Dissent to Dialogue: Transforming Criticism into Critical Thinking

Mindfulness and Teaching

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What is Mindfulness?

- **Samma Sati**: “Right Memory,” 7\textsuperscript{th} step of the Eightfold Path of Buddhism.
- Right Awareness: paying attention to one’s thoughts, feelings, and sensations
- Awareness of the interconnectedness of the reality: existence of the self in relationship
- In the classroom: awareness of this relationship among instructor and students
Pay Attention!

- In mindfulness one is not only restful and happy, but alert and awake.
Challenges of Teaching Religion in the Classroom

According to a new Pew Research Center Study, only a third of Americans say they talk about religion with people outside of their families at least once or twice a month.— Emma Green, The Atlantic, 2016
Three Basic Strategies for Realizing the Cumulative Experiences of Students
1. Autobiographical Knowledge

- Make an effort to know my students as they see themselves
- Remain mindful of students' cumulative life experiences as a means to enhance their learning process
Autobiographical Reflection Writing Assignment

- What is the religion, spirituality, or other belief structure (including science and atheism) in your family?
- How do you relate to your family’s belief system?
- Name any experience or book you read that inspired you to rethink about your belief system.
- What place or activity (church, temple, woods, library, beach, hiking, surfing, etc.) makes you feel peaceful?
- Name a transcendent or overwhelmingly peaceful experience that you have encountered in your life.
2. Know our Neighbors

- Develop awareness of religions in students’ communities
- Study development of religious diversity in the those communities
Awareness of our Neighbors: Class Discussion Exercise

http://www.thearda.com/ Use the “Search the ARDA” box at the top of the page to enter your 5-digit postal code. When it comes up, click on the link of to learn more about the major religious groups in your community. Further down, check out other information.
3. Understanding the Students’ Confusion in the Academic Study of Religion

- Build awareness of religious diversity within each tradition
- Model the difference between criticism and critical thinking
- Mindfulness of the difference between practicing religion and studying religion and religious practices
Provide Examples: From Criticism to Dialogue

- Remind students: “Differences of opinion should never mean hostility.”—Gandhi
- Help them develop deep listening skills
- Use humor and audiovisual resources to make the difficult ideas accessible
Examples

O Master, is it proper for a monk to use email?

Sure... as long as there are no attachments!

GOD OF ALL THINGS

GOD OF MODERN PRESIDENCY MAY BE TOO MUCH FOR ONE PERSON TO HANDLE
The Question of a Broader Value of Contemplative Pedagogy

- The value of contemplative pedagogy is not limited to religious studies. Mindful teaching techniques have the potential to enhance learning in all disciplines—from physics and mathematics to music—as they enhance the learning experience by engendering awareness of interdependence, positive values, and the value of diverse opinions in learning.
Works Cited


What it Should Be:

IT FEELS GOOD TO EMPTY THE TRASH.
What Does It Mean To Be Present?

By Rana DiOrio
Illustrated by Eliza Wheeler