

Teaching Challenging Topics with Empathy and Impact

Developed by Stacey Bevan, MA, RN

Originally facilitated with Carmen Alvarez, PhD, CRNP

Description:

Students may come to class with a swirl of distressing headlines and personal reactions to current events relevant to course materials. Dr. Carmen Alvarez will join this workshop with her reflections on how teaching difficult topics engages her clinical practice as nurse practitioner and research on health in the context of adverse childhood experiences. We'll discuss strategies to acknowledge difficult topics related to course objectives, including current events, and how to weave personal expertise into class discussions. Lunch will be provided!

Learning objectives:

1. Define and practice contemplative pedagogy and mindfulness
2. Identify strategies to acknowledge difficult topics, set an appropriate tone, and make connections to the course material
3. Discuss planning for challenging topics from a personal and audience's experience.

Agenda

Time	Purpose	Content
12:30-12:37	SLB: Experiential exercise	Slow start: 2 minutes Instructions: 1 minute Exercise: 4 minutes
12:37-12:40	SLB: Overview	Learning objectives schedule for the workshop
12:40-12:47	SLB: Group introductions	Name, pick one word to describe your experience during the exercise, what brought you here today?
12:47-12:50	SLB: Concept introduction	Contemplative pedagogy overview
12:50-1:10	CA: question and answer about experience teaching difficult topics	Sample questions: 1. How have you used clinical and research experience to engage students during lectures? 2. Tell me about guest lectures and expertise as a teaching tool 3. Where did you identify other campus resources that may be helpful to students? 4. How do you introduce a lecture that students may have a reaction to? 5. What are some ways you take care of yourself when teaching

		topics with a personal connection?
1:10-1:22	GRP: Applying strategies Identify a topic then brainstorm two approaches: - Meditation/breathwork - Analysis of image or picture - Real time or slow, facilitated reading - Journaling - Mindful writing - Freewriting - Personal sharing - Lived examples - Individual reflection - Active listening - Silence - Expert guest - Assignments like op-eds	3 minutes to read/think 4 minutes with neighbor 5 minutes to group share
1:22-1:25	CA+SLB: Synthesis	Summary of major themes Last questions 20 seconds of square breath
1:25-1:30	SLB: Wrap up/flex time	Restate learning objectives Logistics CTL resources

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Part 1: Introduction

Identify a class that introduced a challenging topic, took place close to a distressing event, asked the audience to reflect on lived experience. How did the facilitator/teacher introduce the class or idea? Did you feel it enhanced or distracted from your learning? Pick one word to describe your experience to share.

Class:
Introduction strategy:
Your experience in the audience:

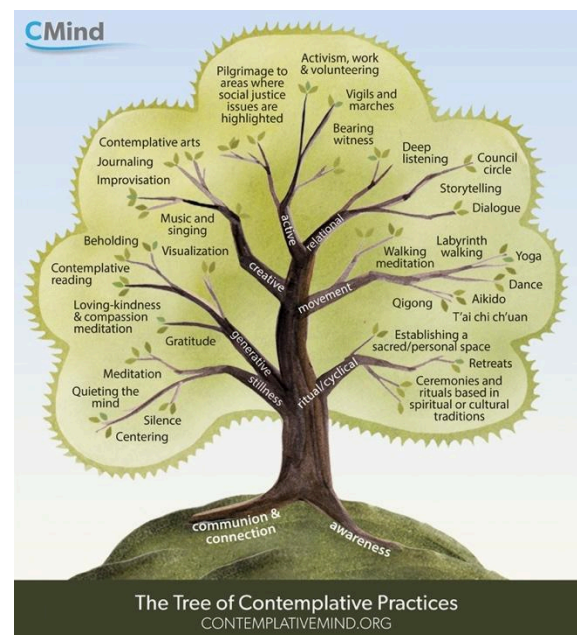
Learning objectives

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Part 2: Contemplative pedagogy

*an approach to teaching and learning with the goal of **encouraging deep learning** through focused attention, reflection, and heightened awareness.*

Learners are encouraged to engage deeply with course material through contemplation and introspection: examining their thoughts and feelings as related to the classroom content and their learning experiences.



CMind. (2021). The Tree of Contemplative Practices [Illustration]. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. <https://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree>
<https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-technology/resources/contemplative-pedagogy/>

Part 3: Teaching challenging topics

Notes

Part 4: Applying strategies

Think about a topic that you have taught or would be of interest in a future class that may elicit a strong audience response, be controversial in some way, or sensitive for you personally. Identify at least two approaches we discussed that you could use to introduce this topic or approach it using an activity.

Topic	Approaches
	1. 2.

References

- Barbezat, D. P., & Bush, M. (2013). *Contemplative practices in higher education: Powerful methods to transform teaching and learning*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Chick, N. (2010). Mindfulness in the Classroom. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved April 5, 2023. from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/contemplative-pedagogy/>.
- O'Donnell, A. (2015). Contemplative pedagogy and mindfulness: Developing creative attention in an age of distraction. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 49(2), 187-202.
- Kaufman, P. (2017). Critical contemplative pedagogy. *Radical Pedagogy*, 14(1), 1-20.
- Zajonc, A. (2013). Contemplative pedagogy: A quiet revolution in higher education. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 134, 83-94.