Mindful Reflection: A Mini-Primer and Introduction

Reflection and mindfulness are both important concepts for higher education and in the wake of Covid-19, trauma-informed pedagogies, and antiracist pedagogical practices, both can help facilitate learning that is responsive to the internal and external factors within a course. Paired together, mindful reflection creates even more purposeful reflection strategies that help build off what students already know about reflection. The following document provides an overview of the two concepts and how they function together to promote deeper learning through metacognition, goal setting, and engagement.

What are mindfulness and reflection?

**Mindfulness:**

Mindfulness is defined as “The awareness that arises by paying attention on purpose in the present moment nonjudgmentally” (Barbezat & Bush, 2014, p. 95, citing Jon Kabat Zinn).

The idea of mindfulness is that it allows students, faculties, and participants to “be” in a moment through actively prioritizing the senses, the current situation, and honoring what is discovered. Mindfulness allows students the opportunity to be curious about their surroundings and the classroom in order to hold various types of knowledge and experiences at once. Some examples of mindful practices include: meditation, yoga, journaling, contemplative photography, ephemeral art, etc. The tree of contemplative practices (Fig. 2) provides a range of examples.

There are many reasons why mindfulness are important for college students including:

- Focus & attention for mental stability (such as regulating emotions)
- Contemplation & introspection for deeper learning
- Compassion & connection to others (such as reducing biases)
- Metacognition & personal connection (Barbezat and Bush, 2014, p. 11)
Reflection:

Reflection in learning is defined as a process where students describe their learning, how it changed, and how it might relate to future learning experiences (“Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind,” 2008).

There are many reasons why reflection is useful for college students such as helping them:

- **Make meaning across courses**
- **Identify previous knowledge and gaps in knowledge (WAC)**
- **Engage in metacognition**
- **Address biases and past held assumptions**

How are they related?

Mindfulness and reflection are related in bringing awareness to one’s experience -- whether in the moment or looking backwards. One way to bridge the two is to conduct mindful reflection that achieves the purposes of both by designing intentional reflection activities grounded in mindful practices that bring nonjudgemental attention to an experience or the present moment.

How do I incorporate mindful reflection in my classroom?

There are a few strategies for incorporating mindful reflection in the classroom. The main goal is to incorporate reflection that also provides students with introspection, the experience of engaging with the present moment, and approaching the topic nonjudgmentally.

*Low-Stakes Activities*
Mindful reflection can be incorporated throughout an entire course in a variety of small ways. These practices include:

- Starting the class with a mindfulness practice and having students reflect on its impact on their approach to the class that day.
- Having students journal about a past educational experience, current sensory experiences, and/or application of knowledge from the previous class to promote transfer.
- Encouraging students to practice mindful activities before homework/reading and including it in the directions (such as discussion posts and other low-stakes assessments).
- Practicing mindful reflection before Peer Review and/or other collaborative assignments to address potential bias.
- Including mindful reflections at the end of each larger scale assignment for students to process the experience both emotionally and cognitively.
- Allowing students to reflect in many different formats: journaling, videos, annotated graphics, etc.

**Large Scale Learning Opportunities**

- Assignments on mindful practices (such as gratitude letters, research projects on meditation, creating podcasts on contemplative practices)
- Course themes and readings around mindful reflection
- One day a week being themed with a different contemplative practices with an included reflection
- Presentations on mindful practices and how these help translate knowledge to new contexts

**What are some further resources?**

**University of Arizona Resources**

- UA: [OIA Writing and Learning Project](https://www.istor.library.arizona.edu/wlp)
- UA: [Contemplative Pedagogy at the University of Arizona: Welcome](https://contemplative.arizona.edu/)
- UA: [Compassion Center | Compassion Center](https://compassioncenter.arizona.edu/)

**Further Resources**

Podcast: Tea for Teaching
- Episode 98: [Developing Metacognition – tea for teaching](https://teatimelearning.org/episode98)
- Episode 93: [Reflective Writing – tea for teaching](https://teatimelearning.org/episode93)

Centers for Teaching and Learning
- [Mindfulness in the Classroom | Center for Teaching | Vanderbilt University](https://www.centerformindfulness.com/)
- [The Purpose of Reflection](https://www.purdue.edu/) (Purdue)