Contemplation's Key Role in Learning
What - Why - How

SUZANNE C. SHAFFER, M.ED., M.S.ED.
PENN STATE YORK
TEACHING & LEARNING WITH TECHNOLOGY
Multiple Ways to Consider This

► Your Teaching

► Your Discipline

► Your Personal Life

► Your Research

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA

These Photos by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY
Why Incorporate Contemplative Practices?
I took a speed reading course and read *War and Peace* in 20 minutes.

It involves Russia.

(Woody Allen)
Slowing down...

HELPS US TO MOVE FROM SUPERFICIAL THOUGHT TO DEEPER LEARNING
To Build...

- Higher-Order Thinking
- Critical Thinking
- Deeper Processing

A rectangle is inscribed in a semicircle of radius $r$. Let $P = (x, y)$ be the point in quadrant I that is a vertex of the rectangle and is on the circle.

\[ A = BH = (x + x) \cdot \frac{y}{2} = 2x\cdot \frac{y}{2} \]
\[ A = 2x\sqrt{r^2 - x^2} \]
What is Contemplation?
Metacognitive & 1\textsuperscript{st} Person Investigations that Nurture:

- Awareness
- Concentration
- Insight
- Compassion

The Contemplative Mind in the SoTL
(Owen-Smith, 2017)
Exercises Anchored in Mindful Attention

- Silence
- Reflection
- Witnessing
- Beholding
- Listening
- Dialogue
- Journaling
- Self-inquiry

The Contemplative Mind in the SoTL (Owen-Smith, 2017)
Clusters of Practices

- Activist
- Relational
- Movement
- Ritual/cynical

- Stillness
- Generative
- Creative

Contemplative Practices in Higher Education
(Barbezat & Bush, 2014)
Transform your Classroom by...

➢ *slowing down the activity long enough to behold the object of study*

➢ *facilitating deep attention to, and intimate familiarity with it*

Contemplative Pedagogies
(Repetti, 2010)
Beholding What?

- Our minds, emotions, bodies (senses)
- Content
  (text, images, ideas, media, external stimuli, problems)
- Others
  (empathy, compassion, understanding)
Disciplinary Examples

- What do you think is happening in this photo/text? (history)
- Beholding graphic organizer of learning/memory process (psych)
- Deciding how to tackle a problem? (math, physics, chemistry)
- Deep focus on graphs, data, charts (science, engineering, stats)
- Observations under the microscope? (biology)
- Identifying patterns of error, themes, etc. (English)
Teaching Examples: The \textbf{❤️} of SoTL
(Hutchings, Shulman, Boyer, CASTL)

What are our students really learning?
What do they understand deeply?
What kinds of human beings are they becoming?
How does our teaching affect student learning?
Can we be more effective?
Personal Examples

Why did I react that way?

What can I learn from this challenging situation?

What can I be grateful for?
Research Examples

What are my data telling me?

What is the best population to study?

What new research can be derived around this topic?
What are Those Important Questions you Have: Teaching, Disciplinary, Research or Personal?

Think - Write - Share
...simply includes the natural human capacity for knowing through silence, looking inward, pondering deeply, beholding, witnessing the contents of our consciousness, and so forth. (p. 30)
How? A Generic Path

- **Silence**
  - Beholding (Objects, Ideas, Sensations, People, etc.)
  - Contemplation
    - Insight/Deeper Awareness or Understanding
      - (Possible) Action
      - Thoughts/Sensations Rise
Contemplative Practices at the Service of Learning

- Situated Contemplation
- Critical Incident Questionnaire
- Powerful Questions A & B
- Gallery Walk
- Lectio Explicatio
- I used to think... Now I think...
- Cajita
- Setting Intentions
- Deep Listening
Situated Contemplation (Disciplinary): Environmental Science - The New Normal
Time to Sketch

In the space provided, sketch or describe an image that represents your question

STOP... BEHOLD... PONDER
Situated Contemplation (Personal)

Questions

GUIDED AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Gallery Statue Walk - Empathy
CIQ: Critical Incident Questionnaire
(Brookfield, 1995; Tripp, 1993; Woods, 1993)

Vivid events that people remember as significant (pg. 114)
CIQ: Critical Incident Questionnaire
(Brookfield, 1995; Tripp, 1993; Woods, 1993)

1. Identify event
2. At the moment of the event, when did you feel most engaged/most distanced from what was happening?
3. What action was most helpful/affirming or puzzling/confusing?
4. What surprised you the most? (your/other reaction, what happened, other)
5. What can you do differently the next time?
CIQ: Critical Incident Questionnaire
(Brookfield, 1995; Tripp, 1993; Woods, 1993)

Assessment

- Look for themes
  - Across class members
  - Across time
- Debrief
- Reflect -> Insight -> Change
CIQ: Critical Incident Questionnaire
(Brookfield, 1995; Tripp, 1993; Woods, 1993)

Disciplinary Examples

• Chemistry Lab safety training or lab prep
• Negotiations class
  • What happened? What would you change?
• Clinicals - Debrief interactions
• History - Put yourself in someone’s shoes on a particular day in history
• Evaluating group process
Powerful Questions: Disciplinary

Encourage genuinely curious questions:

- What’s a real question that you have?

- Complete Socratic Question series (Paul & Elder, 2006)
Powerful Questions: Personal

Question Series (Flanagan, 2017)

- What do you want?  
  (What are you interested in now?)
- What are you doing to achieve it?  
  (What are you doing to experience more of it?)
- How is that working?
- What is your plan?
Powerful Questions: Personal

Door Openers versus Window Slammers

- What questions would you like to be asked that let you be known or understood the way you’d like to be?

- What’s the difference between being known and being exposed?
Lectio Explicatio
(Barbezat & Bush, 2014)

1. Reading. Read a passage slowly and carefully
2. Consider. Have a conversation with yourself about what you’ve read
3. Reading. Read the same passage again slowly and carefully
4. Contemplation. Think deeply upon one aspect of the text that stands out
5. Meditation. Rest your mind.
6. Reflect. What insights present themselves?
7. Remember. Choose a way to capture the insights for later.

Phylogenetic trees
What a phylogenetic tree is. How to read phylogenetic trees and determine which species are most related.

Key points:
- A phylogenetic tree is a diagram that represents evolutionary relationships among organisms. Phylogenetic trees are hypotheses, not definitive facts.
- The pattern of branching in a phylogenetic tree reflects how species or other groups evolved from a series of common ancestors.
- In trees, two species are more related if they have a more recent common ancestor and less related if they have a less recent common ancestor.
I used to think...
Now I think...
(Ritchart, Church, & Morrison, 2011)
Cajita
(Pulido, 2002)

- What would your Cajita look like?
- What would you carry in it?
Deep Listening Debrief

1. Get a partner - Choose A or B
2. Partner A has 2 minutes to talk about their question, experience, insight without interruption
3. Partner B listens silently
4. At the end of 2 minutes, Partner B can ask clarifying questions for 2 minutes
5. SWITCH
6. Remain silent for one minute to bring the time to a close
7. Thank each other
Setting Intentions

What’s one action step you can take?
Debrief & Questions
Thank you!

scs15@psu.edu
References

- *Contemplative Mind in Society Summer Institute @ Smith College*
References


