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**Collaborative Strategies for Successful Green Libraries – Buildings,  
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**Contemplative Pedagogy: Building Resilience in Academic Libraries**

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**Abstract:**

*This paper addresses the emerging movement of contemplative pedagogy in higher education with an emphasis on academic librarianship. The authors posit how integrating mindfulness-based practices into pedagogy and programming builds resilience in students, creating meaning in an age of climate disruption, information overload and uncertain times. Examples of librarians' relevant professional development activities are also included. Library spaces offering mindfulness opportunities for students are explored and a contemplative-oriented, campus-wide collaboration centered on climate disruption is featured. Selected Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda are touched on, demonstrating how contemplative approaches in academic libraries support well-being, justice, community building and concern for the fate of the earth.*

**Keywords: contemplative pedagogy, academic libraries, resilience, climate change, mindfulness**

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**Introduction**

The United States is experiencing an intense wave of turbulence following the highly divisive 2016 presidential election, reactivating racial and religious biases (Neberai, 2017) and shaking the foundation of democracy. The restoration of civility will rely on “individual thinking combined with a diversity of lived experiences, as they allow for an understanding of more facets of truth” (Neberai, 2017, p.10). Along with the roiling of social waters,

scientists report that the Earth reached its highest temperature on record, “heading toward levels that many experts believe will pose a profound threat to both the natural world and to human civilization” (Gillis, 2017). Compounded by the everyday stress of information overload, these disturbing factors make for a brew of destabilizing emotion, distraction and disconnection. This paper points to Contemplative Pedagogy (CP) as a powerful and flexible set of tools which academic librarians can employ - in and out of the classroom - to expand their students’ capacity for learning, wellness, meaning making, community building, earth care and a lasting resilience for weathering challenging times. CP also supports many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) played an active role in developing (2015).

In their book *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush discuss the critical need for education to integrate time and space for students’ reflection. While analytical thought is considered a hallmark of good education, they explain the dire need for “holistic engagement and attention that is especially fostered by the student finding himself or herself in the material” (2014, p.4). In essence, the student’s personal agency is critical in order for them to fully experience course material and apply its meaning and use for themselves. CP techniques invite students to focus internally whether through a guided exercise, open-ended discussion, free writing, silence, breathing, movement, or some combination of modalities that fits the teacher’s intent and skill set within the context of the learning experience (Barbezat & Bush, 2014).

### **Professional Development**

Academic librarians are exploring CP through conferences, workshops, social media groups, retreats, and in conferences and meetings outside of the profession. Samantha Hines and Jenny Colvin initiated a petition to create the Contemplative Pedagogy Interest Group within the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL); the groups was approved in June 2016.

Programming and activities at the 2017 ACRL conference in Portland, Oregon reaffirmed the growing interest in CP, with multiple presentations of related content, and spaces and activities with similar themes. Deborah Ultan Boudewyns and Jill Luedke offered a three-hour workshop, “Mindfulness Practices in the Classroom for Engaged Learning” (2015). A “Zen Room” and a quiet recharge space (which became known as the “Introvert Recharge Room”) were also available throughout the conference, with yoga and meditation sessions offered daily.

Librarians also explored CP in local venues. In March 2017, twenty librarians from across a five college consortium attended the Contemplative Pedagogy and Mindful Librarianship Retreat (Charney & Smith, 2017). Their two-pronged approach offered opportunities to learn about CP, programming, spaces, and professional development, as well as practice mindfulness techniques such as breathing exercises, walking a labyrinth, stretching/movement and a collective listening exercise. The event started with a group discussion based on *The Mindful Librarian: Connecting the Practice of Mindfulness to Librarianship*, followed by small groups exploring further the themes of teaching, one-on-one research consultations, workplace issues, programming and spaces, personal contemplative practices, and CP in the context of social justice.

In June 2016, the Mindfulness for Librarians Facebook group was launched with a series of virtual hangouts taking place between December 2016 and April 2017. Zoom video conferencing allowed for a personal connection and all sessions were recorded and posted to the page. In this informal forum, participants offered mindfulness-based teaching tips, co-facilitated discussions, presented projects and shared professional development opportunities as well as helpful apps, books, audio, websites. Guided meditations included a breathing exercise, yogic finger mudras, and a body scan. Membership surged to nearly 400 after an article about mindful librarianship appeared in *American Libraries* (Ruhlmann, 2017).

Conferences and trainings outside of the profession are essential for librarians interested in CP. Examples include those organized by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMind), the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACHME,) and UNC-Asheville - “A Mindful Campus.”

Clearly, academic librarians are striving to bring more depth of meaning to their teaching of the research process. A distinct example is the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy, which heralded a paradigm shift in the profession. The fourth chapter of *The Mindful Librarian: Connecting the Practice of Mindfulness to Librarianship*, handily maps mindfulness to the conceptual underpinnings of the Framework, demonstrating how students are now asked to understand “why” information literacy is important as opposed to “how” to be information literate (Moniz et al, p. 83). The book illuminates the Framework’s repetitive use of words such as mind, open, awareness, and ambiguity as well as the discipline and attentiveness required to develop the resiliency necessary to, “work through the process of starts and stops that can occur when researching.” (Moniz et al, p. 85). Threshold concepts, the main structure of the Framework, are characterized as “transformative” which relates to lasting change in the student’s learning process. When librarians infuse their teaching with the transformational resilience fostered through CP, they do more than just help students navigate the choppy waters of the research process. CP is a call to action, for both librarians and students to mutually strengthen their respective psycho-social-spiritual as well as their intellectual skills over time.

### **Librarians, Stress and Burnout**

An increasing number of U.S. librarians recognize the need to manage their own stress so as to be more satisfied and efficient in the workplace, including their role in the classroom. When a recent mindfulness webinar for librarians had more than 500 live participants, it seemed like a cry for help with these challenges (Moniz, House, & Neufeld 2017). A more holistic view of teaching recognizes our bodies (both teachers’ and students’) as “valid knowledge producers and having its own value for generating focus, stillness, and more importantly, anchoring us in the ‘now’ moment” (Wagner and Shahjahan, 2015, p.7-8). The rapidly changing landscape of academic librarianship is fraught with pinched budgets, heavier workloads, and the dizzying reorganization of services, spaces and priorities. In a recent study, academic librarians experienced role ambiguity, role overload, and burnout at or above the level experienced by other occupational samples, and the role stressors significantly predicted an array of psychological, health-related, and work-related outcomes. The study examines the relationships between the role stressors and a negative effect on job satisfaction, satisfaction with life, and psychological well-being, resulting in psychological burnout (Shupe, Wambaugh & Bramble, 2015). In addition, many institutions expect

academic librarians to prove their worth through publishing and demonstrate student learning through assessment, which adds to the pressure.

## **Pedagogy**

Librarians are incorporating methods relating to mindfulness and contemplation in their own work as teachers. At Oregon State University, librarians used reflective teaching practices for evaluation of individuals and program, creating a framework for all librarians in an instruction program (Hussong-Christian, 2013). Librarians in the Kentucky Library Association's Library Instruction Roundtable used reflective learning in a retreat situation to model the behavior and to discuss potential uses in their libraries, ranging from personal growth to assessment to critical thinking (Porter, 2014).

Student reflection is most often mined for assessment of instructional objectives and to demonstrate student learning (Bordonaro & Richardson, 2004; Gilstrap & Dupree, 2008). Rather than using the term "contemplative pedagogy," librarians publishing about CP tend toward words such as reflection, mindfulness, and activities designed to enhance focus and attention. Bordonaro and Richardson concluded that student reflection played an important role in helping students understand the process alongside the research (2004). Jill E. Luedke experimented with offering a focusing exercise at the beginning of a one-shot instruction session, helping the students enter the headspace of "receptive learners" (2013) Jenny Colvin found that a wrap-up guided reflection exercise better prepared students to know what they needed to do once they left the instruction session. (Colvin & Sippel, 2016). Kellie Meehlhause adapted the "Minute Paper" to combine student reflection with a selfie exercise (Meehlhause, 2016). Other techniques include inviting students to: stay open to "swerves" in the direction of their research; mindfully craft research questions and distinguish between information needs and ideal sources to meet those needs; free-write about their research interests in the context of the course; consider who may be involved in the conversation around their subject and whose perspectives they have not yet considered; engage in a brief grounding experience such as a communal breath or moment of silence; listening to relaxing music; gazing at soothing images; or tracing a finger labyrinth (The Labyrinth Society, 2017).

## **Spaces**

As students' academic lives blend with their social lives, their need for spaces in libraries shift as well (McKinstry, 2004). Brian Mathews encourages the examination of students' "need states," or the reasons they are use library spaces aside from research (2009). He considers personal uses such as reflection and meditation to be major categories. Mathews conclusion arises from the perspective of improving library marketing, in which the library and the user benefit from considering additional needs from library spaces. The Center for the Future of Libraries (CFL) of the American Library Association recently included mindfulness spaces as a trend to watch (Figueroa, 2016). The concepts of CP are listed under the "Unplugged" trend, and CFL urges librarians to consider the ramifications of the unplugged trend on future space design. (American Library Association, 2014).

Librarians approach the topic of mindfulness spaces from varying perspectives. Three librarians at ACRL 2017 displayed different versions of mindfulness spaces in libraries: a large space with pillows and seating, intended for groups; a smaller room with space for only

three people; and a brain-exercise space (Quinn et al, 2017). Two librarians at the ACHME conference in 2016 showed how spaces could range from permanent to pop-up, depending on demand and space possibilities. (Colvin & Sippel, 2016). New spaces provide opportunities for programming and collaboration with other entities on campus.

In the midst of a hectic day on a buzzing campus, dedicated, quiet spaces offer solace and renewal to all members of the community. Furthermore, when the quiet space is situated within a campus library, users' perceptions of the library expand beyond just the informational resources and services. The calm that results from even a short break could mean the difference between interactions driven by stress as opposed to those lifted up by empathy, which Greason proves is developed through mindfulness practices and defines as, "an ability to suspend judgment and bias to walk in the other's shoes." (Greason & Cashwell, 2009, p. 4). Offering quiet spaces sends a signal to students, faculty, staff and librarians that their health and wellbeing are valued by higher up decision makers. This, in turn, can raise morale and improve relations on campus. While quiet spaces offer a temporary haven for everyone, they might be needed most by those already struggling with mental health challenges.

### **Students and Resilience**

Academic librarians need to be aware that in 2016 roughly one in eight first-time, full-time college students in the U.S. (11.9%) reported feeling depressed "frequently" in the past year, and among the 10.7% of students who reported having a psychological disorder just over half (51.8%) have frequently felt depressed in the past year (Eagan et. al, p. 12). Additionally, more than one-third (34.5%) of incoming first-time, full-time college students frequently felt anxious and those who reported having a psychological disorder were significantly more likely to report frequently feeling anxious (79.5%) (p. 13). As our society grows more acutely aware of the effects of climate change, there is great potential for these more fragile students to be profoundly affected.

Floods, droughts, storms, and extreme heat threaten our sense of place, food and water supplies, housing and infrastructure, physical health and safety, access to work and school, and strain domestic relations, as well as spawn political tensions. Efforts to alleviate or avoid climate change-related threats and tensions can lead to substance abuse, anxiety, depression, violence and suicide. Leslie Davenport, author of *Emotional Resiliency in the Era of Climate Change: A Clinician's Guide* refers to mental health professionals as "the right people to be at the epicenter of the battle to save our home from climate change" (2017, p. 13). She laments the absence of colleagues and institutions to help address this unprecedented crisis. Providing neutral welcoming spaces and ample resources, it is arguable that libraries, including academic ones, are already equipped to share that role. Becoming more adept in contemplative pedagogy will position librarians to contribute to building resilience even more so.

In his book *Transformational Resilience: How Building Human Resilience to Climate Disruption Can Safeguard Society and Increase Wellbeing*, Bob Doppelt describes the critical need for building effective knowledge and skills so that individuals and communities can manage deep trauma before the severe effects of climate change are experienced. This capacity, which he calls "transformational resilience," includes practices to calm the nervous system while exploring assumptions, beliefs and perceptions to facilitate psycho-social-

spiritual stability (Doppelt, 2016, p. 78). He divides these skills into the categories of Presencing and Purposing and defines them respectively as “regulating the body’s fear-based reactions” and “finding meaning direction and hope in adversity.” (Doppelt, 2016, p. 84).

Ellen Hall explains how the impacts of climate change, “can put strain on social and community relationships, leading to increased levels of aggression, violence, and crime.” She adds that communities that have, “a strong social fabric...and have taken efforts to reduce social disparities are better equipped to respond to and quickly recover from climate impacts” (2017). Her article draws from a groundbreaking March 2017 report from the American Psychological Association, *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance* (APA 2017). Several of Hall’s “13 Key Take Aways: Tips to Support Communities” intersect with the objectives of libraries and can be amplified in an academic community through the use of CP: facilitating social cohesion through communal design; providing clear and frequent information; engaging community members; and providing opportunities for meaningful action.

### **Talking Truth at the Library**

An example of communal design, engagement, and meaning making is seen in a project hosted at the University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. The idea sprang from a conversation between a librarian, a professor of environmental conservation and an education doctoral student. Their daily despair around the barrage of climate change news felt like too much to bear alone. Surely they weren’t alone with the cognitive dissonance of carrying on through the work day alongside the heavy knowledge of the planet’s demise. Sensing the need for a campus wide conversation, they initiated a three-part series and named it “Talking Truth: Finding Your Voice Around the Climate Crisis” (Charney, 2017). When sixty people (faculty, students, staff, librarians, and community members) arrived for the first session, they knew they had struck a chord. In breakout groups, each person responding to the question, “With whom do you talk about climate change?” The room crackled with animated conversation and at times tears were shed. The second session, based on a model developed by Harvard scholar Marshall Ganz, used storytelling to explore personal values and what moves us to act around the urgent matter of climate change (Working Narratives, 2013). For the third session, participants entered a dimly lit room with background tonal music. While viewing a short video loop of CO2 levels rising from 800,000 years ago until the present year, it dawned on them that they were witnessing a moving record of our planet hurtling toward unlivable temperatures (NOAA, 2016). The images then transitioned to breathtaking landscapes and incredible creatures of land, air and sea – from a miniscule octopus atop a fingertip to a mighty blue whale. The juxtaposition of the earth’s destruction alongside the life force of our planet evoked a powerful recognition of the interconnectedness of all life, the vulnerability of ecosystems, the innocence of the more than human world, and the imperiled existence of us all. Participants were then asked to free write a response to the question, “How do you feel about climate change?” which was inspired by the work of Joe Duggan from The National Science and Technology Centre in Canberra, Australia (ITHYF). The writing samples were then sent to the University Archives in the main library, with many more to follow future Talking Truth programs. This expanding “time capsule” reflects the UMass Amherst community’s emotional response to climate change, with a notable shift in intensity following the exceedingly divisive presidential election of Donald Trump in November 2016. There are currently about a thousand writing samples (and some drawings)

housed in the Archives with future plans for sorting, coding, audio- or video-recording, and performing live readings of the work on campus and in the community.

At the end of the third session (which was meant to be the last), a psychology professor volunteered to help continue this incubator project. Soon after, a science librarian, an undergraduate English major, and staff members from campus planning and extension joined the planning team. The unique, flattened hierarchy of the planning team and the participants lend a rich, intergenerational aspect to the project, with everyone relating as human beings regardless of their “status” on campus or in the community. A contemplative exercise is always incorporated, sometimes as simple as inviting participants to take a few deep breathes -- a reminder of the role of our body in the learning experience. In the second year, a weekly session called “Holding Earth: Mindful Climate Action” centered on guided contemplative practices led collectively by participants. There were also films and guest speakers focused on renewable energy solutions and activists’ frontline stories. Rooted in and complementary to the research and teaching that happens on campus, Talking Truth is infused with a spirit of experimentation, flexibility, inclusivity and social transformation. In one case, a program was postponed on the spot so everyone could attend a student Divest protest that erupted at the same time as the scheduled program.

Paul Wapner, Professor of Global Environmental Politics at American University attended a Talking Truth workshop at the CMind conference. He remarked afterwards that the project provides, “a chance to unearth the deep-seated sentiments we feel and, by giving them voice, enable them to find stability, solidity and, most of all, expression.” He called the project, “a necessary step in climate activism” and “especially fitted to academic institutions since it practices whole-person education...[and] integrates cognitive, emotional, and somatic experience and provides tools for clarifying and deploying them in the service of climate protection” (Wapner, 2016).

In the fall of 2017, a weekly collaboration will commence between Talking Truth and Paperbark Literary Magazine, an environmental humanities journal starting up on the campus. Activities will include inspiring readings from climate change works, art making, creative writing exercises and discussions to cultivate a community of contributors to Paperbark and generate material for the magazinel. The weekly series will be called “Heart in Action: Creative Responses to Climate Change.”

### **Sustainable Development Goals**

Talking Truth touches on an array of the 17 SDGs. The contemplative aspects of the project point to Good Health and Wellbeing (Goal 3) and the cultivation of empathy and community building speaks to Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16). Programs such as “Renewables Are Ready” educated participants about Affordable and Clean Energy (Goal 7) and Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11). The overarching theme relates to Climate Action (Goal 13) with activities that encourage appreciation for the ecosystems necessary to sustain all life, including Life Below Water (Goal 14) and Life on Land (Goal 15).

Although this paper does not delve deeply into the SDGs, there is potential to integrate contemplative practices and transformational resilience into the targets, scaling up the effort to fit an international scope. For example, Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) addresses depression and the potential outcome of suicide. Target 3.D aims to strengthen the capacity of

all countries for early warning, risk reduction and management of health risks (IFLA, 2015). A recommendation for research, development and promotion of mindfulness-based programs could be added to this target. Understanding and managing trauma would allow communities to act from a place of being trauma informed, as opposed to being trauma organized. Trauma-informed preparedness translates to thoughtful, equitable, and life-sustaining decisions as individuals, institutions, communities and governments, even while under duress caused by climate change and other challenges (Doppelt, 2016, p.285).

## **Conclusion**

CP essentially asks us to slow down, reclaim our bodies, and remember our whole selves which can feel hijacked by everyday life (Shajahan, 2015, p. 499). Especially when practiced over time, CP promises librarians and their students an enduring inner strength that feeds engaged learning, effective teaching and empathic citizenry. This paper serves as an invitation for librarians (and their partnering colleagues) to be bold, to stretch beyond their comfort zone as they experiment with CP techniques. The recent flurry of professional development for librarians that center on mindfulness is reassurance that there is support and increasing acceptance of such innovations. Considering the hyper-paced and divided state of the U.S. and the world may motivate librarians to be agents of change through their teaching methods -- and to subtly administer care to their students in the process. When librarians demonstrate how to connect their inner lives with the global challenges we all face, they contribute to the meaning of our collective experiences and invite students to be part of the experiment. And while climate change may seem like a distant threat to some, science tells us otherwise. Getting ahead of the curve, for instance by beginning to master Presencing and Purposing skills now, would be a wise strategy for managing inevitable climate change trauma. This paper illuminates the momentum for CP within U.S. academic libraries, an excellent test bed for imaginative advances. Looking further ahead, IFLA's partnership with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development holds great promise for integrating the protective, stabilizing and empathy-invoking effects of contemplative pedagogy and practices on a global scale.

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