readers may notice that throughout this essay, while attempting to define a "contemplative" course or "contemplative writing," I note the importance of context and disposition over technique. This is because I believe it is through attention to the broader contexts for contemplative experiences and practices that we can tap into the radical, transformative potential of the contemplative traditions from which such practices emerge. Context matters. For example, mortality salience could intensify "people's strivings to protect and bolster aspects of their worldviews, and to bolster their self-esteem" (Lehrer, 2008) or it could be "a key method for cultivating critical subjectivity and character development," depending on cultural context (Komjathy, 2018 p. 278). The technique and its effects are part and parcel to its contexts. Similarly, a mandala could be a tool to promote relaxation, to generate capital (through the production and selling of merchandise), or to enact impermanence. Let us as educators inquire: why are we using this tool or technique and to what end?

Contemplative traditions, as helpfully summarized by Komjathy, are rooted in underlying beliefs about the nature of consciousness, including the belief that we can and should be liberated from habit and acculturation (2018, p. 6). This ontological belief is a prime mover for my contemplative courses. This belief leads me to teach in ways that convey how noticing or bringing awareness to some aspect of our way of being is in itself useful. While I do not pretend that I or this course can "liberate" anyone, I do believe this course offered students a chance to re-see (their relationship to writing, food, exercise, roommate, Shakespeare, math, oppression…). If such noticing results in a student's choice to transform some habit or pattern, that is a bonus.

I would humbly urge educators drawn to contemplative pedagogy to explore their own informing traditions, contexts, and ontologies before adopting a "contemplative technique." I would also invite educators to enact a holistic and integrated notion of "contemplative" that attends to process, experience, disposition, practice, context, and commitment to transformation rather than focusing on mere technique. In this way, we may advance the field of Contemplative Studies in ways that are, at heart, contemplative. Perhaps more importantly, we can make more visible the radical ethos of contemplative traditions—Christian, Buddhist or otherwise—rather than effacing them or worse, doing violence to them.

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Notes

[1] I also teach a seminar entitled "Mysticism & Contemplation," which is informed by my own practice, features contemplative experiences/practices, and takes as its subject contemplative literature from a variety of contexts and traditions. I am using that course to theorize "contemplative reading" for another study in progress.

[2] Open Educational Resources (OER) and Open Pedagogy is a burgeoning field that has its roots in producing and utilizing publicly accessible materials to reduce students' textbook costs. It now includes learner-designed and learned-directed experiences with strong sense of public engagement (DeRosa, 2017).

Contact Information

Karolyn Kinane, Ph.D.
Associate Director of Pedagogy & Faculty Engagement
Contemplative Sciences Center
University of Virginia
PO Box 400290
Email: kk7av@virginia.edu

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