



DISCUSSION ABOUT ESTABLISHING STANDARDS FOR TEACHING MEDITATION IN THE CLASSROOM

NB: This is a draft document to be used for further discussions; it is NOT a finished and voted on set of universally accepted standards.

NB2: These comments pertain only to the teaching of contemplative practices in the classroom. They may or may not be relevant for teaching done outside the classroom on college and university campuses.

Introduction

In response to a question raised during the CCC meeting of April 22, 2014, the Contemplative Studies Initiative Core Faculty began a discussion about what standards or credentials were necessary for teaching contemplative practices in the higher education classroom.

The Teaching Parameters

We wanted to begin this discussion by making absolutely clear that we are NOT in the business of training clerics or professional meditators in the classroom; all we are doing is introducing students to some basic techniques.

In some courses, all this consisted of was a very short period of 3-8 minutes of a simple attention focusing exercise, such as counting breaths or focusing on a word at the beginning of a course devoted to a non-contemplative topic.

In other courses the contemplative practices occupied 20-35 minutes of devoted class time (meditation labs). We could call the former category “Secondary Contemplative Teaching” and the latter category “Primary Contemplative Teaching.” In our discussions of this important issue, as a group we decided that we should differentiate between backgrounds necessary for each of these.

Backgrounds of our Teachers

Among the Secondary Contemplative Teaching (SCT) category, the backgrounds of teachers varied from 3 years of training (but including certification in the “Mindfulness for Educators” program) to 40 years. It also included anywhere from 45 hours of intensive (mostly silent) retreat practice to over 500 hours.

Among the Primary Contemplative Teaching (PCT) category, the backgrounds of teachers were very extensive, ranging from 10-45 years of practice in a tradition and

including from 500 to almost 10,000 hours of intensive (mostly silent) retreat practice. Three members of this group had been certified by the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts School of Medicine as teachers of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a very demanding program with high requirements and standards.

A Proposal

All 10 faculty members who responded to this survey thought that Brown faculty who have backgrounds for both SCT and PCT should take a certification course in “Integrative Contemplative Pedagogy.” As it happens, the Contemplative Studies Initiative and the Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning have run such a program for the past three years. It is a one-week course for educators that we plan to offer every summer in conjunction with our Contemplative Studies Summer Intensive courses.

In conclusion we are putting forth for further discussion among our Contemplative Studies Core Faculty the following minimum requirements:

1. Secondary Contemplative Teaching (3-8 minutes/class):
 - a. 3 years of practice in a well- recognized and well-established contemplative practice tradition (e.g. Centering Prayer, Insight Meditation Zen Buddhism, Yoga) or contemplative educational program (e.g. “Mindfulness for Educators”)
 - b. 50 hours of intensive (usually silent) retreat practice
 - c. Certification in Integrative Contemplative Pedagogy in the Summer Workshop program sponsored by the Sheridan Center and Brown Contemplative Studies

2. Primary Contemplative Teaching (20-35 minutes/class):
 - a. 5 years of practice in a well-recognized and well-established contemplative practice tradition (e.g. Centering Prayer, Insight Meditation, Zen Buddhism, Yoga) or contemplative educational program (e.g. “MBSR”).
 - b. 500 hours of intensive (usually silent) retreat practice
 - d. Certification in Integrative Contemplative Pedagogy in the Summer Workshop program sponsored by the Sheridan Center and Brown Contemplative Studies