



Mindful Silence and Centering in Teacher Education

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Intentions/ What I Hope to Cultivate

- P-12 teacher candidates will know and use specific mindfulness strategies to manage the stress and emotions of teaching, to maintain balance and happiness in their lives, and to avoid burnout.
- Teachers will learn mindfulness techniques that they can teach to their own current/ future students.

Method

- Begin each class meeting with 4 minutes of “silence and centering”
- Invitation, not a mandate, but structured expectations (quiet, no electronics, stay in room or step outside for full period of silence)
- Use Insight Timer iPhone app with beginning and ending bells
- Teach specific mindfulness meditation techniques: breathing, self-compassion, noticing thoughts or emotions, affirmations or repeated statements, sensory awareness, mindful movements
- Include a short anecdote or teaching from my own personal practice/experience related to the taught technique

Evaluation of Silence and Centering

- Self-report anonymous open-ended surveys at midterm and end of term to gather input on student responses to the silence and centering experience
- Sample survey questions: Overall response? What, if anything, works for you about it?

- What, if anything, do you find difficult or frustrating about it? Do you ever try any of the suggested strategies? If so, which ones? Suggestions to improve the quality of the experience?
- Invitations to share orally after an experience
- Instructor notes, observations, and reflections
- Qualitative analysis: 3 years of data, 147 students



Results: Themes

- **Welcoming of the practice after an initial period of disequilibrium**
“I spent the first two or three silence and centering times trying to figure out how much money I was paying to sit quietly in a classroom. Since then, my opinion of it has improved.”
- **Helps focus one’s mind on the class and content at hand**
“I am able to take inventory on myself and see where I am and how I might need to make mental adjustments in order to better participate in class.”

- **Concern about using class time for contemplative practice**

“The only thing I find frustrating about this practice is that the days I do not participate mentally (or feel like I can’t slow down), I feel like it’s time wasted. In four minutes I can update my planner, send an email, complete a graphic organizer, order at Starbucks, exchange stock options, walk to the mailbox, fill up my water bottle, etc. Not all at the same time, of course. In all seriousness, the days I am frustrated by this practice are the days that I need it the most.”

- **Evidence that students transfer the contemplative practices to other contexts**

“On the way to take the Praxis exam, I did a lot of chilling out and breathing, giving myself mental reminders to be calm.”

“I have found this [breathing technique] has really worked, not only for class but also for my sport. I do this before the games as well as before I go in and play. This really calms my nerves and allows me to play well.”

- **Resistance to the calmness and stillness**

“Sometimes I just want to get started with class. It’s been a long day and I just want to keep going and get the day over with as fast as possible. Given what’s going on in my head at times, it’s frustrating to just be ‘at one’ with my thoughts.”