Mentoring WPAs for the Long Term: The Promise of Mindfulness

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Abstract

Since at least the mid-1960s, writing teachers have used mindful practices such as close observation, visualization, deep-breathing, and meditation to help students feel less anxious, develop greater self-awareness, and, ultimately, to produce better, more meaningful writing. Despite the wealth of research that now confirms both the psychological and physical benefits of such practices, and the broader acknowledgement of the importance of embodied awareness or "emotional intelligence" to effective leadership, their potential for writing program administrators has only recently begun to be explored. One of the best examples of such exploration is Christy Wenger's 2014 article in which she offers "contemplative administration" as a "feminist alternative for WPA work" that encourages "a fresh look at wellbeing—of people, programs and leadership" as well as administrative identity and agency (122). The discussion below, which draws on decades of literature on contemplative pedagogy, seeks to extend Wenger's argument by outlining how mindfulness-based mentoring of WPAs might help to both alleviate the stress of administration and enhance possibilities for long-term success.

Introduction

Increasing pressures on colleges and universities to account for student learning and to improve efficiency and affordability in the face of funding cuts have had wide-ranging consequences for writing programs and for writing program administrators (Scott and Welch 4). While our field has done a superb job over at least four decades of preparing new and prospective WPAs for knowledgeable, strategic management of curriculum and instruction, we have been less successful at equipping especially capable

colleagues to assume the leadership roles necessitated by the rapidly "shifting sands" (5) of higher education: roles that require not only disciplinary expertise and rhetorical savvy, but resilience, i.e., the ability to creatively and courageously respond to complex challenges in a sustained, sustainable way.

It is not insignificant that, as our administratively focused scholarship has expanded and deepened to help WPAs keep pace with changing expectations for teaching and learning, personal accounts of the professional, psychological, and even physical costs of administration have seemed not to diminish, as we might expect, but to grow ever-more intense. Such is especially the case for women, as illustrated by recent CCCC roundtables on the challenges of feminist leadership (Nicolas, et al.; Crow, et al.). That is, despite all of our efforts to support WPAs through books, articles, conference panels, workshops, and mentoring networks, talented colleagues—the very people we need most to lead our programs and step into other, more influential academic leadership roles—are burning, and dropping, out.

I was nearly one of these casualties. After many years of work in administration, first as a long-time WPA and then as a department chair, I started to unravel. The strain of keeping the "plates" of administration (but also teaching, research, family, and friends) "twirling" (Pinard) had left me psychologically and physically exhausted. Then, on my way back from the 2012 CWPA conference, I chanced upon Gretchen Rubin's *The Happiness Project* in an airport bookstore. That book, particularly its chapter on paying attention, led me to other books on nurturing awareness, self-trust, and empathy, which helped me reconcile my own sources of struggle and see how, as a discipline, we might supplement the invaluable work on administrative ways of *doing* with attention to ways of *being* that make the doing both more effective and possible for the long term.

At the most basic level, we might adopt an approach to WPA mentoring suggested by Christy Wenger's 2014 article outlining her efforts to integrate contemplative practices into her work as a new program administrator: mindfulness, or "the awareness that arises by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn xxxv, emphasis removed). In addition to non-judgement, mindfulness requires "patience, a beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go" (Kabat-Zinn 21). It is best cultivated through regular non-doing, breath-focused meditation, observation of thoughts and feelings, and discernment of "how we might choose to be in relationship" to the world in and around us (xxxv). Mindfulness helps relieve stress, highlight "what is deepest and best" within ourselves (liii), and inspire new forms of personal and professional agency. My own developing mindfulness practice has,

like Wenger's, helped me work with more presence and purpose (Wenger 132–33) and "respond differently," more calmly and deliberately, to stressful situations (136).

As Wenger suggests, while not always framed in terms of mindfulness, per se, the practice of pausing to allow for both physical and mental presence and considered reflection on emotions, thoughts, and the full range of possible responses is familiar to our field. Compositionists have, over many decades, sought methods of helping students "slow down," "become aware of," and examine their "inner stream of thoughts, feelings, and images," in order to more fully engage in the writing process (Moffett, "Reading and Writing" 321–22, 315); compose more interesting, insightful, meaningful, and better-revised texts (Schmidt 74–75); and, in so doing, develop a stronger sense of who they are and what they have to say. Typically, such methods, borrowed from cognitive psychology, various spiritual traditions, and alternative medicine, have included meditation, creative visualization, breathing activities, yoga, and even reading and writing themselves. Though similar techniques have been offered to and embraced by composition teachers to enhance their own writing, self-reflection, and sense of well-being (Moffett, "Women's Ways"; Murray; O'Reilley; Fontaine) and those of the teachers they mentor (Tremmel, Mathieu, Sullivan), the potential benefits of these techniques for composition administrators have not yet been fully explored in our WPA scholarship.

In the discussion that follows, I extend Wenger's work by proposing ways that those of us who mentor program administrators might adopt ideas and insights from mindfulness-oriented pedagogical practice in an effort to foster both effective and sustainable administration. It's a proposal that, in questioning what it means to "draw on everything you know" in order to survive and succeed as an administrator (Bizzell viii), seems both necessary and timely, given the increasing complexity of higher education as well as the growing recognition that effective leadership requires not just technical skill and cognitive ability but an emotional intelligence that, I would argue, is not adequately addressed in the WPA literature (Goleman 3). I begin where mindfulness practice typically begins—with a focus on presence—and continue with a discussion of some of the most common methods for enhancing student awareness of thoughts, feelings, and responses in the present moment and how they might be integrated into our WPA mentoring, despite both practical and conceptual challenges.

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Acknowledging the "Now"

A central premise of mindfulness, and the spiritual and scientific thought that informs it, is that much human suffering results from dwelling in a past we cannot change or worrying about a future we have little control over—and letting this shape our interpretations of and reactions to present circumstances. We have trouble seeing and appreciating what is happening now, which limits our perceived range of possible responses. The fewer options we perceive for responding, the less empowered we feel; the less empowered we feel, the more frustrated we become, often without even knowing why. Stopping to acknowledge with Kabat-Zinn that, literally, we only have moments to live allows for the mental stillness needed to fully consider what is happening in the present, why it is happening, and how to most appropriately and effectively respond.

In classrooms that are informed by mindful practices, teachers recognize the pull of the past and press of the future on students' ability to pay attention and engage (Kroll 70–72) as well as on their attitudes about writing, their writing processes, their willingness to take risks, and their interpretations of intent (of assignments, class activities, and peer and instructor responses). As Paula Mathieu argues, both teachers and students carry "accumulated past experiences, preconditioned responses, resistance and fears into every class" (14). If left unexamined, worries about the past and future can compromise not just what we do, but who we are in relation to those we seek to teach and to learn from. They hamper the ability to forge "ethical commitments" (Mathieu) as well as to recognize that any given rhetorical situation is always "momentary," "impermanent," and, thus, "dynamic," i.e., inviting "improvisation" in addition to reliance on expected rhetorical strategies (Peary 22–24).

Much administrative angst is similarly rooted in unexamined residue of past experience or assumptions about an uncertain future. Such can be seen most readily in moments when a program (department, school) faces the prospect of change (of curriculum, instruction, assessment approach, etc.), particularly change imposed from the outside. Veteran faculty, staff, and administrators who feel invested in whatever is changing often have trouble considering new initiatives with fresh perspectives, especially if change is introduced by people with whom they have too much or too little history. Colleagues newer to the scene, lacking the contextual knowledge and experience to predict and understand possible implications of change or the change process, can be overly confident about both.

What complicates matters for composition and rhetoric specialists is that, as a discipline, we tend to be preoccupied with our past and ever-

anxious about our future. As Pat Belanoff points out, for example, many of our intradisciplinary disagreements are rooted in an obsession with origins:

> Our discipline, while acknowledging the creative power of words, seeks almost obsessively for their origins, causes, and pre-existent contexts. . . . Do the words we speak or write on the blank page come spontaneously from a source within us? Is that source in direct (or indirect) contact with a higher power of some kind? Or are we merely channelers for the words of our culture, constructed by that culture to say only that which can be said within it? (400).

Disagreements over foundational questions such as these make it difficult to articulate a unified disciplinary identity, which, then, causes worry about the future, especially during tough fiscal times when "how we name ourselves and our actions" becomes highly important (419). The way we imagine the future is itself influenced by our historical commitment to process, particularly the "sense that what awaits us all is a world ready and willing to be 'revised,'" that we have more control over the results of our efforts, however noble and well executed, than we can possibly have (Miller 8). When, as administrators, we realize the limits of our influence, we risk feelings of "cynicism and despair" as well as a disillusion-borne "moral superiority," which prevent us from seeing all of the options "available at this moment" and making the most principled decisions we can with the "information at our disposal" (7, 12–13).

Following the lead of mindfulness-oriented writing teachers, those of us who mentor WPAs might then extend our traditional skill training to help our administrative colleagues "pay attention—to observe, to see the richness and detail that is right before us" (Kroll 76). A first step is to prompt them to ponder how distracted they are by thoughts of "what they have just done or what they need to do, that they are not present" (73). To orient his writing students in this way, Keith Kroll uses the familiar example of driving from one place to another without remembering much of what happened in between—a kind of "detachment and disengagement" that shows up everywhere in their lives, including in their approach to writing (72–73). Similarly, Mathieu asks new writing teachers to consider how each classroom "interaction" is influenced not just by their students' "preoccupations"—but by their own (14–15). Among other strategies, both invite personal expression, via narrative essays (Kroll) and open, honest discussion (Mathieu), to highlight what it means to be "fully present—as a writer or a teacher—in the current moment" (Mathieu 15).

In much the same way, WPAs can be encouraged to recognize unhelpful "attachment[s] to past and future" (Tolle 61). Like Kroll and Mathieu, I

have found that simply making space for mutual sharing of administrative stories (i.e., the narratives we create around events or issues) inspires awareness in this regard. If, after asking an advice-seeking colleague to explain a current challenge, I sense that she is focusing too much on aspects of the situation that are beyond her control (i.e., past and [presumed] future happenings) and not enough on those that are within her control (how she relates to the challenge and frames it for herself and others), I offer that observation and share one of my own stories of struggling to focus on, accept, and respond to a problem with awareness of what I can and cannot change. Assuming that the exchange has enhanced trust (in my experience, if I speak authentically, it almost always has), we can then figure out, together, solutions that acknowledge the past and possible future(s), but are not dictated by them.

Stopping

Above all else, developing awareness requires a commitment to regularly stopping whatever one is doing at the moment. Though not a required component of stopping, silence—a quiet environment—helps many people see its benefits. As Charles Suhor observes, stopping in silence is already part of our English-teaching "tradition," particularly with respect to process pedagogy (24). Focusing specifically on the pedagogical uses of "purposeful silence," Suhor encourages expanding on familiar practices such as quiet reading, brainstorming, and reflection-enhancing instructional wait time during class discussions as a way to inspire the "sensitive listening, speaking, and reading" that leads to greater (aesthetic, spiritual, self) awareness (24). Silent stopping in the writing classroom can also take the form of visualizing a process or end product before actually embarking on a writing project. In one of the earliest published explorations of the benefits of contemplative classroom practice, for example, James Moffett recommends "that teachers coach students on how to get themselves into a meditative state of unusual absorption in a subject that interests them and then to visualize, imagine, feel, and think everything they can about that subject without at first concerning themselves about writing something down" ("Writing" 243).

As a long-time administrator myself, and as someone who supports other administrators, I have found the deliberate use of wait time and creative visualization particularly helpful in understanding and improving workplace dynamics. Similar to instructional wait time, administrative wait time simply requires resisting the urge to do what one might be conditioned or expected to do, at any given time, out of sheer habit (and often

in haste), i.e., mindlessly. Examples include forming an opinion about, or solution to, a situation before it is fully understood, interrupting colleagues, and responding to provocative emails immediately after receiving them. As I learned over decades of using wait time in my classrooms, choosing to say or do nothing can change the dynamics of an interaction which, then, can change the shape and eventual outcome of an entire situation. Simply resisting filling conversational spaces, particularly saying the first thing that comes to mind, has worked to minimize the emotional toll of my administrative work in several ways: I say fewer words that I wake up in the middle of the night regretting, and I listen more, and more actively, which has improved my relationships. Additionally, as is the case with students, wait time has helped me delegate responsibility for a productive discussion to colleagues, which they are typically happy to take, along with shared responsibility for the matters under discussion. Wait time can be readily modelled in mentoring situations and its benefits experienced and highlighted within a single interaction. All a mentor needs to do is listen as a problem is described; keep quiet or, at most, ask non-leading questions, until her colleague reaches a feasible conclusion; and then note both the use of wait time in the interaction and how it can be employed productively with faculty and staff who may be the source of an administrative challenge. Wait time is easy for WPAs to practice, too: all that's required is a face-to-face or electronic exchange in which to test the effects of remaining silent when feeling compelled to respond.

Visualization activities have also helped me a great deal as both a teacher and an administrator. Just as a teaching mentor encouraged me to do before the first class session of every semester, if I am faced with a potentially stressful administrative meeting, I try to imagine myself at the meeting from beginning to end, confidently offering ideas and asking questions, listening, taking notes, and responding patiently. If it's a particularly important meeting, I will sometimes visit the assigned room beforehand in order to better envision myself in the context. While it can also be helpful to picture everyone else in a meeting listening and responding with goodwill, I try to remind myself that, as with the uncertain future, I have no real control over others' interpretations or responses; I can only "take each moment as it comes and [be] with it fully as it is" (Kabat-Zinn 28). Like wait time, visualization can be readily explained in a variety of mentoring contexts, practiced, and then evaluated for usefulness.

Some forms of stopping or non-doing are more accurately thought of as different-doing—engaging in activities that provide a break from work to allow space for rest, contemplation, and renewal. From a mindfulness perspective, any activity will do, as long as the beneficial effects are regis-

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tered and greater awareness inspired. To prompt "heightened consciousness and self-communication" among students, for example, Moffett suggests a range of absorbing physical activities, including "pleasantly monotonous craft movements like knitting and weaving or work activities like hauling a rope or wielding a pickaxe or shovel or thrusting seedlings into mud" ("Writing" 245). Writing, too—particularly personal or unstructured writing—can offer refuge from daily stresses if its primary purpose is to be present and attentive to one's life (Kroll 73); experience "emotional excitement" (Schmidt 68); or to see the subject at hand differently (Murray 19). The more the activity feels like a "creative intervention," offering new space for "the growth of intuitive erudition," the more transformative it can be (Musial 224–25).

Importantly, mindfulness practitioners, within and outside our field, recognize that no single form of non- or different-doing works to raise self-awareness for everyone. Which is why they encourage teachers to "create a space" for students to discover those things that will "nourish an inner life" (O'Reilley 2–3). In my experience as a mentor of administrative colleagues who are feeling frustrated or burned out, I have found that in order to inspire others "to stare out the window, to stay in bed, to have lunch, to have tea, to walk the dog, to fingerpaint," (O'Reilley 15), I had to first "follow the deepest leadings of [my] own heart" (14). I had to "get a life" that I could model for others—a process facilitated by observation and reflection.

Observing

As suggested above, many of the methods used in mindfulness-oriented writing classrooms are prevalent in writing classes, generally. One such method is close observation, especially of places, people, and events that serve as subjects or contexts for student writing. What makes observation different within a mindfulness framework is its purpose, which expands beyond the production of detailed, vivid, interesting papers to developing the capacity to notice, to "be awake" (O'Reilley 10). As Mary Rose O'Reilley explains, "Precise details open a window in the spaces where spirit abides and plays; our attentiveness to them measures the extent to which we are present" (12).

Writing teachers who take a mindfulness approach to instruction often invite students to keep observation journals—of the world around them but also their "inner state" (Woodward 81). As a method for enhancing "insight, intuition, and awareness" among her basic writing students, for example, Angela Woodward experimented with asking them to note when they felt happy in the class and when they felt unhappy. Regularly noting

how they were feeling about class activities and then discussing the source of those feelings inspired students to "bring more of themselves, including their resistance [to writing and reading] into the classroom" (81), which enhanced trust and classroom community. Similarly, Donald R. Gallehr introduced various methods of "witnessing" thoughts and emotions into his writing classes, including, for example, a "worry sheet" exercise, in which students "map and discharge thoughts that bother them" and interfere with their work as writers. By concretizing and then "sitting with" troubling thoughts, as if they are "old friends rather than enemies," students learned to "disarm them" (25).

With respect to mindfulness-oriented WPA mentoring, Robert Tremmel offers a model for awareness-raising observation in his discussion of how he helps new TAs to "pay attention in the midst of all of this confusion" (including, e.g., the "contradictory demands of teaching itself" that are "compounded" by demands of their "academic work") (57). For his "slices of classroom life" activity, Tremmel asks TAs to first write a narrative of "some specific and limited 'event' in school" and then reflect on "the thoughts, feelings, and speculations that arise during and after the event" (58–59). According to Tremmel, this activity prompts beginning teachers to understand how their "actions and perceptions" of "what is happening in [the] classroom" are "strongly conditioned" by how they feel and what they "make of" those feelings (60). As a result, they begin to "know their students and in the process come to know themselves and how they function as teachers" which, in turn, can immediately impact their teaching practice (61–62).

A "slices of administrative life" mentoring activity, based on Tremmel's model and engaged in through either informal writing or conversation, offers potential for heightened awareness as well as acceptance that "it is the quality of [one's] consciousness at this moment that determines the future" (Tolle 60). Mary Pinard's reflection on her first year as a WPA demonstrates as much by highlighting how her creative writing background, which emphasized careful observation and the ability to "stare something, anything, into meaning," allowed her to more readily "take risks and to tolerate [the] ambiguity" that comes with WPA work (61). Quickly recognizing the need to "slow down [and] take note of the issues [she] was encountering" with greater awareness made it easier to achieve a balanced view of the strengths and weaknesses, the "imminent disaster (or triumph)" in each issue she faced (61–62).

Reflecting

Beyond providing examples of how observation might be used in an administrative mentoring context, Tremmel and Pinard both highlight the natural connection between observation and reflection. Though it can be beneficial to simply observe, the possibilities for mindful action in response to observation come from reflection, especially reflection without judgment, for "what you judge you cannot understand" (de Mello 37). As with observation, reflection is so prevalent in our discipline as to be considered part of our DNA, a threshold concept of our field, "critical for continued learning and participation" in our "community of practice" (Adler-Kassner and Wardle, "Naming" 2). Reflection from a mindfulness perspective, however, is meant to enhance not only the "ability to theorize and question" the "processes, practices, beliefs, attitudes, and understandings" about a particular realm of doing (writing) (Taczak 78), but to inspire self-awareness that informs all areas of one's life.

While reflective practices such as keeping an administrative journal or annotating meeting agendas can help raise awareness of the multiple possible sources of WPA-related stress, I have found two exercises particularly beneficial for increasing broader self-awareness and self-efficacy. The first, included in Kabat-Zinn's groundbreaking *Full Catastrophe Living*, is the "Awareness Calendar," various versions of which are used frequently in stress-reduction mindfulness workshops. Whether focused on daily events or interpersonal communications, the calendar requires noting what happened, describing associated feelings and thoughts, considering reasons for any gaps between expectations and outcomes, and, if applicable, determining possible resolutions (Kabat-Zinn 612–16). The second method, an administrative ways-of-being statement, is modelled after the now-ubiquitous teaching philosophy statement, but goes beyond articulating the values that inform one's practice (e.g., honesty, transparency, generosity, collaboration) to include the habits of self-care needed to maintain commitment to those values without compromising psychological or physical health. While my administrative work has always been guided by a set of well-articulated administrative principles, it wasn't until I began to engage in awareness-enhancing activities on my own and discuss their benefits with close administrative colleagues, that I recognized that the very activities I was not making time for (daily walks, lunch with friends, writing and reading for pleasure) were standing between the present, patient, kind administrative self I wanted to be and the stressed-out, short-tempered, bone-tired administrative self I had become.

Embodying

Though the term *mindfulness* might suggest otherwise, developing self-awareness requires attention to both mind and body, particularly the links between them. This attention involves "feeling the body from within," observing emotions, considering their sources, and reflecting on how and why they influence perceptions and reactions (Tolle 26–27). It is through "honoring the body" and "listening to the messages it is trying to give" that the full range of psychological and physical health benefits associated with mindfulness can be experienced (Kabat-Zinn 353–60). Some of the best strategies for hearing what the body has to say are focused breathing, meditation, and yoga.

Writing teachers who work from a mindfulness perspective are aware that one of the easiest ways to "get in touch with the inner body" is through what spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle calls "conscious breathing" (125). They often incorporate breathing exercises into their curricula in order to help students slow down, attend to what they are experiencing in "the here-and-now," recognize the "close connection" between thoughts and feelings, and, with that recognition, develop ways of interpreting and changing them (Moffett, "Writing" 244). Such exercises range from "simply attending to breathing without altering it" to "some of the most powerful consciousness-altering exercises [that] entail slowing, holding, or patterning the breath" (244). Mindful breathing, especially when combined with other mindfulness practices, is also used in classrooms to inspire "inventive" thinking (Peary 31) as well as a sense of connection with others, leading to greater empathy and "ethical practice" (Mathieu 18). The air we breathe, after all, is, quite literally, one thing we share with every other human being. Further, because breath is a constant as long as we are alive, but "responds to our emotional state by changing its rhythm, sometimes quite dramatically," simply noticing how they breathe can help students "get comfortable with change" (Kabat-Zinn 41).

One of the most widely recognized methods for attending to breath, in the moment, is meditation, which mindfulness practitioners identify as an important "way of 're-minding' ourselves" of who we are beyond our intellect, of "who is doing the doing—or, put otherwise, with the world of being" (Kabat-Zinn 56, 55). Meditation's familiarity as a means of inspiring "embodied awareness" (50–51) is likely why it shows up so frequently in discussions of efforts to bring mindfulness practices into the writing classroom. In addition to offering students "an opportunity to concentrate, to allow their minds to be quiet and aware," "to be in the moment," and achieve "clarity and insight" (Kroll 76), meditation, when practiced regu-

larly, decreases the performance anxieties of otherwise "apprehensive or blocked writers" (Campbell 246).

For many, the term *meditation* calls to mind sitting on a cushion, legs folded, hands resting upright on knees, with incense burning in the background. In actual practice, however, it can be more or less formal and take place in brief periods throughout a day or in longer sessions. It can be done sitting in a chair "with feet on the floor" and "backs balanced" (Gallehr 24), standing, lying down, or even walking with awareness of "the experience of walking itself" (Kabat-Zinn 124). While the meditating mind is most typically focused on the breath, it can have as its focus a posture (as with yoga), a significant object, or "thoughts and feelings as they arise" (Gallehr 26). It can be practiced as an activity unto itself or usefully combined with other physical activities, including writing, as long as those activities enhance the ability to "witness," direct, or silence the mind (Moffett, "Writing" 246), or, perhaps, more accurately, to detach from thoughts or "let go" (Gallehr 27). In fact, engaging in what Moffett describes as a gamut of activities, including "focusing, meditation, yogic stretching, fasting, breathing, and chanting . . . alternating abruptly with talking, thinking, reading, and writing," can, according to him, be especially valuable by "tend[ing] to rearrange the inner furniture and . . . reconnect thoughts and feelings in new ways" (Moffett, "Women's Ways" 260).

A similarly transformative practice—and one often productively combined with meditation, as suggested above—is yoga. As Jennifer Musial outlines, the practice of yoga can enhance understanding of basic mindfulness precepts which, for her, are foundational to a "feminist heart-centered pedagogy" (224). These include presence, "sitting with" discomfort, mutual trust and respect, compassion, and "letting go" (223–26). Though yoga, like meditation, calls to mind unhelpful stereotypes (e.g., spandex-clad bodies in intense pretzel-like poses), the type of yoga most often incorporated into classrooms is typically limited to breath-focused balancing and stretching exercises—what yoga studios often label as restorative yoga.

All of these embodied practices are adaptable to a WPA mentoring context, particularly a professional development workshop, where they can be introduced through assigned readings or brief presentations; discussed as part of a continuum (i.e, from basic to more advanced); and, most importantly, practiced. Harvard's Mindfulness for Educators institute, which I recently attended, provides a helpful model. Over eighty teachers and administrators, from across the country and representing all educational levels, read and discussed current research on the benefits of mindfulness and then engaged together in various forms of meditation, focused in multiple ways—on breathing, but also on projected quotes and images,

self-composed short mantras (e.g., "I am peaceful, I am kind"), and on emotional changes prompted by first imagining a sad experience and then dancing to "Rock around the Clock." These meditative moments were interspersed with both seated and standing neck rolls, arm and shoulder stretches, and gentle torso twists. While there was recognition among the regular meditators and yoga practitioners in the group that deeper, more sustained practice leads to more obvious results, all participants noted in a final reflective session how the brief embodied activities helped minimize distractions from "the outside world" and enhance their sense of well-being. Additionally, those new to such practices echoed a sentiment captured by Sheryl Fontaine in her discussion of learning karate as an adult: that the "beginners mind" required for fully engaging in an unfamiliar "art and tradition" raises awareness of how our students feel, especially at the beginning of a new semester. "From the beginner's mind," she explains, "I have seen my respect for students grow, my understanding of their feelings deepen" (221). Such a perspective is invaluable for WPAs, whose success depends on mutual respect and empathy not just for students but for faculty, staff, and administrative colleagues faced with unfamiliar problems.

Considering the Challenges

Beyond the obvious conceptual obstacles to mindfulness mentoring, negotiating logistics—the how, when, and where of engaging WPAs in awareness-building practices—can seem difficult. Is mindfulness best invited by slipping an article on self-awareness under an office door? By demonstrating focused breathing in a one-to-one meeting? Through group meditation at a professional development workshop? Having myself experienced all of these methods, as either the mentor or mentee, I have concluded that, as with effective teaching, the answer depends on what's needed and what's possible, given levels of openness and trust as well as personal and professional resources (e.g., time, money for faculty development workshops, etc.). Mindful mentoring, like all good mentoring, requires an awareness that one size definitely does not fit all.

With respect to specific elements of mindfulness practice, there are numerous potential challenges. First, pausing at all, let alone pausing to fully consider the present moment, is tough. As Belanoff reminds us, our teaching and administrative contexts are part of "a society that values getting from one place to another in as straight a line as possible with no pauses in liminal spaces and no wonderings along the way" (417). Our notions of success, within and outside academia, are based on a concept of agency that emphasizes doing (over being) and quick decision making (over

thoughtful deliberation). Few academics experience both the expectations and stresses of nonstop doing as much as administrators. With respect to writing program administrators, in particular, Laura Micciche argues that "attentiveness to the moment requires a kind of pacing and ethos that . . . seem largely unavailable to WPAs on a daily basis" (75). The "felt experience of being physically and mentally over-taken by the enormity of the job" has become so normative that those who attempt a "slow agency," allowing time for "thinking, being still, and processing," can experience uneasiness and even guilt in contexts where deferred action is interpreted as inaction or "dereliction of duty" (73–74). Kabat-Zinn frames this guilt in terms of the legacy of "the Puritan ethic" in the United States—a mindset which sees self-care as selfish or undeserved (35).

Additionally, common awareness-enhancing practices bring with them their own challenges. Practices that incorporate purposeful silence, like wait time, require both a willingness to rest in the discomfort of silence which, as a culture, we are "fearful of" (Belanoff 400) as well as a surrendering of control over what might be said or proposed by others if space is allowed. Administrators from historically marginalized groups also must negotiate the benefits of purposeful silence with various forms of cultural silencing—what, with respect to women, O'Reilley calls "the Tillie Olsen silence, when you don't have a voice, when you are discounted, marginalized, standing there ironing" (7). Further, while observation and reflection are now standard pedagogical fare, encouraging attention to feelings still pushes the boundaries of academic appropriateness, particularly when enhanced by meditation and yoga, which, for many, call up additional and sometimes-problematic religious associations as well as the notion of a "'deep' self, so often sought" by meditators but seemingly at odds with postmodern theory (Campbell 249). JoAnn Campbell's worries, as an untenured faculty member, about bringing meditation from "the fringes of our discipline" and the margins of academia into her writing classroom in the early 1990s seem as relevant today as they did then.

Carefully framing activities and defining terminology are key to increasing openness to mindfulness practice and its many benefits. Suhor offers a helpful way of approaching the use of purposeful silence, specifically, by acknowledging that "the systematic suppression of language" is never good and highlighting the importance of "a dynamic interaction . . . between talk and silence" to teaching and learning (24). Similarly, O'Reilley offers silence as the space within which we make potentially life-altering choices about how we will respond to students and colleagues:

> In academic culture most listening is critical listening. We tend to pay attention only long enough to develop a counterargument; we critique the student's or the colleague's ideas; we mentally grade and pigeonhole each other. . . . Seldom is there a deep, openhearted, unjudging reception of the other. And so we all talk louder and more stridently and with a terrible desperation. By contrast, if someone truly listens to me, my spirit begins to expand. (19)

In terms of alleviating discomfort with unfamiliar activities like focused breathing, meditation, or yoga, recent mindfulness-oriented pedagogical literature can be most helpful. Composition and rhetoric colleagues who write about integrating mindfulness practices into their classrooms can now support empirical claims of the many benefits with mounting scientific evidence (see, for example, Mathieu). Also, since Moffett published his foundational and oft-cited "Writing, Inner Speech, and Meditation" in 1982, much thought has been devoted to making such practices less threatening to both students and teachers alike. In terms of meditation, in particular, those who mentor WPAs can follow the lead of O'Reilley and Belanoff in demonstrating the ways in which practices typically associated with Eastern religions, like Buddhism, are actually apparent in all religions. One of the most instructive aspects of O'Reilley's *Radical Presence*, for instance, is the manner in which she makes her case for contemplative classroom practice by weaving together aspects of multiple spiritual traditions within Christianity (e.g., Catholicism, Quakerism) as well as Judaism and Buddhism. Against a similar spiritual backdrop, Belanoff uses the *Oxford English Dictionary* to trace an etymological path from *reflect* to *meditate* and then to *contemplation* (405–06), through the acts of *studying* or *pondering* (407), and then, from there, notes the similarities with *metacognition*, thus further broadening the scope of the practice, its associations, and potential for action (411).

Our mindful teaching colleagues also offer methods for negotiating the privileging of mind over body in academia by embracing "both/and" thinking and redefining narrowly conceived terms. As Angela Woodward describes the contemplative pedagogy she uses with basic writers, it is "concerned with ways of being, for both students and teacher" (78) and allows for integration of "clarity, logic, and reasons" with "insight, intuition, and awareness" (81, 80). Along the same lines, Alexandra Peary and Erec Smith reconceive *kairos* in ways that require attention to both intellectual and physical experiences (Peary 31), to both "cognitive and spiritual faculties" (Smith 36), and a sense of self-actualization that enhances, rather than conflicts with, the "ability to understand and construct appropriate subject positions" for the benefit of effective argument (38).

Even when ready solutions to challenges posed by mindful teaching seem unavailable, the scholarship uniformly suggests that the potential personal and professional benefits are well worth negotiating possible obstacles. Mindful teachers generally agree that awareness-building activities reduce anxiety, improve focus and creativity, enhance feelings of empathy, and increase (physical, intellectual, and emotional) stamina—not just for students but for themselves. As students become more comfortable with uncertainty and more aware of who they are and what they are doing in the present moment, so, too, do their teachers, who often gain new professional and personal insights. When transferred to an administrative context, mindful practice promises similar results for WPAs and the people with whom they work. As Micciche found, for example, simply slowing down the administrative decision-making process engendered a range of "regenerative returns" (74), from new opportunities for productive collaboration to reduced stress levels. Perhaps even more important, within the mandate-driven context of higher education, where it's easy to feel our "professional agency erode" (Scott and Welch 5), stopping to "be in the moment [and] puzzling through" challenges with enhanced awareness (Micciche 83) can expand a WPA's sense of where and how she might effect change. As Wenger explains, mindfulness

> better positions WPAs . . . to be aware of the emotional and physical management of writing programs and people, to resist our construction as an exploitable presence and to carve out new possibilities for how we might become effective change agents within our programs and campuses. (122)

Far from just serving the WPA's own interests, mindful practice is, at its base, a practice of considered compassion for both self and community—a purposeful attention to the part of oneself and others that when really listened to, without judgment, inspires bolder, braver, stronger (and less stressful) personal and professional commitments (O'Reilley 20–21).

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