Contemplative Approaches to Foreign Language Teaching

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Some guiding questions

• In what ways can we help students address the stressful challenges of young adulthood?

• How can we involve students in new ways of knowing and learning that engage the issues of our time?

• How can we develop a more compassionate understanding of the behavior and values of others, especially those who are unlike us?
Uses of contemplative approaches that correspond to the guiding questions

• As ways to help students calm and focus their minds.

• As modes of inquiry.

• As transformational practices, particularly as ways to improve inter-cultural understanding.
Definition of a contemplative practice

• “A contemplative practice is any activity that quiets the mind in order to cultivate the capacity for insight.”

• From the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society’s Law program
Calming and focusing practices improve conditions for learning

• For example, Willoughby Britton’s study (2010) showing that short daily sitting practice of observing the breath improves memory and concentration and decreases anxiety.

• With increased focus and lowered reactivity, a student learns more about his own mind.
Calming and focusing in the FL classroom

• Lowers the affective filter (Krashen)

• Strengthens self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura)

• Helps students deal with the psychological intensity of intercultural encounters. (Practices enable students to both cultivate awareness of emotional states as well as to manage them.)
Some calming and focusing practices for the classroom

• mindfulness practice—quiet sitting.

• body scan—the gradual movement of awareness through the body.

• progressive relaxation—the systematic tensing and releasing of muscle groups throughout the body.

• breath work—simply observing the breath without changing it or slightly altering the breath (i.e., an elongated exhalation calms the SNS or “flight, flight, or freeze” response).
More practices for calming and focusing

- silent walking practice—around the classroom, the campus, or through a labyrinth.

- ritual—bring to class a bell, a candle, a leaf, or a reading. These can also be used as objects of focus for the quiet sitting practice.

- chant—the Spanish vowels.

- guided imagery—the instructor describes a place in which students feel relaxed and safe.
Lemniscate
Further information

• BROWN UNIVERSITY CONTEMPLATIVE STUDIES INITIATIVE
  http://www.brown.edu/Faculty/Contemplative_Studies_Initiative/

• ASSOCIATION FOR CONTEMPLATE MIND IN HIGHER EDUCATION
  http://www.acmhe.org/

• CENTER FOR CONTEMPLATIVE MIND IN SOCIETY
  http://www.contemplativemind.org/

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  Article, “Contemplative Pedagogy in Post-Secondary FL Education”
  http://www.brown.edu/academics/contemplative-studies/resources/scholarly-works

  Book, Yoga for College Students: Balance and Transformation
  http://www.yogaforcollege.com/
A must-have text