I seek a holistic approach to teaching with integrity that supports shifting student research needs.

CIVILITY-SOCIAL JUSTICE-MINDFULNESS

Introduces its mission by stating: “Anti-Oppression Pedagogy teaches how to structurally analyze systems of oppression, while contemplative practices cultivate an embodied self-awareness. Mindful anti-oppression pedagogy merges the two to cultivate an embodied social justice.” Functions as a rich gateway to ideas and contemplative practices that come from a variety of sources and are useful for college educators as we navigate social justice issues in our classrooms and beyond.


Describes how and why we would use contemplative practices in anti-oppression classes, and tips for handling situations that might arise as a result. Speaks to the value of helping students become aware of internalized oppression, of how it’s held not only in our minds, but also in our hearts and bodies. Explains how mindfulness helps us learn to contextualize, teaches us discernment, adaptability, allows us to create options, and empowers us with choices. Points out that given the complexity of our life experiences, it takes more time than a single course and the careful setting up of a safe space to begin to master identity development and self understanding. Berila’s 2016 book, *Integrating Mindfulness Into Anti-Oppression Pedagogy: Social Justice In Higher Education*, further develops the ideas and strategies presented in this webinar.


Introduces its mission by stating: “To support our ability to realize justice, we also call for all in higher education to create environments which foster deep listening, speaking, and inquiry. Contemplative practices of all sorts offer powerful means of creating and sustaining these environments.” Lists readings, webinars, and keynotes to help examine and challenge the manifestations of injustice in our country’s history, culture, and individual actions.


Chatman teaches sociology and anthropology courses at the University of the District of Columbia, a public, urban, land-grant HBCU. She shares some of the practices she uses in her classes to deepen student learning, enhance well-being, and inspire a commitment to social justice. She notes that contemplative practice is not prayer in schools, psychotherapy, a violation of rights, confessional, or a passing trend. Highlights several practices that students have welcomed for the opportunity to pause practice self care, allowing for an enhanced learning experience.

The Mindfulness Challenge is inspired by the Muslim Prayer practice. Students were asked to spend their 4 days of their spring break sitting in silence for 5 minutes, 5 times per day. On Wellbeing Wednesdays they devoted one hour to an activity that promotes personal wellbeing. Responses were mostly positive and welcoming of the chance to pause and center and care for themselves. The Food Stamp Challenge introduced social justice issues to the students by having them experience the income disparity and food insecurity of many American families who live on $7 per day. The Coltrane Meditation guides students through a listening meditation using saxophonist John Coltrane’s music. The exercise is designed to help students become attuned to their breathing, their bodies, and their thoughts.
http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/workplace/civility

Shows the relationship between civility and diversity specifically in the workplace. Lists the benefits of a civil environment: collaborations, ideas, customer satisfaction, and staff retention. Cites Emily Post’s Etiquette as an excellent source for information and instruction on how to practice civility in the workplace.


20 articles from a variety of college educators across the nation describe strategies for creating a respectful and inclusive learning environment. Includes productive difficult dialogues, microaggressions and microresistance, overcoming racial tension, culturally responsive teaching, and more.


Though it has a K-12 focus, the content can be adapted for adult learners at the college level. Explains that teachers can have different understandings of diversity, and shows how it’s necessary to practice self-reflection to overcome personal bias in the classroom. Draws on intercultural communication theories that describe mindfulness as a core concept used to help individuals reframe and reinterpret unfamiliar behavior or ways of communicating to understand rather than judge others. Offers 6-step process for mindful reflection and communication that includes several questions to ask oneself:

1. Explain the attributions that you have about the student.
2. Write our and reflect on your feelings and thoughts when working with the student. Take into account the potential for misinterpretations resulting from deficit thinking, prejudice, and overgeneralizations.
3. Consider alternative explanations by reviewing your documentation and reflections.
4. Check your assumptions. Share your reflections with a colleague and/or community members to learn more about expected and observed behaviors outside the classroom.
5. Make a plan for changing your response and identify resources to implement the plan.
6. Continuously revisit this process to reassess your attributions and your progress with the student.

Suggests that now is the time for experts on diversity/equity and mindfulness to come together and connect the understanding of systemic inequity with inner work as a catalyst for systemic change. Highlights the work of three individuals whose initiatives focus on reducing unconscious bias.

Vinny Ferraro, trainer with Mindful Schools, believes that one way to break through bias is to imagine that we don’t know what’s going on for other people, to suspend our belief that our truth is the only/whole truth, and to realize that each of us sees through a lens of our own conditioning. He trains at-risk youth and the adults who work with them to wake up to and approach each moment with compassion.

Rhonda Magee is a law professor at the University of San Francisco. Her ColorInsight curriculum brings an ongoing awareness of the many ways that race, color, and culture impact us in our interactions with others, and shows how mindfulness practice coupled with deep compassion for ourselves and others can help reconnect us as human beings.

Veteran Oregon police officer Richard Goerling began mindfulness to relieve stress and learn more about himself. He recognizes that implicit bias is rampant in law enforcement and established the Pacific Institute to train police offers in Jon Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.

Ali and Atman Smith and Andy Gonzalez established the Holistic Life Foundation in Baltimore to help young people in the inner city find their own resilience through yoga and mindfulness. These are the ones who went about cleaning up after the riots following the death of Freddie Gray and raising the spirits of the community.

[See Appendix A for Ferraro’s In the Heat of the Moment that offers practical ways to explore bias with awareness and kindness]


Explores how unconscious racial biases affect judgment and decision making in our daily lives.

Suggests that because mindfulness increases focus and raises awareness, it can help minimize bias. Colorblindness is not a viable response to the racism that continues to permeate our society. Instead, Magee believes that mindfulness-based interventions will better address the problem.

Her ColorInsight Practices combines teaching and learning about race (including whiteness), bias, privilege and historical conditions that have contributed to their ongoing operation in our lives with regular experiential practices for opening awareness and increasing capacity for new ways of being with and minimizing racism and color-related suffering. [For examples, see Appendix B]


Introduces deep listening with an open, non-judgmental mind as a practice that allows us to fully engage with others. Especially applicable to our campus environment where discussions on social issues are alive but maybe not doing so well as students and employees struggle to consider other perspectives without implicit or explicit bias. Suggests that deep listening is a powerful tool that can lead to resolving the dynamics of oppression. [For teaching ideas, see Appendix C]
Appendix A: Vinny Ferraro, *In the Heat of the Moment*

*Take a journey through bias with awareness and kindness with Vinny Ferraro*

The path of mindfulness, awareness, kindness, and compassion will take us as deep as we’re willing to go. Not only can it help us to relieve our stress, but it can arouse in us the courage to pull back the curtain and honestly face our patterns and conditioning, tracing them back to unconscious stories that shape how we see the world, and the other people in it.

It can be helpful to notice our preconceptions and stories in the quiet of a meditation session, but it can also be powerful to notice our biases on the spot, in the heat of the moment, and switch things up. Here are some steps to consider.

1. **When you notice habits overtaking you, bring out the compass**

   Based on some old information, you find yourself trapped in a habit pattern. You’re prejudging a person, people, or a situation, and it’s all attached to a story you’re holding onto: *These people always…*

   When lost like this, you need to find out where you are, what’s really happening in your mind as it interprets what’s in front of you. Do you feel uncomfortable, awkward, nervous? Are you reacting more to the story about the situation than the present circumstances? Are you disengaging and distancing yourself from what’s right there?

2. **Get the lay of the land**

   It’s good to familiarize yourself with the territory, the terrain of what you’re uncovering in your mind. Consciously explore yourself and your patterns particular to these conditions: Every time I see this, I think this…

   When you can see the lens you’re looking through, you can see the stories that have been running you and the reason you’ve lost touch with the living, breathing people in front of you.

3. **Venture into uncharted territory**

   Acknowledge the story or stories that are governing your responses. Question them. Being doggedly honest is the key here, no matter what comes up. Ask yourself:

   *What is informing this story? Why would I think that? This happened and what I made that out to mean is… The culture or the system I’ve grown up in may play a role in shaping my stories, but is there anything going on that I can own?*
4. Surrender the safe territory of what you think you know

Having taken a fresh look at what’s going on, it’s time to consider the possibility that you are not seeing the whole picture. Now that you’re loosening your grip on your version of things, ask yourself whether you like what you’re contributing to the present moment, both internally (in your mind) and externally (in your actions).

If you allow yourself to stay stuck on your original habit pattern, and have the same old reaction, you won’t really notice the impact you’re having on others. You will feel what your story tells you to feel.

Better to feel the vulnerability of not being right—or at least not quite so certain. Not knowing is tenderhearted.

5. Find a bigger map

Our map of the world and our place in it is so often too small. Our stories have shrunk what is a very big and wild place and left out a lot of tribes and a lot of terrain.

Reflect on and update your GPS. Connect and realign with your actual beliefs and values, the ones you hold deep down. Educate yourself, break the old cycles, cut a new groove.

Following this kind of process in the middle of things may seem difficult, but it really doesn’t take long to examine and dislodge our story, and we can do it over and over again. It may slow things down a bit, but that’s not so bad.

And remember the old saloon wisdom: “If you sit down to gamble and you don’t see the sucker, it’s probably you.” Where our biases are concerned, if we don’t see what the big problem is, we may be a part of it.
Appendix B: Magee, ColorInsight Practices

Rhonda Magee has adapted contemplative practices to cultivate awareness of bias. Examples of her work to date:

“I See You”

1. In a circle, look into the faces and eyes of everyone in the room.
2. Offer one another a smile or gently attending gaze.
3. In this way, we begin to live our intention of being with others respectfully and of giving everyone our attention.

“Just Like Me”

1. Students are paired and asked to look into one another’s eyes as the instructor intones a series of phrases which underscore the similarity that exists across, or in spite of, any apparent or presumed differences.
2. Settle in, bring your awareness to your breath and to your body sitting, and gently take in the person sitting before you. Notice any tendency to look away.
3. Now consider that the person before you has known love. Inwardly recite the phrase “Just like me, this person has loved, and has been loved.” And, “Just like me, this person has known pain and loss.”
4. This practices aims to dissolve the sense of social distance that may exist as part of the “story” of our racialized differences.

Insight Dialogue

1. Simply sit, bring awareness to breath, and notice any sounds that occur. We label them as sound, noticing perhaps when they arise and fall away, and any impact on the body, or tendency to go into a story about what the sound represents.
2. By developing this capacity to hear sound with less judgment, we enhance our capacity to hear words with an ear for the multidimensionality of the messages they convey.
3. Pause, allow thoughts to settle and open to the wisdom and honest truth that might support deepening connection, while trusting in the process of bringing awareness into the experience of being with another. Only then do we speak.
4. The listener settles into presence, creating a safe container in which the truth may be spoken. The speaker listens not merely for the words spoken, but also for the body language through which deep meaning is often conveyed.

“MLK’s Equanimity”

1. The practice is suggested by Arthur Zajonc in his book, Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry, and it asks participants to reflect on the story of how Martin Luther King, Jr., quelled a crowd intent on revenge.
2. Invite participants to think of a situation in which they are feeling rage, and to access a higher self that might assist them in seeing both (or more) sides of the dispute from the vantage point of the whole.
3. Discuss, first in dyads and then in a large group, what insights arose in that inquiry.
Appendix C: O’Connor, Listening as a Transformative Practice

Here are some ideas that may be helpful as you consider the possibilities of deep listening in the context of your own teaching.

1. **Start with yourself.** Instead of holding on to your own knowledge and conclusions about a subject, suspend your expertise and open a space for students to explore the topic through their own sense of curiosity. Deep listening can reveal some of your own assumptions and prejudices if you pay attention to the emotions that arise.

2. **Set some guidelines.** Encourage students to be mentally present throughout the discussion, and to pay attention to the sound of the discussion. Here are some examples of ground rules I asked my students to follow:
   - Don’t interrupt someone who is speaking.
   - Speak at a rate and volume that everyone can hear and follow.
   - If you tend to talk a lot, practice choosing just one or two comments to make during discussion. If you don’t usually talk, exercise bravery and practice speaking up.
   - Listen to each word the speaker says without trying to rush ahead to figure out what he or she means.
   - Listen with an open mind.
   - Listen to yourself with the same care and respect that you give to others.

3. **Remember to pause.** One thing we often forget to allow time for in the classroom is thinking. Pausing for just a moment gives everyone a chance to process and reflect on something that was just said or a question that was just asked. Wait time is a technique commonly used when asking for responses to questions, but pauses can be helpful at other points in the discussion, too, and can create a balance of sound and silence. Especially when you are dealing with topics that can be very emotional, pauses are a way to show compassion toward ourselves and others by giving some space to those emotions before proceeding with the discussion.

4. **Listen twice.** I often asked a student to repeat their question or a point that they made to make sure that everyone heard and understood it. This modeled to students that the words spoken in the room were important, and also allowed us to experience again to a statement as it was made.

5. **Arrange for conversation.** If possible, arrange the seating in the room in a circle. Seeing the person speaking, and not just the back of the head of the person in front of you, changes the tone of the discussion. It helps us to remember that we are talking to another human being with feelings, hopes, and fears just like our own.

6. **Require reflection.** Assign writing that specifically asks students to reflect on the development of their listening skills, and how that has affected their thinking and learning. Students lead very busy lives, and they sometimes don’t have time to notice subtle changes in their thinking or the way they interact with the world. Realizing that their beliefs or views have changed is an important part of releasing oppressive attitudes and knowing that they can continue to change in the future.

   “Deep listening opens the door to greater understanding and empathy. It creates a stronger community through genuine engagement and prepares students to address injustice and oppression from a place of humility and confidence.”