



THE ARROW

A JOURNAL OF WAKEFUL SOCIETY, CULTURE & POLITICS

The Arrow explores the relationship between contemplative practice, politics, and activism. We investigate topics in politics, economics, ecology, conflict transformation, and the social sciences. Inspired by the vision of meditation masters Chögyam Trungpa and Sakyong Mipham for a “union of social life and spiritual wakefulness” in society, *The Arrow* provides a critical and much needed space for investigating the meeting point of contemplative wisdom and pressing issues of climate change, racism, inequality, and conflict.

Staff

Chief Editor

Gabriel Dayley

Associate Editors

Rachel DeMotts

Sara Lewis

Jacob Richey

Alex W. Rodriguez

Jessica A. Stern

Creative Director

Alicia Brown

Advisors

Senior Advisor

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

Founding Editor & Strategic Advisor

Kai Beavers

Advisory Board

Michaele Ferguson

Holly Gayley

David Kahane

Adam Lobel

Greg Lubkin

Judith Simmer-Brown

Peer-Reviewed Issue

Cover design by Alicia Brown

© 2017 The Arrow Journal

www.arrow-journal.org



Contemplative Pedagogy: Equipping Students for Everyday Social Activism

by AMANDA WRAY & AMEENA BATADA

29

Abstract

The following article presents classroom approaches that use contemplative practice to engage students meaningfully in social justice-oriented, everyday activism. Dominant tropes in our language falsely insist that we are a “post-racial” society where focusing on the individual, even to the exclusion of seeing systemic oppression, reflects progressive consciousness (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Wise, 2009). Oppression has become rhetorically objectified as “over there” and “back then,” and such disconnect from reality disempowers individuals to feel less implicated in injustice. As critical pedagogues working in a public, liberal arts institution, we often navigate the classroom as a space for creating and inspiring social change. This article presents a theoretical foundation and pedagogical strategies for (re)connecting students to the material realities of everyday objects and for implicating students as change agents in everyday discourse situations. Through guided visualization and critical dialogue, we invite students to trace histories of everyday needs (e.g., food), tools (e.g., a coffee maker), and encounters (e.g., with housekeeping staff) in order to foster reflection on their interconnectedness and to analyze rhetorical tropes of innocence (“I’m not racist, but...” and “I didn’t know, so...”).

Keywords: contemplative pedagogy, social justice, pedagogy, social change, anti-oppression, mindfulness, everyday rhetoric

AS CRITICAL PEDAGOGUES working at a public, liberal arts institution, we attempt to navigate the classroom as a space for creating and inspiring social change. This article presents a theoretical foundation and pedagogical strategies for (re)connecting students to the material realities of everyday objects and, importantly, for preparing students to be change agents in everyday situations. We begin with a discussion of how connecting students with social justice principles through our everyday realities may be facilitated by contemplative inquiry and pedagogy, and we offer practical teaching strategies for helping students to use contemplation to actively identify and disrupt social oppressions within their everyday lives.

Our everyday lives are embedded with numerous products of social injustices. We may buy new running shoes, for example, without acknowledging the often precarious and unjust working conditions of those producing these goods and, importantly, we excuse such social ignorance as innocent. Even those who seek out socially responsible goods may struggle to find sales establishments whose clerks are educated on which goods are produced with or without child labor, for example. Beyond consumable goods, language reflects another site of disconnect where the habitual nature of everyday expressions obscures or minimizes histories of oppression. For example, the term “basket case” is an everyday way of dramatizing emotional and physical disability, even though the term emerged during WWI to describe a soldier who had lost both arms and legs in battle.¹ Philomena Essed and others² demonstrate the embedded nature of injustices—especially racism—in the social fabric of our culture: “[M]ore than structure and ideology,” racism is an orienting process that “is routinely created and reinforced through everyday practices.”³ The social injustices embedded in our habitual, unconscious everyday purchases and ways of speaking compound with time and across space. Surely, now is the time to turn attention to the ways in which we can bring greater critical consciousness to the everyday, to use our habits to challenge the status quo instead of support it.

Essed encourages us to confront “inaction among the dominant group (detachment from racial issues and from Blacks) and, more specifically, passive tolerance of racism.”⁴ Beverly Tatum agrees that teaching students to recognize social injustice is not enough.⁵ Even as critical pedagogies work to enhance individual consciousness about racism and other forms of everyday oppression, students may be left “enlightened”

and yet unclear about action strategies for seeking out and interrupting social injustice.⁶ This potential lack of action strategies is just one of the obstacles to social justice teaching.

In *Teaching Justice*, Kristina Holinger reports that faculty teaching social justice-oriented courses experience several barriers, including: student apathy; student lives overburdened with school, work, and families; our preoccupation with social media and other technologies over personal interactions; and students' difficulty with holding the overwhelming nature of injustice.⁷ Overcoming such obstacles requires students to make personal connections to the material, such as knowing family or friends who have been affected by injustice, or through personal experiences of feeling marginalized or discriminated against. As Sara Konrath, Edward O'Brien, and Courtney Hsing suggest, what "seems to enable people to relate to others in a way that promotes cooperation and unity..." is *empathy*.⁸ In their research on over 13,000 American college students across 72 samples between 1979 and 2009, they found that empathic concern and perspective taking had declined over the 30-year period, and the decline was most pronounced during the last decade of the timespan. The authors suggest that increasing individualism, materialism, isolation, and use of social networking are impediments to building empathy.

Increasing student empathy will develop some groundwork for social justice; however, as David Kahane asserts, "[w]e may feel empathy for others' suffering, or connection to distant others as we learn more about them, but these changes tend to remain superficial and evanescent so long as we neglect a first-person realization of the powerful motivations and drives that underlie our persistent tendency to dissociate."⁹ To cultivate the first-person realization, or inquiry, Kahane proposes the use of contemplative pedagogy, which "can help students to understand the habits of thought, judgment, and reaction that keep them trapped in the cocoon of their own privilege."¹⁰ Kahane refers this privilege as "their own suffering," and Wendell Berry describes it as a "hidden wound" that the dominant majority experiences as "a profound disorder" that damages one's mind and society.¹¹ Though racism is ever present in the lives of our students, many may struggle to truly empathize with such a reality given the cognitive dissonance created through dominant narratives of neoliberalism and colorblindness. Perhaps educators have the greatest potential for inciting student empathy by turning the gaze within, by inviting individuals to consider the ways

they have—perhaps unintentionally and passively—endorsed social injustices through their everyday ways of talking and being.

The benefits of contemplative practices are numerous, including enhanced cognitive ability,¹² concentration and insight,¹³ moment-by-moment awareness,¹⁴ and reduced counterproductive academic behavior.¹⁵ A recent review of meditation programs in schools also found that they can have a positive effect on well-being, social competence and academic achievement.¹⁶ For these reasons, the use of contemplative pedagogy in higher education has grown significantly over the past two decades. According to former Mind & Life Institute director Arthur Zajonc, contemplative pedagogy refers to “a wide range of educational methods that support the development of student attention, emotional balance, empathetic connection, compassion, and altruistic behavior.”¹⁷ Contemplative pedagogy blurs the boundaries between the academic and that which is considered “outside” academia—including the heart and emotion—by providing students with “tools to remain present—and embodied—in the classroom.”¹⁸ Tools that we consider “core” to contemplative pedagogy include compassionate silence (no self judgment), intentional pauses for reflection, self-questioning (via writing, small and large group discussions), and deeper attention to physical, emotional, and mental sensations. Such practices move students beyond objective studies of content in order to engage them in the “self-conscious, critical, and intense process of gazing inward and outward that results in questioning assumptions, identifying problems, and organizing for change.”¹⁹

Many factors influence the success of contemplative pedagogy in the classroom including student personalities and levels of investment, institutional and environmental contexts (such as class size and student diversity), course content and learning goals, individual comfort and training with writing and contemplation, among others. At the liberal arts institution where we teach, for example, we are among a small cohort of interdisciplinary faculty integrating contemplative pedagogy. Some of our students, then, could encounter these methods across multiple courses, which may improve their effectiveness and engagement. We are faculty at a small institution (fewer than 3,500 undergraduates) that values small class sizes. This enables us to do more one-on-one connecting with students and to engage students, who have greater opportunities to share frequently in class discussions. 78% of our students are white and nearly 89% are from the state. At the time of this article’s drafting, Ameena (female, south Asian) is tenured and

teaches predominantly classes of 22–30 students in courses in community and public health and health communication, mostly required for the Health and Wellness Promotion majors. Amanda (female, white) is not yet tenured and teaches 15–20 person classes of all levels of students within the university's Writing Program and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program.

This article does not address in depth the teacher training and professional development in diversity work that supports and facilitates our consciousness as critical pedagogues and antiracist activists, nor can we address the care work that goes along with any consciousness-raising pedagogy. These points deserve careful attention as one prepares to integrate contemplation- and social justice-oriented pedagogies in the classroom. We offer here a brief description of two classroom activities that we have used with success in encouraging student empathy and a sense of material connection to the humanity embedded in everyday objects and ways of talking about difficult issues. Both of us entered into contemplative pedagogy with established meditation practices, and we have the benefit of an on-campus learning circle with other faculty who use mindfulness in the classroom. Such informal mentoring and formal sharing of materials contribute positively to an open and supportive climate for contemplative pedagogy and practices at our institution.

Guided Visualization of Interconnectedness: Histories of Everyday

Interconnectedness is a foundational concept in social justice education. Through personal connections, students may feel more deeply affected by and connected to major social issues. Through the recognition that all beings are connected, students also can develop a sense of responsibility and accountability for their own actions. Further, they can identify ways that their own decision-making can contribute to a more just world for themselves and others. In one of Ameena's courses, she uses a guided visualization to demonstrate to students the interconnectedness of our world and to identify intervention points from personal to global, thereby supporting their ability to engage in both the *learning about* and the *taking action* aspects of social justice education.

The course in which Ameena uses a contemplative practice to bring awareness to our interconnectedness is a 200-level health and wellness

course called Health Parity: Domestic and Global Contexts, and it is among our institution's list of "diversity-intensive" courses.²⁰ The course explores various health disparities and the social (and other) contexts that contribute to disparities, with the core themes of power, privilege, intersectionality, historical oppressions, and institutional/systematic biases. One topic we investigate is how employment—from types to conditions—plays a role in health disparities. The main goal of this investigation is for students to understand the complex, far-reaching, and interdependent nature of the relationships between employment and health at the global level. As such, Ameena uses a guided visualization to assist students in making these connections for the topic, how they can play a positive role, and how they can apply this way of thinking to other aspects of their lives.

Visualization is a form of meditation similar to guided imagery. Research suggests that guided imagery helps to induce relaxation and it can help to reduce anxiety for cancer patients²¹ and help prepare athletes for competition.²² While guided imagery typically involves individuals focusing within to address symptoms and "rewire" neural networks,²³ visualization may also provide the opportunity for outward focus. For example, loving kindness meditation, during which an individual visualizes several people, from loved ones to acquaintances to subjects of concern and wishes them to be happy and free from suffering, has been associated with increased feelings of social connection, specifically positive social emotions and decrease social isolation.²⁴ Similarly, the classroom practice described here was developed as a way to invite students to focus their attention on remembering a very personal experience and then broadening it outward to include the people and the processes connected to their own lives.

Ameena prepares students for the visualization by telling them that they will be doing a contemplative exercise, which she describes early in the course as activities that will provide them with the opportunity to pause, bring their awareness to some focus, and consider course content on a more personal level. For Ameena's and Amanda's classes, our approach to contemplative exercises usually involves a focused individual or pair/group activity, writing, and discussing both the content and the process of what we and the students experience.

Students are invited to take a meditative posture of sitting comfortably with their backs against their chairs, their feet flat on the floor, their eyes closed or gazing downward to minimize distraction, and their hands on their thighs or held together. Students with physical

or other challenges to sitting in this way are invited to find their own comfortable position. They are then invited to bring their awareness to the guidance/instruction and its content. The body is relaxed and awake and breathing is regular. At least at first in this exercise, the body is *receptive*, not productive, so students can come into the present moment and appreciate how they feel prior to the engaging in the activity.

Once students find a comfortable position, Ameena asks them to bring their awareness to their breathing as a way of bringing their attention to the present moment and to her instructions. Ameena tells them not to manipulate their breathing but simply to notice it. They might notice the quality of the breath—how fast they are breathing, how long the exhales and inhales are and what happens between them, or whether it is shallow or deep, among other aspects. Ameena suggests to students that when thoughts about the past or future or other parts of their lives come to mind, that they acknowledge them and then gently let them go and return to their breath awareness.

Students begin the visualization by thinking back to the very first thing they can remember from that morning, likely about the time when they woke up. They “walk” through their morning very slowly, noticing as many of the details as they can of what happened in physical, mental, and emotional terms. Ameena provides an example, “Maybe the first thing you remember is hearing the loudness of your alarm and reaching out to press the snooze button on the clock or phone. Maybe you remember the coolness of the floor as you sat up and placed down your bare feet. Take your time. Revisit each moment: what you saw, heard, felt, smelled, even tasted.” During this time, students’ bodies may re-live the experiences as well.

Once students have several minutes of walking through their morning, Ameena then invites them to begin to think about the things—the objects, and sometimes even humans and other animals, with which they came in contact: that alarm clock, the phone, the sheets, the floor... maybe the toothpaste or the curtains they open or the coffee and its brewing machine. And, as they are thinking about these people and things, Ameena asks them to begin to trace them back, “Where did they originate? What did it take to get them to you? Where was the alarm clock made? Who made it? From what? And what materials, people, and stops got it to you?” Ameena reminds them to consider other things from their morning in this way, and then allows several silent minutes to pass.

Ameena tells them that the class will soon wrap up the visualization and invites them, when they are ready, to bring their awareness back to the present moment by noticing their breathing. In the same way as earlier, they pay attention to different aspects of their breathing without manipulating. They notice any changes in the quality of their breath from the beginning of the visualization. Ameena invites them to open their eyes/raise their gaze, and return to the classroom. Next, she asks them to take out a piece of paper or their notebook and to write about their visualization, including both the content and any insights that came up for them as they were doing the activity.

After about five minutes of writing, the class begins a discussion of what arose for them during the visualization. Students usually report on the many items, people, and pets with which they interacted in the morning. They comment on their waking, washing, and dressing routines and many mention the foods and beverages they consumed. Some students comment on how they had trouble remembering aspects of their morning because of the autopilot nature of the daily routine, or they point out that they now remember interesting aspects that at the time went unnoticed. “What can we learn from these observations? What does it mean when we notice? Why do we not notice?”

When Ameena asks students about recalling the things with which they interacted, students talk about some of the items already mentioned here, as well as many others such as their coffee and breakfast foods and their clothes. In tracing back the coffee they made or bought at a local cafe, students remember the store owner, the roasters, all the way back to the coffee farm, the farmers, and the individual coffee beans. However, the way the bean grows and the look of the coffee plant are fiction in most minds. When considering getting dressed, Ameena asks students to—without looking—guess where their shirts were made. The class discusses the production chain for their clothes and other goods and many students share their insights about the challenges of purchasing food and other items that they know are made and transported using fair labor practices or non-toxic materials.

In just 30–45 minutes, students may realize their proximity to the people who make the clothes on their bodies and the food they consume. Students discuss the influence that personal actions can have on creating demand for more humane, sustainable products and, consequently, for supporting healthier lives. According to Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, learning about and exploring this internalized dominance among students is an essential aspect to explore in social justice

pedagogy.²⁵ Internalized dominance refers to the realization of one's privileged position within an interconnected network of decisions affecting the lives of people in other parts of the world, through working conditions, environmental exposures of factories, and so forth. Becoming more aware of one's role may lead students to feel overwhelmed. The discussion after the visualization in this class and subsequent contemplative practices, including a loving kindness meditation, assists students in holding these contradictions. As Kahane has observed in similar classroom-based efforts, students "tended to move toward a willingness to experiment with their own tolerance for letting in others' suffering, and with what this might feel like in action. And they tended to be increasingly open to the possibility that their service to those who suffered whether by giving up luxuries for others, or volunteering, or reorienting career and life plans, might not be a sacrifice... but a movement toward greater meaning and fulfillment in their lives."²⁶

As such, the class discusses many possible intervention points along the entire production chain as well. Students, who also have read about working conditions in other parts of the world and in the USA prior to coming to class, can point out the importance of company-level rules and regulations to keep employees safe, healthy, and happy. They also raise the importance of local, state, and national-level policies that mandate the creation, implementation, and enforcement of healthy work environments and systems. Further, students identify the economic and social forces, from competitive costs of products to advertising, which create demand for products made and transported in unhealthy ways. Their recognition that they have a role in creating demand, and ultimately a more intimate role in the lives of people they do not know changes their outlook. Their recognition that they can keep clothes (or other items) for longer, buy from fair labor outlets, talk with their friends and family about these issues, and learn more about it all, is empowering. Without prompting, they set intentions for how they will take action to reduce health disparities now and in the future. Ameena also helps students to see that social activism is important because of the problems we currently face in the world, but that these personal steps can be a form of social solidarity; the more we engage in this solidarity, perhaps the less need we will have for activism.

It also is important to recognize that students come to this activity and discussion from various perspectives and levels and types of privilege. All students can remember something about what happened during their mornings and most, if not all, students can recall using an

item that likely was produced in another country and/or in sub-standard working conditions. Where distinctions may emerge is when they sometimes discuss their own experience with these types of working conditions. Some students share, in this discussion and in other class sessions about employment and health, how they have been subjected to long hours, little pay, and toxic environments in the workplace. In this way, students may place themselves at one or multiple places along the production chain, as well as on a continuum of privilege.

Generally, students respond well to this activity, with no one explicitly electing to not participate, over the fourteen times Ameena has used it. Students also appear to be open to the discussion and are curious to contemplate and eager to share the sources of their clothes, food, and other items from their morning rituals. Since the activity involves closing eyes, sitting quietly, reflecting, and sharing sometimes personal information about their lives, it is important to have built a sense of community and connection in the classroom prior to using a visualization such as this. Although there is usually no resistance to the activity, there occasionally arises skepticism by a student during our discussion of the points of intervention in the production chain. Students sometimes don't believe that the actions of one person can have an effect. Usually, other students will comment on how movements start with small groups of people or that it is important to live consciously. It is not clear whether these comments are persuasive but usually the questioning student appears to have heard and considered them. Also, through this guided visualization exercise and discussion, students may be primed to think about interconnectedness at other times as well, allowing for the social justice lessons to permeate their lives, demonstrating the potential impact of contemplative pedagogy.²⁷

Critical Dialogue Exercise: Histories of Everyday Talk

Amanda designed critical dialogue exercises in response to a classroom conflict that happened her first year teaching at our present institution. During a literature class on the life writing of female social activists, two students had an uncomfortable debate about whether colorblindness was “racist” or “not racist.” In her office, alone, each of the students expressed interest in learning to disagree respectfully; one believed her brand of feminism was being disrespected and her voice silenced, and the other student also felt silenced in the classroom and suggested that Amanda be more active in helping students “check” their privilege.

These students shared an interest in social justice, feminism, and critical consciousness about internalized oppressions; yet, their distinct experiences put them in different places in an ongoing process of self-actualization. To Amanda, the problem seemed to be one of listening. Education expert Lisa Delpit explains in “Silenced Dialogue,” that listening requires open hearts and minds: “We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs.”²⁸ Through critical dialogue exercises, Amanda wanted students to express aspects of their belief systems and, especially, to question the ways our beliefs factor into our interpretations of others. Krista Ratcliffe’s *Rhetorical Listening* helped Amanda to theorize listening as a contemplative act. Beyond listening as a meaning-making tool for understanding the self in relation to others, Ratcliffe argues that listening is also rhetorical and can function as an “interpretative invention” strategy. Using this strategy, an individual reflects an active stance of openness and a willingness “to cultivate conscious identifications in ways that promote productive communication, especially but not solely cross-culturally.”²⁹ Ratcliffe suggests that conscious identifications move us beyond a self/other binary viewpoint to a place where we listen for how our identifications inform our beliefs and assumptions—to listen for how we attempt to connect and disconnect with others. Instead of listening for what we can challenge or agree with, Ratcliffe explains, “we choose to listen also for the exiled excess and contemplate its relation to our culture and our selves. Such listening does not presume a naïve, relativistic empathy, such as ‘I’m OK, you’re OK’ but rather an ethical responsibility to argue for what we deem fair and just while questioning that which we deem fair and just.”³⁰ One of Amanda’s First Year Writing students described the purpose of critical dialogue exercises as an opportunity to “look deeper... [into] why something is said or done and why [someone acted] in a specific way.”

To begin a critical dialogue exercise, students are randomly partnered,³¹ and, much as in what has been presented above in the description of Ameena’s exercises, the class takes two to four minutes of quiet attention where participants are asked to sit with their eyes closed or fixed on something and to observe their breath. Students do not encounter mindful silences for the first time with critical dialogue exercises; much as we discuss above in presenting Ameena’s exercises, Amanda regularly begins class with mindful silence to help students to focus in, to disconnect from the rest of our day, and to become more whole and present in our classroom space. The critical dialogue exercise

can be adapted for shorter sessions, though Amanda most often allows forty-five minutes to an hour, typically leading students through two to three exercises per semester (though she has led groups of students or faculty through a single exercise with positive results). Generally, she organizes dialogue prompts around a particular topic that relates to students' daily objectives, and invites them to do one or more of the following: Tell a personal story, take a stance on an issue, contemplate alternative interpretations and viewpoints, and/or "play" critically with everyday language (discussed in more detail below).

A sample sequence for identifying assumptions about poverty might include reading the questions listed below, providing two to four minutes in between each one for rhetorical listening (only one student speaks and the other listens for their own interpretations), dialogue, or contemplative silence: *What is your mental image of an American living in poverty? Where have you seen these images? Tell a story about a "poor" person you've known at some point in your life? Now, take a few moments in silence to consider how you knew this person was "poor": What made them "poor", in your opinion, and how did you know? Explain to your partner how your dominant image of "poor" people compares to and/or complicates the person in your story? Discuss situations when you heard privileged Americans claim to be "poor" (e.g., I hear students say they are "so poor" they can't go to spring break. How is being "poor" and not being able to afford spring break different)?* Finally, each student stakes a claim on whether the dominant visuals and narratives about global poverty damage or empower Americans in poverty.

Critical dialogue exercises ask students to take pause at moments and at other points to return attention to their breath; mostly, though, they are in conversation with one another. Even if they aren't responding to the prompts Amanda has posed, students are expected to dialogue. Writing, which helps students process the emotions and discoveries that may have emerged during the exercise, marks the end of the exercise. Sometimes, Amanda guides students toward a particular type of reflection by offering them a prompt (e.g., How does your inner representation of the "poor" in the U.S. shape your way of acting when confronted with poverty in your everyday life? How do you interact with people who are homeless, for example?), but more commonly she invites students to simply write about whatever they feel is at the surface.

As she continues to organize and present critical dialogue exercises in her classes, Amanda wants to gather more information about how

students who have experienced oppression may face various “triggers” during this activity. Though the focused prompts of critical dialogue exercises help to guard against tokenizing any one reality across a social group, the physical intimacy of this dialogue space could enhance personal anxiety as someone identified with the group of study (e.g., individual who has lived in poverty). Amanda attempts to prepare students for critical dialogue exercises by announcing them in advance, naming the class’ learning goals, and offering one or two prompts for students to ponder between classes. Students are given the opportunity to opt out of critical dialogue exercises, though none have done so, thus far. Because she has worked with an overwhelmingly white population when leading critical dialogue exercises, Amanda worries about white students confessing guilt about racism, blindly unaware of the emotional and physical damage such confessions can inflict on students of color. Such confessions ask us to, perhaps, absolve white guilt by directing attention to intentions rather than individual agency in maintaining oppression. To address this concern, Amanda can share with students pithy articles, such as Everyday Feminism’s “8 Things White People Really Need to Understand about Race.”³² Number seven on this list instructs the reader to listen more so they can stop tokenizing people of color, demanding emotional energy from people of color, and expecting people of color to be “educators on demand.” Though critical dialogue exercises are adaptable to most classroom content, implementation of this activity should be grounded in feminist, social justice-oriented praxis and should be responsive to the unique batch of learners populating one’s course. Not all educators are prepared or should feel compelled to engage students in consciousness raising activities.

Students report in written feedback³³ that critical dialogue exercises have five learning outcomes: broadened understanding of personal belief systems and values, heightened awareness about differently-situated lived experiences, greater consciousness about personal bias or the making of assumption, increased feelings of comfort and belonging within the classroom, and intensified personal activism. We wish to focus attention here on the fifth item in this list—the ways in which critical dialogue exercises encourage (informed) personal activism in everyday contexts.

Through critical dialogue exercises students are given space to devise and share strategies for discursive activism, which involves using discourse, especially in everyday contexts, to incite critical thinking

and/or to interrupt status quo ways of thinking. Many of us have experienced a social situation that was uncomfortable because someone's prejudice was made explicit. A racist joke here. A stereotype there. Students can easily recognize such hostile moments, yet they may struggle with knowing how to respond to these situations and how to interact with those making offensive comments in a productive way. A First Year Writing student stated, "Taking into consideration what we talked about—how certain injustices are overlooked and normalized—makes me feel more confident about my own opinions about them; and therefore, I feel more likely to speak out against them in the future." Hearing how others have responded or what they wished they had said when faced with social injustice arms students with more strategies for negotiating these moments. This "play" with language draws upon students' personal stories of experiencing an uncomfortable situation rather than a scenario that Amanda devises for them. In this way, she attempts to prepare students to become change agents by asking them to first tell about a moment of encountering injustice and then to collaboratively brainstorm interruption strategies. A Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies student explained the takeaway message of the activity in this way: "It made me realize some of the techniques that I *do* have at my disposal, and the importance of looking at situations in terms of opportunity for critical dialogue, but also thinking about appropriate place/space for it and whether or not it is best to approach in that space." In hearing others narrate their experiences with social injustice in discourse situations, participants are drawn into their memories and invited to consider how they have handled such situations in the past. A First Year Writing student offered: "I realized that not standing up for what you believe in is actually saying that something that bothers you is okay. By not expressing how you don't like homophobic language, you are allowing it to continue and therefore allowing it to be acceptable. Sometimes I don't want to start an argument and have any of that hate directed at myself, but now I'm more motivated to speak up."

After students have taken time to reflect in writing on the critical dialogue exercise, Amanda documents on the board students' suggested rhetorical strategies for interrupting injustice in everyday discourse situations. These generally include critical questioning (e.g. "What do you mean by that?"), identification of injustice (e.g. "When you said xyz, it felt like a generalization across all people of color"), redirection (e.g. "Did you know that statistics actually don't support that assumption?"), and statement of feeling (e.g. "That really offended me because

people I know who live in poverty are not like that at all.”). The large group discussion about discursive activism strategies allows Amanda to address *kairos*, a Greek term roughly translated as the opportune moment. She makes explicit the influence of audience and context in the types of conversations one can have in any given discourse situation, and students are pushed to be mindful of the risks and rewards for speaking out and/or interrupting oppression when they encounter it in the everyday. This is generally a great opportunity to mention the privilege of whiteness to experience fewer risks when speaking out against racism and also to encourage students to practice mindfulness as a means of staying present in potentially triggering situations. Mindful silence can function as an act of resistance in many ways.

Conclusion

Through the use of contemplative practices such as visualization, mindful reflection, and critical dialogue, we invite students to trace histories of everyday needs (e.g., food), tools (e.g., a coffee maker), encounters, and ways of speaking (e.g. “I’m not racist, but...”). The teaching exercises described here showcase critical and guided reflection about human interconnectedness, and through these practices we support students’ exploration of the concepts and actions associated with interrupting social injustice in their everyday lives.

Cultivation of effective strategies for social justice education in the college classroom are critical, particularly given the growing visibility of organized and grassroots activism (#blacklivesmatter) and the current racially-charged discourse at a national level. Recently, there have been a number of high-profile cases of faculty who have encountered student resistance in classroom discussions, such as Andrea Quenette at the University of Kansas and Shannon Gibney at Minneapolis Community and Technical College.³⁴ Further, our institutions are often under pressure by off-campus influences to minimize controversy, which threatens political discourse and academic freedom.³⁵ Faculty must feel comfortable devising and honing effective strategies to support social justice teaching and learning, and we believe the best way is through conversations with other practitioners, such as those that informed the writing of this article.

Through contemplative pedagogy, faculty can go beyond social justice education that strengthens students’ awareness and resolve to “make a difference” by prompting reflection and providing a structure

for transformational experiences that inspire both understanding and connections. Realizing that social justice is not just about someone else but that all of our humanity is intertwined, students can observe the significant struggles of our time, set their own intentions, and take action in their daily lives. Given that for the majority of students college is a time of both capacity building and identity formation, the opportunity for promoting social justice principles as a “way of life” seems an element of *kairos*, not just ideal in terms of timing but also in terms of audience openness and contextualized engagement. As Kahane states, contemplative practices “bring our bare humanity into the classroom in ways that allow education to be more holistic, more fulfilling, and more real for both professors and students.”³⁶ Because contemplative pedagogy allows us to connect more with our students, their learning, and their activism, we see it as especially oriented to social justice.

AMANDA WRAY is assistant professor at University of North Carolina Asheville where she teaches writing; rhetoric; and women, gender, and sexuality studies courses. She is a feminist, oral historian, and critical pedagogue whose work focuses on individual agency within the everyday to interrupt racism, sexism, and other social oppressions.

AMEENA BATADA, DrPH, is associate professor of health and wellness at the University of North Carolina Asheville. Ameena teaches courses on health disparities, community health promotion, and health communication. She works with colleagues and students to engage in community-driven research to help understand interventions and to advocate for policy change.

NOTES

1. “Basket Case,” Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=basket+case&allowed_in_frame=0, accessed February 2017.
2. Philomena Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1991); Nina Eliasoph, “‘Everyday Racism’ in a Culture of Political Avoidance: Civil Society, Speech, and Taboo,” *Social Problems* 46, no. 4

- (1999): 479-502; Jane H. Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).
3. Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism*, 177.
 4. Ibid., 183.
 5. Beverly Tatum, "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" *And Other Conversations about Race* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 11-12.
 6. Ibid., 200.
 7. Kristina Holsinger, *Teaching Justice: Solving Social Justice Problems through University Education* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012).
 8. Sara H. Konrath, Edward H. O'Brien, Courtney Hsing, "Changes in Dispositional Empathy in American College Students Over Time: A Meta-Analysis," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15, no. 2 (2011): 180.
 9. David Kahane, "Learning About Obligation, Compassion, and Global Justice: The Place of Contemplative Pedagogy," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 118 (2009): 53.
 10. Ibid., 59.
 11. Wendell Berry, *The Hidden Wound* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989), 3-4.
 12. Adam Moore and Peter Malinowski, "Meditation, Mindfulness, and Cognitive Flexibility," *Consciousness and Cognition* 18, no. 1 (2009): 176-186; Fadel Zeidan, et al. "Mindfulness Meditation Improves Cognition: Evidence of Brief Mental Training," *Consciousness and Cognition* 19, no. 2 (2010): 597-605.
 13. Yi-Y Tang, et al, "Short-Term Meditation Training Improves Attention and Self-Regulation," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA* 104, no. 3 (2007): 17152-17156.
 14. Amishi P. Jha, Jason Kropf, and Michael J. Baime, "Mindfulness Training Modifies Subsystems of Attention," *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience* 7, no. 2 (2007): 109-119.
 15. Inge Schwager, Ute Hulsheger and Jonas Lang, "Be Aware to Be on the Square: Mindfulness and Counterproductive Academic Behavior," *Personality and Individual Differences* 93 (2016), 74-79.
 16. Lea Walters, Adam Barsky, Amanda Ridd and Kelly Allen, "Contemplative Education: A Systematic, Evidence-Based Review of the effect of Meditation Interventions in Schools," *Education Psychology Review* 27 (2015), 103-134.
 17. Arthur Zajonc, "Contemplative Pedagogy: A Quiet Revolution in Higher Education." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 134 (2013), 83.
 18. Beth Berila, "Contemplating the Effects of Oppression: Integrating Mindfulness into Diversity Classrooms," *The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (2014), 56.
 19. Diana Gustofson, "Embodied learning: The body as an epistemological site," in *Meeting the Challenge: Innovative Feminist Pedagogies in Action*, ed. Maralee Mayberry and Ellen Rose (New York: Routledge, 1999), 249.
 20. All students are required to take one diversity-intensive course as part of the Liberal Arts Core (LAC) at the public liberal arts institution where we teach.
 21. Mahboobehsadat Hosseinia, Batool Tirgarib, Mansoor Azizzadeh Forouzi and Yunes Jahanid, "Guided Imagery Effects on Chemotherapy Induced Nausea and Vomiting in Iranian Breast Cancer Patients," *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* 25 (2016), 8-12.
 22. Nicole Westlund Stewart and Craig Hall, "The Effects of Cognitive General Imagery Use on Decision Accuracy and Speed in Curling," *The Sport Psychologist* 30, no. 4 (2016), 1-25

23. Emmet Miller, "The Cultural Revolution of Guided Imagery," in *Transformative Imagery*, ed. Leslie Davenport (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016); Diana Gustofson, "Embodied learning: The body as an epistemological site," in *Meeting the Challenge: Innovative Feminist Pedagogies in Action*, ed. Maralee Mayberry and Ellen Rose (New York: Routledge, 1999): 249.
24. Cendri Hutcherson, Emmal Seppala, and James Gross, "Loving-Kindness Meditation Increases Social Connectedness," *Emotion* 8, no. 5 (2008): 720-724.
25. Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelow, "Respect Differences? Challenging the Common Guidelines in Social Justice Education," *Democracy and Education* 22, no. 2 (2014): 5.
26. Kahane, 57.
27. Daniel P. Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publications, 2014), 205.
28. Lisa Delpit, "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children," *Harvard Educational Review* 58, no. 3 (1998): 297.
29. Krista Ratcliffe, *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* (Carbondale, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 23, 25.
30. *Ibid.*, 25.
31. Not choosing their partner creates a shared vulnerability and can be an opportunity to grow in their awareness of others. These two things are less likely to happen if the students often sit next to one another or work together regularly.
32. Jamie Utt, "8 Things White People Really Need to Understand about Race," *Everyday Feminism* 23 July 2014, <http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/07/8-things-white-people-race/>, accessed November 2, 2016.
33. Participant comments used throughout the article are drawn from anonymous pre- and post-activity written reflections as well as from course evaluations over the course of a four-year period. All of these comments are used with permission and they represent undergraduates enrolled in First Year Writing; The Teaching of Writing; Professional Writing; Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies courses as well as college faculty who have participated in critical dialogue exercises as a part of professional development workshops.
34. Scott Jashek, "A Class Implodes Over Race," *Inside Higher Ed*, November 23, 2015, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/11/23/u-kansas-professor-leave-after-comments-race-result-5-complaints>, accessed May 19, 2016; Aaron Rugar, "MCTC prof reprimanded for alienating white students during structural racism discussion," *City Pages*, November 27, 2013, <http://www.citypages.com/news/mctc-prof-reprimanded-for-alienating-white-students-during-structural-racism-discussion-6538410>, accessed May 19, 2016.
35. American Association of University Professors, "Academic Freedom of Students and Professors, and Political Discrimination," <http://www.aaup.org/academic-freedom-students-and-professors-and-political-discrimination>, accessed May 19, 2016.
36. Kahane, "Learning About Obligation, Compassion, and Global Justice," 53.