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Critiquing Instrumentalism in Higher Education

Lessons from Teaching as Meditative Inquiry

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Abstract

In this conceptual and self-reflective essay, the authors begin from the premise that the contemporary higher educational institutions in Canada and many other parts of the world have increasingly tended to focus on instrumental teaching, rooted in neoliberal and capitalist ideals of societal progress through economic development. The result is that higher education centralizes making students career ready, rather than the holistic development of the student. Critical of this, Ashwani Kumar (professor of Education) and Nayha Acharya (professor of Law), undertake a collaborative effort to discuss how Kumar's theoretical and practical concept of teaching as meditative inquiry can be an antidote to instrumentalism in higher education. In the first part of this essay, Kumar describes his concept of teaching as meditative inquiry by unfolding its theoretical rooting and giving practical examples of how he has used this approach in his teacher education and graduate education courses as well as in his doctoral seminar in contemporary educational theory at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In the second part, Acharya narrates her experimentation with the teaching as meditative inquiry approach in her Alternative Dispute Resolution course, which she teaches at the Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Providing concrete examples from their experiences of using a meditative inquiry approach to teaching and learning, the authors describe 1) the value of giving students the space to discover their own intrinsic relationship with the subject matter being taught, 2) how passion, authenticity and creativity can be enabled in the classroom, and 3) the challenges of adopting teaching as meditative inquiry approach in the classroom.

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Introduction

Holistic, meditative, and critical teaching centralizes students learning about themselves and uncovering their passions. The joy of teaching arises when a student blossoms into the best manifestation of their true self. But as higher education becomes more driven towards professional readiness in the neoliberal globalized world that commodifies education, teaching and learning are less about the development and growth of the individual. Rather, contemporary higher educational institutions seem to be increasingly concerned with maximizing the individual's instrumental value for society (Busch, 2017; Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Giroux, 2014; Kumar, 2019a; Levidow, 2007; Ross & Gibson, 2007; Scott, 2016).[1] Such an educational context, which is insidiously controlled by colonial and neoliberal ideologies, expects a rather narrow conception of curriculum and teaching of academic institutions. Rooted in instrumental conceptions of curriculum, teaching, and learning like Tylerian Rationale[2], the contemporary educational structure demands that the curriculum, teaching, and learning in higher educational institutions primarily focus on what knowledge and skills students must gain, how they should learn them, and how their learning should be assessed, so that the requirements of their future professions are satisfied. We contend that in that circumstance, when educators invite creativity, it is to serve the capitalist system so that the students can use their creative efforts to produce better, more efficient, and more desirable goods, services, and innovations. Similarly, critical thinking and reflection are taught so that the individual can contribute to so-called societal development and progress. Even if rest and relaxation are encouraged, and techniques like mindfulness are invoked, it is because the rested mind can produce better, more, and faster (Kumar & Downey, 2018, 2019). In a neoliberal and capitalistic inspired educational context, students and teachers are instruments to achieve economic development without having much intrinsic worth and society (sometimes represented by the professional body) is the patron. The students' delight at finding their unique passion and potential is at best an accidental by-product of their education. In a nutshell, the overall contemporary higher educational system is in the service of neoliberal capitalism despite the resistance of countless critical and creative educators and their students.

Of course, it is not that a general hope for a progressively better society is problematic, nor is the hope that students will contribute to that betterment; what is problematic is the colonial, economistic, and neoliberal definition of progress which prioritizes economic efficiency and which de-emphasises the subjectivity of the individual—and their freedom to learn for the love of learning—in higher education (Busch, 2017). It constitutes a failure to appreciate that society is

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[1] See also *Cultural Studies↔Critical Methodologies* special issue "Neoliberalism in Higher Education" (Volume 17, Issues 3, 2017) to learn about critically significant research on the impact of neoliberal policies on higher education: http://journals.sagepub.com/toc/csca/17/3

[2] Tylerian rationale implies a framework of curriculum development that was outlined by Ralph Tyler in his book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1949). It was based on four questions: What educational purposes should school seek to attain? What kinds of the educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes? How can these educational experiences be effectively organized? How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained (Tyler, 1949, p. 1)? These four questions and the instrumentalist, ahistorical, atheoretical, apolitical, and uncritical thinking that informs these questions brought about what is known as the "curriculum development" paradigm in education (Pinar et al., 1995). The curriculum development paradigm supports prescriptive curricula, outcomes-based education, standardized testing, and bureaucratization of educational institutions (Kumar, 2019a, p. 16).

more than an economy and individuals are more than an efficient economic unit. Such an economistic perspective fails to recognize that society emerges through relationships between and among individual subjectivities and, therefore, the true and deep transformation of the society and its social, political, economic, and educational structures is contingent on the transformation and blossoming of every individual (Krishnamurti, 1953, 1954; Kumar, 2013, 2014; Macdonald, 1995).[3]

Treating the individual as an instrument for society's so-called progress and development undermines both the student's and the teacher's passionate, creative, critical, ethical, and meditative engagement in teaching and learning. Moreover, the emphasis on efficiency and productivity at almost any cost disregards issues of social injustices, discrimination, global and regional inequalities, ecological crises, and individual and collective happiness. This encumbers the movement towards a more peaceful and just society because it creates market-driven and self-centered individuals who are afraid of falling short of societal and professional expectations of productivity. Such individuals act out of fear (further exacerbated by student loans and debts) rather than one's intrinsic motivations, which creates internal conflict and dissatisfaction. Such conflicted individuals cannot form a deeply harmonious community.[4] Individuals are the building blocks of society; unless we all have free education and unless we are free to teach, to learn and to pursue our passions, a harmonious society cannot flourish.

The notion of teaching as meditative inquiry (Kumar & Downey, 2018) turns the dominant paradigm of contemporary higher education on its head by reclaiming the place of the individual and their relationships to society as the central priority of education. It provides an approach that centralizes the importance of becoming aware of one's self, discovering one's authentic being, and one's true passions which are not externally driven and controlled but are rooted in one's intrinsic and creative intelligence (Kumar & Downey, 2019). Societal contribution then assumes its rightful place as the by-product of good education. The approach is characterized by freedom rather than authoritarian teaching (Freire, 1973)—students are given as much freedom as possible to facilitate independent and collaborative inquiry into the subject matter being taught and are encouraged to think critically, culturally, creatively, and meditatively. The goal is to release their creativity and imagination (Greene, 1995) so that they discover and embrace their own capacities and intrinsic intelligence (Kumar & Downey, 2019) and establish unique relationships with the subject matter they are studying. In this approach to teaching and learning, students are given space to explore their own creativity so that they may ignite their individual sparks into a flame of unique passion.

In the meditative inquiry approach to teaching, when critical reflection is invited, it is to engage students in critical and dialogical space to discover how their own mind and state of being can be influenced, manipulated, and encumbered by societal demands, colonial, capitalist, and neoliberal agendas, and the tendency (reinforced by most higher education programs) to compare and measure one's self against others and pre-established standards of performance. The purpose is to help the student learn to see how external factors shape one's thinking and create comparative

[3] This idea draws on the work of James Macdonald and Jiddu Krishnamurti, who, as Kumar (2013) explains, "think that the highest form of education is to provide opportunities for teachers and their students to understand and transform their consciousness and thereby society" (p. 3).

[4] Kumar (2013) explains that one of the four key principles of curriculum as meditative inquiry is the recognition that human consciousness is in conflict that arises primarily because of our fear and insecurity (p. 42-43). See also Krishnamurti, 1954, 1969.

tendencies within oneself which cause internal conflict. Through the deepened awareness of how one thinks and feels, one learns to study the internal landscape and how it poisons one's well-being. Such an awareness and a sense of freedom that emerge from it allows one to be guided by their own authentic being rather than primarily by extrinsic factors. In practical terms, the intention to experience enhanced self-awareness is realized through introducing rest and relaxation in the classroom to encourage students to give their minds the space and the quietness to enable deeper self-understanding.

Our hope in this paper is to caution against the danger of instrumental and market-driven approaches in higher education that rely on cognitive, memory-driven, technique-oriented, and information-transmission centered teaching and learning strategies, to introduce a wider audience to Kumar's notion of teaching as meditative inquiry, and to demonstrate its applicability (even its urgency) in higher education and professional programs.

The ideas and practices expressed in this conceptual and reflective essay on teaching as meditative inquiry draw inspirations from and contributes to three sectors of educational scholarship, namely, holistic education, critical pedagogy, and self-reflective approaches. First, we believe that education must nurture the whole person including the physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual aspects of their beings rather than simply focus on their minds for the instrumental gains of the political and economic structures (Doin 2012; Lees & Noddings, 2016; Miller, 2019; Miller, Nigh, Binder, Novak, & Crowell, 2018; Noddings, 2003). This focus on holistic education forms the core aspect of teaching as meditative inquiry as it unfolds in our classrooms. Second, we contend that holistic education remains incomplete if it does not develop the critical consciousness of teachers and students regarding the widespread injustices that pervade our society due to discriminatory, prejudicial, and oppressive attitudes and structures. Teaching as meditative inquiry appreciates and learns from the well-established tradition of critical pedagogy (Darder et al., 2009; Darder et al., 2016; Freire, 1973; Kanpol, 1999) that aims to deeply understand and transform oppressive political, economic, social, and educational structures. By centralizing the study and transformation of consciousness (which lies at the root of the oppressive structures) as its central aim, teaching as meditative inquiry furthers the goals of critical pedagogy. Finally, due to our emphasis on a deeper exploration of human subjectivity—the core of the educational experience according to teaching as meditative inquiry as well as the phenomenological (van Manen, 2012), existentialist (Green, 1995), and psychoanalytic perspectives (Taubman, 2012)—that demands reflection, introspection, and self-inquiry, this essay derives insights from and furthers the goals of self-reflective methods and perspectives in education, including self-study literature (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Loughran et al., 2004; Knowles and Cole, 1994; and Kitchen & Russell, 2012), autobiographical inquiry (Pinar, 2012), contemplative inquiry (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Gunnlaugson, Sarath, Scott, & Bai, 2014; Simmer-Brown & Grace, 2011; Zajonc, 2008)), and reflective practice (Brookfield, 1998; Schön, 1983).

We have organized this essay as follows: In Part I below, Ashwani Kumar further explains the concept of teaching as meditative inquiry, sets out its theoretical underpinnings, and demonstrates how it comes to life in his teacher education and graduate education courses as well as in his doctoral seminar in educational theory at Mount Saint Vincent University.[5] In Part II,

[5] Kumar teaches contemporary educational theory to doctoral students, curriculum theory and holistic education to master's students, and social studies, philosophy of education, and holistic education to pre-service teachers. Teaching as meditative inquiry informs, and is practiced in, all his courses.

Nayha Acharya shares her experiences of experimenting with the teaching as meditative inquiry approach in her Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) class which she teaches at the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University. She discusses why she thought it was important to incorporate the meditative inquiry approach, and gives specific examples of elements she has introduced into her ADR course that are informed by it. In Part III, based on our experiences with teaching as meditative inquiry, we identify five thematic insights and recommendations for our colleagues who teach in higher education institutions.

Part I
What is Teaching as Meditative Inquiry and How Does it Come to Life in Education Courses?
(Ashwani Kumar)

In the meditative inquiry approach to teaching and learning, the core purpose of the educational experience is to encourage students and their teachers to deeply understand and transform the conflicted nature of human consciousness—characterized by fear, conditioning, and fragmentation—by cultivating a deeper sense of awareness.[6] When I first introduced this idea in my book, *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry*[7], I commented that: "It is my understanding that most of our problems—psychological and collective—have their source in our consciousness, our very psychological nature" (Kumar, 2013, pp. 1-2). Deep down, we are all in fear of losing the material things and psychological beliefs and commitments that give us a sense of security and certainty (Krishnamurti, 1954, 1969). We develop certain convictions as we grow up— religious, ideological, cultural, and nationalistic—and we hang on tightly to these identities because they give us a sense of psychological security, a sense of belonging, a sense that we are part of something big and important. The attachment to these psychological conditions and the security that they bring create fear, because there is the anxiety associated with losing these psychological structures and entering into instability and uncertainty (Kumar, 2013).[8] In relationships (either between individuals, between groups, or between nations), these psychological structures are challenged, because we are all conditioned differently.[9] That inevitable challenge brings conflict and disharmony.

Rooted in this view of our shared human condition, the purpose of education is best understood as the transformation of a conflicted state of being through a deep awareness of one's consciousness which include the conditioning influences, the external demands of society, parents, and educators, and the associated fears. Such awareness loosens our psychological chains and releases us from fear. What ensues is an integrated individual, aware of their own authentic self,

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[6] For an in-depth discussion of the nature of human consciousness and its conflicts, see Kumar (2013), chapter two.

[7] *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry* (2013) was selected as one of the Outstanding Academic Titles by *Choice* magazine reviews in 2014.

[8] As Krishnamurti (1969) puts it: "I want to be reasonably certain of the state of things to which I am going. So the brain cells have created a pattern and those brain cells refuse to create another pattern which may be uncertain. The movement from certainty to uncertainty is what I call fear" (p. 42).

[9] "The origin of the inner conflicts is in the very process of holding on to such beliefs to ward off psychological fear. Psychological accumulations such as beliefs prevent psychological fear as long as they are undisturbed" (Kumar, 2013, p. 43). See also Krishnamurti, 1954.

no longer mechanically reacting to fear, but acting from a place of true stability, rooted in awareness.

The development of that awareness through authentic, deep, and self-reflective questioning and astute observation of how one thinks, feels, and acts is meditative inquiry.[10] When conceptualized in the context of education, meditative inquiry can be understood as a space where teachers and learners seek insights into their own consciousness. Together, they cultivate qualities that prepare the ground for these insights to emerge by learning the art of attentive listening (Pinar & Irwin, 2005; Krishnamurti, 1954), by appreciating the value of openness, in the sense of being open to life and flexible with ones perceptions and notions (Macdonald, 1995), maintaining a non-judgemental attitude, so that authentic exploration can emerge without fear or shame of being 'wrong' (Freire, 1973; Macdonald, 1995), and by becoming increasingly sensitive and compassionate towards oneself and others.

Viewed from the perspective of meditative inquiry, education is not conceived as information transmission or a means-to-an-end learning, where the teacher's role is to dictate what materials must be learned and how. The teaching as meditative inquiry approach problematizes what Freire (1973) calls "banking education" and all other forms of instrumental, transmissive and mechanical approaches to teaching. Such traditional approaches to education align with capitalistic (Taylor, 1911) and neoliberal ideologies (Ross & Gibson, 2007) that characterize ideal students as future workers rather than as individuals in their own right (Busch, 2017; Kumar, 2019a). As such, the focus in higher education tends to be telling students what they need to know and what skills they need in order to succeed in society.

Paralleling the dominant societal paradigm of 'getting ahead,' educational institutions and structures instill an ethic of competing against one another, and incentivise that competition with external rewards like good grades, teacher and parental approval, and ultimately, achieving security in life by landing a job. Elsewhere I argued:

> The problem with the education system, not only in the West but also in the East, is that it has become too instrumental and too mechanical; it has become too focused on doing well on tests, getting into university and finally getting a job. (Kumar in Kumar & Downey, 2019, p. 61).

Teaching rooted in mechanical, functional, and means-to-an-end approaches is unidirectional, authoritative, uncreative, and homogenous, as several proponents of holistic education have also recognized (See for example: Doin 2012; Hess & Noddings, 2016; Miller, Nigh, Binder, Novak, & Crowell, 2018; Noddings, 2003). It teaches students to strive for external rewards, but does not place any value on the intrinsic reward of learning things that one enjoys deeply (Kumar, 2013). There is little emphasis on self-exploration, self-understanding, and the accompanying emergence of authentic and intrinsic passions. When teaching as meditative inquiry guides one's approach to teaching, on the other hand, freedom is paramount, space is given to uncover one's creative

[10] For an in-depth discussion on the concept of meditative inquiry, readers are directed to Kumar's *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry* (2013). The critique of higher education that is the focus of this paper is presented in chapter three, "On the Nature of Education". Offering a similar critique of children's education, James Mcdonald (1995) refers to what Kumar describes above as an "ideology of achievement" (p. 51). Krishnamurti refers to this concept simply as "ambition" or being caught up in "becoming" (Krishnamurti & Bohm, 1985).

potential, and open, multi-directional dialogue becomes the core of the educational experience (Kumar & Downey, 2019).

How, then, does one teach in accordance with the teaching as meditative inquiry approach? How does it look in a classroom? Below, I have provided some general comments about how I have used teaching as meditative inquiry in the teacher education and graduate education courses and the doctoral seminar in educational theory that I teach at Mount Saint Vincent University to demonstrate how the theoretical concepts discussed above are put into practice.

Cultivating the *art of awareness* is the central most feature of teaching as meditative inquiry. The art of awareness comprises four dimensions—knowledge, social criticism, self-reflection, and meditative inquiry itself. Each of these are relevant to adopting teaching as meditative inquiry in the classroom. The first dimension—awareness-as-knowledge—covers the domains of information and knowledge that human beings have accumulated and continue to accumulate as an ongoing consequence of scientific and social research. As a teacher educator, I am responsible for sharing the knowledge that I possess in my areas of expertise and for encouraging students to share their knowledge and understanding with me and their peers. Rather than having a unidirectional approach that focuses on transmission of knowledge from teacher to student, I attempt to facilitate the processes of construction, co-construction, and reconstruction of knowledge through experiential and interactive learning processes in which my students and I are equally engaged participants. I choose a variety of readings to highlight the significance of multiple perspectives, worldviews, epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies.

For example, while teaching the doctoral seminar in contemporary educational theory, I select readings from a variety of theoretical perspectives, even those that I am less familiar with or which do not align with my own theoretical inclinations. I introduce doctoral students to a range of perspectives including Marxism, neo-Marxism, critical theory, and critical pedagogy; critical race theory; feminist theory; queer theory; postmodern and post-structural theory; autobiographical theory, phenomenology, existentialism, and psychoanalytic theory; aesthetic and arts-based perspectives and practices; Indigenous and postcolonial perspectives; and holistic, spiritual, and alternative theories of education from around the world. Through our mutual engagement with these perspectives as well as in dialogues with the actual authors of many of the selected readings,[11] students come to learn that contemporary educational theory draws on a vast range of theoretical and philosophical traditions and approaches and is characterized by complexity, contradictions, diversities, and endless possibilities. One key goal of the doctoral seminar is to encourage students to develop their understanding of a variety of theoretical perspectives, the scholarly and social contexts in which those perspectives were developed, and the ways in which they are engaged with in academic exploration of educational problems. Teaching and learning educational theory in a dialogical atmosphere creates space for the students to engage with educational theory so that they may see its relevance for their own explorations, rather than to just transfer information to the students about the theories that may influence

[11] Ashwani Kumar has been teaching doctoral seminar in contemporary educational theory for the past two years. In order to bring the course readings alive and to give students a rich academic experience, he invites many of the scholars whose work he includes in the reading list. He and his students have been fortunate to have the following well-known academics, who draw upon and contribute to a vast range of educational theories, visit his course: Barbara Bickel, Celeste Snowber, E. Wayne Ross, Huey-Li-Li, Kathlen Weiler, Liana Beatie, Lindsay Morcom, Lisa Merriweather, Max van Manen, Peter Taubman, Rita Irwin, and William Pinar among others.

educational scholarship generally. The expectations of the assignments in this course also promote authentic and personal engagement with the theories they are studying.

I provide a great extent of freedom in the choice of assignments to encourage originality, creativity, and deeper personal engagement. In my graduate courses in curriculum theory and holistic education, for instance, I encourage in-service teachers to find relevant literature themselves to contribute to the discourse of the class. I offer them the freedom to determine "what knowledge is of most worth?" (Pinar, 2012, 2016)—a key curricular and pedagogical question—instead of deciding the whole syllabus myself. This may additionally encourage them to adopt the same practices in their own classrooms. One of the assignments that I often ask students to complete is to pick a book of their choice (which can be an academic book or a work of fiction) and to share how the book may help us look at education as a creative and transformative experience rather than a mechanical and instrumental activity. In another assignment, I suggest a broad theme to the students—for example Indigenous worldviews, cultures, and educational principles—and ask them to pick their own article/book chapter in relation to their own practice and teach their colleagues in our class about the key insights and pedagogical possibilities that their chosen piece can offer. These assignments enable freedom in learning and allow students to bring a plethora of perspectives from which we can look at teaching and learning.

I also encourage students to work in groups so that they learn from the perspectives of others and enrich one another's learning. This kind of dialogical interaction promotes mutual understanding and cooperation rather than creating an individualistic, competitive environment for gaining high grades. Through group-based learning, students learn the advantages and challenges of collaborative inquiry along with learning the relevant material.

The next dimension—awareness-as-social criticism—aims at encouraging students to be critical thinkers, drawing its inspiration in the critical theory and pedagogy tradition (Darder et al., 2009; Darder et al., 2016; Freire, 1973; Kanpol, 1999). My pedagogy intends to develop the capacity of critical thinking among students so that they do not inattentively conform to or accept the givens of society. I encourage my students to critically engage with issues of social injustice and discrimination. A main goal of my teaching is to underscore the importance of teaching and learning to promote social justice, and this is central to the meditative inquiry approach to teaching.

Many readers may believe that meditative inquiry implies mindfulness activities which promote a non-judgmental approach to oneself and one's relationships (see Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Simmer-Brown & Grace, 2011; Zajonc, 2008). While non-judgment is very important to developing the ability to observe and be aware of oneself and who one interacts with, one cannot be oblivious to, or even neutral, towards widespread discrimination, social injustice, and economic inequalities. Therefore, in all my courses I put considerable emphasis on issues of racism, colonialism, and Eurocentrism. My students and I engage with Indigenous knowledges and cultural perspectives on education and life from different parts of the world (Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 1994; Ermine, 1995; Morcom, 2017; Sable, 1996). Again, this learning unfolds through introducing students to these critical issues and encouraging authentic dialogue and exploration of them. Studying these social issues through meditative inquiry invites students not only to critically analyze societal problems but also to turn inwards and begin to see how the human condition itself contributes to and creates the problems in the first place. In my Holistic Education course for the Bachelor of Education students, these perspectives are also explored with a number of practitioners and scholars from Halifax who work from Indigenous (Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 1994; Ermine, 1995; Morcom, 2017; Sable, 1996), Africentric (Dei, 1996; Hunn, 2004; Shockley & Cleaveland,2011),

restorative (Amstutz, 2015; Smith, Fischer, & Frey, 2015), holistic (Miller, 2019), and alternative (Lees & Noddings, 2016) educational perspectives. For example, I invite representatives from Eskasoni School Board where Mi'kmaq culture and educational perspectives provide a truly holistic education to its students. I invite teachers and administrators who situate their practice in the Africentric principles of teaching and learning. I invite representatives from Halifax Independent School, Shambala, School, and South Shore Waldorf School. In addition, I invite numerous teachers who have studied holistic education with me and are spearheading a holistic education movement in the public schools in Nova Scotia.

The third dimension—awareness-as-self-reflection—focuses on encouraging students to understand and practice methods and techniques like autobiographical inquiry (Pinar, 2012) which aim to increase our capacities for self-reflection and introspection. A thoughtful cultivation of a unique and authentic individuality is possible when we give considerable emphasis to understanding who we are in terms of our psychological, political, cultural, historical, and societal context. The understanding of the self in its context helps one to recognize the uniqueness of other individuals and their contexts. It also helps one to appreciate the significance of diverse and varied perspectives and worldviews that guide people's thinking and actions. Self-reflection is central to understanding oneself and one's relationships, as well as developing an open-minded, considerate, and compassionate way of being. As such, introspective self-reflection is essential for any meaningful response to intolerance, discrimination, and violence.

To promote self-reflection, I encourage my students to write autobiographical essays and connect the readings and assignments to their everyday lives as teachers and as human beings. In their autobiographical pieces, they explore their personal reasons for becoming teachers or pursuing doctoral studies, their past experiences that have influenced and conditioned how they conceptualize curriculum, teaching, learning, and research, how their identities are connected to the place where they grew up, and the sources of their values and beliefs about education and life.

In some of my courses, I engage students in some existential-reflective exercises that I have developed and learnt from others and that aim to promote a deeper awareness of their selves. An example of such an exercise is to ask students to jot down their thoughts and feelings as they are, without modification and judgment, on paper to connect with ourselves and release some of the inner turmoil that is consistently keeping us tense. Other examples include writing down our fears, struggles, and conflicts, among others. In the times of COVID-19, I encouraged them to reflect on their fears, anxieties, and concerns in relation to the pandemic and how it has impacted their lives and classrooms. Students are never expected to share the content or the details of these reflections but they share their experiences of reflecting on these existential themes. These reflections are always followed by complete silence. Many students report that once they put down everything on paper, they feel unburdened and relaxed. These reflections allow us to directly and non-judgmentally experience our inner states of mind and heart and express them consciously which further intensifies our awareness in teaching, learning, and living. Through these reflections, students also become increasingly aware of their worldviews, identities, as well as the forces that have conditioned their thinking, feelings, and perceptions. Correspondingly, they become aware that others are also similarly influenced by their unique backgrounds, influences, and psycho-social experiences and, thereby, develop sensitivity to themselves and those who they relate with.

The final dimension—awareness-as-meditative inquiry—is the core of the concept of teaching as meditative inquiry. Awareness-as-meditative inquiry implies awareness of oneself (how one thinks, feels, and acts in everyday life) and one's relationship to other people and the

environment. This intrinsic and inherent capacity of attentiveness can be developed through experimenting with deep listening and careful observation, the art of dialogue, and creative expression.

The first significant aspect of developing awareness is to give careful attention—through astute observation and listening—to one's body, thoughts, and emotions as well as to the people and environment one interacts with in daily living. Meditative listening and observation are not analytic and dissection-driven; rather, they are open, holistic, existential, non-judgmental, and compassionate in nature so that one may develop a deeper connection with what one is coming in contact with instead of remaining distant and disconnected.

This kind of listening and observation is supported when a person is relaxed. I offer the students a variety of relaxation exercises in my class. For example, during summer classes I often take my students for walks in the beautiful Hemlock Ravine Park near Mount Saint Vincent University. On these walks, we keep quiet and attentively listen to the whispers of the nature and observe its immense beauty. We do calming breathing exercises. We listen to meditative music including Indian classical music, Tibetan music, Western classical music played on harp and piano. We do yoga stretches and at times lie down on the ground to gather our energies. We also dance at times. We try out various existential-reflective exercise as I mentioned above. At times, we relax by engaging in our individual passions and sharing them with each other. I have played the harmonium and sung for my students and have shared my work on music as meditative inquiry (Kumar & Downey, 2019). This allows students to open up and share their own creative passions freely and enthusiastically. Once they open up, the whole classroom emerges as a beautiful space where everybody is willing to share their interests and passions with their classmates. At one point, one student sang for the class, which she had never done before. Once, a student shared her dance with the class. Often, we dance and laugh together. It is the awareness of oneself and one's surroundings that is at the crux of all of these relaxation exercises. Along with promoting awareness, the exercises also create a peaceful and collegial environment marked by trust and unencumbered participation. These are essential ingredients for the deep, non-judgmental observation and attentiveness that is characteristic of learning through meditative inquiry. All of this never undermines intellectual engagement. On the contrary, it creates an atmosphere of freedom and connection such that the intensity of academic engagement is deepened.

Paying attention to oneself and others is of critical significance when it comes to learning through and participating in the art of dialogue—a central feature of teaching through meditative inquiry approach in my classes. To me, authentic, attentive dialogue is essential to learning and should be the central process of education (see also Bohm, 1996; Freire, 1973). In my first meeting with students, in all my courses, I introduce the art of dialogue as a key educational concept and process as well as a way of being by deeply probing its value for teaching and learning. This exploration into dialogue occurs dialogically with my students. Some common ideas and themes that have emerged in these introductory discussions include: First, dialogue is characterized by deep listening and authentic engagement. These features are supported by the pre-emptive relaxation exercises discussed above. Second, it gives students a chance to learn how to take ownership of their ideas and thoughts and share them with others who may have different views. As such, it allows for an open interplay of conflicting and divergent ideas. Third, it facilitates cohesion among the entire class and enables everyone to come together to understand one another's perspectives and to see the essence of any given topic. The discourse often leads to the insight that dialogue allows for the class as a whole to see the deeper dimensions of a particular topic or theme.

In addition, given the significance of dialogue in my approach to education, I strongly encourage every student to actively participate in each class. Again, the trusting and non-judgmental atmosphere is supported by relaxation exercises and a sense of openness and care. When students are relaxed, open-minded, and attentive, they are more likely to be attuned to themselves, and to participate in our dialogues on the subject matter with more depth. I also try to model the manner of good participation by equally participating in the dialogue and the relaxation and reflective activities. Over the years, I have consistently noticed the depth and value of the educational experience that occurs during a dialogue. Describing what dialogical meditative inquiry entails, I noted elsewhere:

> The significance of dialogue as a method of exploration and expression of ideas has become apparent to me over the past seven years in my role as a teacher educator. In my observation, the dialogues and discussions in which I have engaged, not only in my classrooms and academic arenas but also with wider audiences, seem to have a deep educational and meditative impact on the participants.[12] Thus, in the classroom and beyond, these meditative dialogues often succeed in transcending instrumental or mechanistic views of teaching, learning and living. (Kumar in Kumar & Downey, 2018, p. 54-55)

The arts of listening, observation, and dialogue that are cultivated in a meditative and creative space, allow my students to realize for themselves the deeper meaning and significance of meditative inquiry and holistic education. While, at times, especially in required courses, they may find my pedagogy unusual and unconventional (which it is), soon they realize how a meditative way of teaching and learning allows them to realize their own potential for holistic development—they gain insights into the subject matter being studied, they become intrinsically critical and aware of societal issues and their rooting in human consciousness, and they become aware of their own internal state of being. This is what I call holistic education—an education that allows the fullest development of the individual.

Students often express their gratefulness for the positive energy that we together create in the classroom. They become perceptive of the value of relaxation and slowing down as parts of holistic and healthy living and prioritize humanity, relationships with others, and relationships with themselves instead of an obsession with learning outcomes and standardized testing. By the end of their learning experience with me in my courses, a majority of the students report (through anonymous student evaluations and their reflections on the course as well as through their personal emails and in-person remarks) that their engagement with meditative inquiry supported them in realizing the need for self-understanding and understanding their relationship to others. They begin to consider that freedom, dialogue, and creativity should be the core of teaching and learning that intends to awaken intelligence and awareness. As such, they grow appreciative of alternative educational worldviews and recognize the limitations of instrumental, efficiency-driven, and technique-focused approaches to teaching, learning, and living. Teaching as meditative inquiry ultimately brings about a sense of awakening in them and allows them to feel empowered to bring personal, relational, and societal transformation.

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[12] Over the past seven years, Kumar has engaged in dialogues in different settings, academic and beyond, regarding the meaning and significance of meditative inquiry (see Kumar 2016, 2019b; Kumar et al., 2013, 2019, 2016).

In summary, I consider teaching in my teacher education, graduate education, and doctoral courses to be a tremendous possibility for asking deeper questions about life and education, and to discover ourselves and connect with one another through this pedagogical process. Through cultivating such personal and relational awareness, which comprises self-reflection, meditation, and a considerate dialogical encounter with others, authentic individual transformation becomes possible. From there, the seeds of social transformation are planted. This is the crux of the teaching as meditative inquiry approach.

Part II
Meditative Inquiry in a Law Classroom: Teaching Alternative Dispute Resolution (Nayha Acharya)

Before I started learning about teaching as meditative inquiry, my approach to designing a course began with conjuring my image of an ideal lawyer and then constructing a course in a way that would help students approximate that ideal. I suspect that many instructors across disciplines in higher education adopt a similar outcomes-based pedagogical approach, starting by asking ourselves, "What do I want the students to learn? What skills do I want them to gain? What kind of professionals do I want them to be?"

In the law school context, one may determine, for example, that we want lawyers who understand and can apply legal principles. Accordingly, we teach those principles, demonstrate how to apply them, and give students practice applying the principles through problem sets. We may also want lawyers to be critical, so we expose students to criticisms of the legal system and invite them to evaluate the critiques. We may want lawyers to be good oral advocates, so we encourage (or require) them to participate in moot argument exercises and other advocacy building activities. And so on. This way, we attempt to structure an educational program that gives every student the best chance of living up to our images of good lawyers.

In several respects, this approach is not only well-intentioned but also probably quite worthwhile. Lawyers *do* need to know how to effectively interpret and apply legal principles. They also need, in my view, some exposure to oral advocacy, and law schools should provide such training. But as I learned more about the teaching as meditative inquiry approach, I felt that designing courses *only* from the starting point of "what kind of lawyers do we want?" risks boxing students into our pre-determined paradigms and causes us to incentivize students to live up only to *our* ideals or to the abstract ideals of the legal profession. That fails to prioritize the students' ability to discover *their* ideals, their own interests, concerns and approaches, their unique passions and aptitudes. In that process, we risk losing the unique spark that each individual student comes to law school with. This began to deeply concern me as I have begun to realize that only those sparks can ignite the flame of intrinsic, authentic, and passionate engagement with life and with law. In short, the existing approach to law teaching prioritizes the instrumental value of professional education rather than prioritizing the student themselves.

As noted above, Kumar's notion of teaching as meditative inquiry centralizes the students' authentic learning in the educational experience. It posits that the fundamental goal of educational experiences is to enable students to discover how *they* want to relate to the subject matter, allowing them to construct personalized pathways to engage with the subject matter, which in this instance comprises of legal principles and societal issues that have legal components. It encourages teachers to allow space for a passionate inquiry into the topic of the class and to make room for intrinsically

motivated exploration of the relevant principles and skills. It invites us to find ways to enable students to uncover critiques that are meaningful to them. When we do so, students are given the freedom and offered the perspectives to develop their professional identities, guided by their own true interests.

Exploring teaching as meditative inquiry caused me to realize that my original approach to designing and teaching a course was failing to set the stage for a particularly deep and meaningful education because it did not centralize students coming to their own appreciation of the subject matter I was teaching. I learned that if I could prioritize that, then the students' engagement with the course content would more likely be authentic, passionate, and creative, which would lead to passionate and creative lawyers—something our society would more truly benefit from.

An autobiographical inquiry (Pinar, 2012) into my own experience of law school made me appreciate this approach even more. I had not prioritized becoming aware of my own intrinsic interests while in law school. By the time I finished, I did not have much of a self-identity as a lawyer, and whatever I did have was entirely extrinsically motivated. It should not have been surprising that I ended up in a career that may have seemed 'successful' from an outside point of view, but it was not an intrinsically good fit and felt unnatural. Thinking back, I realize how much energy and resource gets wasted when individuals attempt to fit a mould that does not reflect their own way of being. Learning about teaching as meditative inquiry enabled this reflection for me, so I thought that trying to use it in my classroom would give my students a chance to avoid the pitfalls of extrinsically motivated decision-making that I fell into.

I teach a course called Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) at the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada. It is a small group (16 students) seminar course that explores different ways of approaching and resolving conflict outside of the court system. I thought this course was well suited for experimenting with the teaching as meditative inquiry approach because of its relatively low number of students, and because I have significant freedom in course design in terms of content and assessment method. Moreover, in this course, I adopt a broader definition of conflict compared to my other law school courses and the inner human experience of conflict is a consistent running theme throughout the course. This seemed to align well with the notion of conflict as an internal phenomenon, which is central to Kumar's idea of meditative inquiry generally. Below, I discuss how I have attempted to incorporate the teaching as meditative inquiry approach into my ADR class.

When I first meet my ADR students, I share with them that one of the most significant elements of this course is to give them the freedom to engage with ADR in a way that is meaningful to them. I believe this initial discussion with students is crucial because they are not accustomed to having much freedom in their courses, but in this class they are allowed significant freedom in terms of both form and content. The idea is for them to make their own personal connections to the materials and topics in their courses, but they are more used to being told what they must learn, how they should learn it, and how they must demonstrate that they have learned it—this is certainly true in other courses that I teach at the law school. It is necessary to some extent, because often students do not know what they need to know—I certainly did not know when I was in their position, and I do set a syllabus and make sure that we cover several foundational elements in my ADR course. But by the third year of law school, where my ADR course usually takes places, we have dictated a lot. I explain to the students how the course is structured to allow them as much freedom and space as possible to let their personal engagement with ADR unfold.

First, as Kumar explains, teaching as meditative inquiry invokes a dialogical approach to teaching and learning (Kumar & Downey, 2018). Through dialogue, participants learn to become aware of their thoughts, opinions, concerns, and they practice articulating them with a group of people, all committed to the authentic and communal exploration of a topic. I have tried to build in significant space for such dialogues in every class of the ADR course. One example is in the class about the concept of conflict, where we discuss the legal system's notion of conflict, ADR rooted critiques of that notion, and alternative theories of conflict. I assign some background readings prior to the class but engaging with those concepts and critiques exclusively unfolds through dialogue among the students and is not contingent on lecturing or one-way knowledge transfer or what Freire calls "banking education". I facilitate the dialogue by posing the initial question(s), by re-phrasing or seeking clarification from students, and at times by pointing out how certain points being raised relate to each other, but I try to be a witness, with my whole being present and listening, as much as possible. I have observed students looking inside themselves to understand and express their viewpoints. They raise examples of conflicts from their own lives (e.g., with parents, partners, roommates, employers), often sharing their own emotional states and vulnerabilities. I watch their reflection deepen and their thinking develop over the course of the discussion. The dialogic method allows the subject matter to become personal for the students. The content of the dialogue becomes theirs and ours, not just an imposition from me.

Second, I ask the students to keep a critical reflection journal throughout the class. I request five entries on any topic that comes up in the class that has sparked the student's interest. Students are invited to explain the experience and reflect on why it was impactful for them and how it has contributed to their own self-identity as a lawyer, or conflict manager, or both. Guided by the teaching as meditative inquiry's commitment to freedom, I have opted to leave the topics for reflections very open so that students are free to reflect on anything that strikes them. Even experiences outside of the class that can be connected to the course are fair game. For instance, if someone finds themselves in a conflict situation in their outside life and our discussion around personal conflict management styles comes to mind, that experience can form the basis of a journal entry. I suggest that students see the journals as a journey into their own exploration of what they care about in relation to ADR and why, and an inquiry into what that tells them about themselves. My hope is that this assignment encourages students to look inwards and find their intrinsic motivations so that they can be guided by those instead of being overly influenced by extrinsic ideals—akin to the concept of awareness as self-reflection that Kumar outlines above. I read the critical journals at the end of the course. At times I have found myself moved at how deeply the students have allowed the experiences in the course to touch them.

Moreover, keeping with the teaching as meditative inquiry theme of freedom in both content and manner of expression, instead of up to two written journal entries, students are invited to prepare an alternative form of expression (a poem, a painting, a sculpture, a podcast, a video, etc.) and provide a brief explanation of how it relates to the class. I got the idea from two places. First, I had been impressed seeing the artistic and unique assignments and journal entries that Kumar's students turn in, and second, one of my mentors at the law school allowed her students to turn in one artistic project in one of her classes, and I had been searching for a way to incorporate that idea into one of my classes. The first time I invited artistic/alternative expressions, I wondered whether students would take to it. Now, after three years of teaching this course, my office walls and a couple of shelves are filled with delightful pieces created by my former students. Some students commented that they loved being able to do something that they enjoyed, and to do it

"guilt-free" since it was part of a course. Again, this allows students to become personally connected to the subject matter in a manner that is meaningful to them.

The final part of the course that corresponds with the teaching as meditative inquiry approach is the student presentations. In one of our many discussions about teaching, Kumar had described his course on social studies methods (focusing on geography education) for pre-service teachers, where he invites students to present on any topic that interests them from a geographical perspective. Students can discuss anything from the geography of tattoos to the geography of religion to topographical geography. Following his model, I tried something similar in ADR. I ask students to choose any topic that they are passionate about that relates in some way to ADR and to share that passion with the class. I emphasize that while they may be accustomed to being asked to present a legal argument, that this is not the purpose of the presentation in ADR. The purpose is to find creative ways to engage their classmates as they teach the class about their topic. One memorable presentation involved a group sing-along about the impacts of environmental conflicts on all of us; another resembled a comedy act, which tactfully and thoughtfully unravelled important issues about the impact of culture on dispute resolution. Students have also presented on the implications of pop culture on ADR, Indigenous and African dispute resolution traditions, the role of apology in conflict resolution, various international conflicts, conflicts particular to elders, Christian dispute resolution, online dispute resolution, sports negotiations and arbitration, and more.

Attempting to adopt the teaching as meditative inquiry approach in a law school course is not without challenges. One of the primary challenges in this course arises because, as I noted in the beginning, students are not used to having the type of freedom that they get in this course. For the presentations, for instance, the only hard and fast guideline I give is the time limit. That seems to cause some uneasiness for students at first, but I remember one of Kumar's comments about the challenges associated with teaching as meditative inquiry: "Sometimes," he said, "students feel like they've been thrown into a river without knowing how to swim. But once they see that you are swimming in the water with them, they start to trust the process" (Personal Communication). I try to swim with the students as they prepare their presentations, their reflective journals and even as they dialogue, and they seem to learn to tread very fast. Before long, their personalities and their creativity shine through. After the first year that I taught the course, I recall two African Nova Scotian women commenting that this course helped them find and express their real voices, and they feel relevant in the class. That remains the most rewarding comment I have ever received in relation to teaching. The two women felt that they had a valid space in the class, and that enabled the rest of us to hear their stories. So, although the somewhat unstructured nature of the course may invoke some uneasiness in the beginning, I have no doubt that it brings much value.

Another challenge arises because of grading. Most law schools, and higher education programs in general, still adhere to relatively strict grading demands. There are certain grading guidelines that each class must adhere to. At the Schulich School of Law, the seminar courses are not graded on a bell curve, but there are still some grading stipulations. That means I must grade student work and ensure that there are not too many high grades and not too many low grades. In a course where freedom and subjectivity are prioritized, adhering to the stipulations of comparative grading can be challenging. I have never had students complain about grades in ADR, and I have always been comfortable with the grades that I end up assigning, but I do experience having to assign grades to such personal and subjective work as a personal challenge.

Another personal challenge of teaching through the teaching as meditative inquiry approach was allowing myself to feel comfortable with unpredictability. In content heavy courses, it feels natural to give pre-determined, predictable lectures, so that at the end one feels that the requisite material has been covered. I found that the first several times I led a class through dialogue, I was nervous about letting go of controlling the flow and content of the conversation. But just as I ask of the students, I had to let myself trust the process. I am becoming more comfortable with it, and as I do, I have seen the dialogue become richer because it takes on a flow of its own. I am learning to find the balance between providing just enough lecture-style instruction to introduce topics, and then letting the dialogue freely flow thereafter.

Students have expressed gracious appreciation of the ADR class. Some excerpts of anonymous student responses from my most recent course evaluations include:

- "Let us be active in our own learning"
- "I never felt afraid or judged"
- "An open space for sharing"
- "A space that is comfortable to participate and engage with everyone"
- "One of the things I found most valuable was the opportunity to reflect on how we approach conflict, and how to incorporate ADR exercises into our own practices and our own lives in general."
- "Helpful to increase my self–awareness as a student, a person, and a future lawyer."

In the academic year (2019-2020), my in-person ADR class ended abruptly due to the COVID-19 crisis, and we finished the course through online correspondence. Students sent me numerous pictures of the pieces that they had created for the course—everything from T-shirts to podcasts to song recordings to photographs. At the end of the course, I emailed my students to thank them for the course, to check on their well-being, and to remind them that over the course of ADR we had found ways to tap into our emotions and reactions, and that it could be valuable to hang on to that skill in the midst of the pandemic that had disrupted so many lives, caused so much uncertainty, and changed the way we interact with one another. Many of my students responded with comments appreciating the course for its emphasis on internal awareness and open exploration. I was grateful for their comments because I feel that creating the space for students to become attuned with themselves and to encounter their inner life is my small contribution to the betterment of society.[13]

In a nutshell, experimenting with aspects of the teaching as meditative inquiry approach in ADR allowed me and (I believe) my students to become a community of learners, each empowered and motivated to explore and share our unique interests in ADR. Had I not adopted this approach, the students would surely have been exposed to key concepts in ADR, but they would not have had the space to investigate themselves and their interests (which constitutes meditative inquiry), and to develop a personal relationship with ADR arising from a place of self-awareness. In the

[13] In 2021, Acharya's ADR class nominated her for the Law Students' Society Excellence in Teaching Law Award. To be nominated by the whole class and then to receive the award was a very touching experience for her. It demonstrated that students do appreciate a pedagogical approach that prioritizes their freedom, creativity, and well-being.

future, I hope to introduce the relaxation exercises that Kumar describes above. I have been hesitant so far, out of fears over how the students would react to them, but given how students react to the course generally, I believe they may surprise me, as they have done in the past.

In the end, hearing the dialogues, reading the reflective journals, receiving the artwork or other creative pieces, watching the presentations, and listening to student reactions after the class has taught me that if I trust the teaching as meditative inquiry approach and make an effort to give students the space to relate to the subject matter in their own way, then the impact of the course on the students is much deeper. Learning about teaching as meditative inquiry has helped me to find ways to prioritize students' authentic engagement, to avoid forcing them to box themselves into my idealizations, and to encourage students to invoke their inherent passions—which I hope sets them on the path towards a personally meaningful and impactful career. I hope also that the comments I have provided here will serve as an invitation to other law teachers to reflect on their law school experiences and consider how that reflection may prompt new ways of being in their classrooms.

Part III
Insights and Recommendations

Having reflected on our experiences in engaging the teaching as meditative inquiry approach in our higher education classrooms in the faculty of education and the faculty of law, we offer a summarized list of thematic insights and associated recommendations that may be adopted by our colleagues who wish to experiment with this approach in their higher education classrooms.

Dialogue

Insight: Learning through dialogue enables students to engage personally as well collectively with the subject matter rather than learning through unidirectional information transfer. Through dialogue, students learn to articulate and express their own thoughts as well as appreciate other viewpoints on the subject matter under consideration. They learn to have their own voice in relation to a topic, rather than simply repeating back what they have been told.

Recommendation: Allow for at least some free flowing, minimally structured dialogue in your classes. Educators could try assigning a reading, and then posing an open-ended discussion question on that reading (like, 'what was the most striking insight for you in this reading?') and allow the dialogue to flow, without trying to control its outcome. It may be helpful that teachers explain to students that dialogues are an opportunity to authentically and collaboratively explore a topic and share our ideas with one another.

Freedom, Space, and Creativity

Insight: In order to develop a meaningful relationship with the subject matter in a class, students need space and freedom. They cannot develop a deeper relationship with the topics and themes when they are bombarded with information and assessments, nor when they are constantly told what to think or do. Space and freedom are necessary to allow students to generate unique and creative ideas and works.

Recommendation: Consider offering students choice of topics, themes, and methods of presenting their work rather than limiting them to the topics, formats, and structures that we are familiar with. Educators may especially move away from assessing students through only

standardized examinations that require everyone to give the same answers. Examples of alternatives include reflection journals, independent papers, projects, or presentations with a choice of topic and form including artistic/alternatives formats, or book reviews with choice of book. Besides assessment, one may also consider co-creation of parts of the syllabus where topics to be studied in later parts of the course can be determined as a class based on interest.

Intrinsic Connection with Subject Matter

Insight: The meditative inquiry approach to teaching and learning highlights that considering education instrumentally (that is, primarily as means to get a job) results in narrow and restrictive development of the individual, and only a superficial connection with their subject. Students seek to get through a course for the sake of the credentials they seek. Meditative inquiry calls for an intrinsic engagement, where students are invited to develop their own unique relationship with the subject matter they are learning so that they may develop a self-motivated interest. This enables a connection with the subject matter that is intrinsic, and therefore is capable of invoking creativity and passion instead of learning for primarily extrinsic rewards.

Recommendation: In order to create a pedagogical space where students can discover their intrinsic connections, it is important that we give as much choice as possible. The value of freedom and space discussed in the previous theme also contributes to the development of intrinsic connection. For instance, using assignments that encourage students to find unique ways to relate to their subject matter by allowing a range of possible projects and allowing for a variety of modes of expression including artistic, audio-visual, or others, would help.

Criticality

Insight: It is imperative in higher education that students develop critical insights into the social, political, and economic structures that they are situated within, for example the educational system or the legal system. Introducing students to social issues of racism, colonialism, and Eurocentrism, as well as alternative approaches including Indigenous systems of education, governance, and social relationships is critical. The meditative inquiry approach would invite students to relate personally with these topics and, importantly, to see dominant paradigms and structures within themselves and in society. This is essential because true and meaningful transformation occurs at the level of the individual and society when we are aware of oppressive and discriminatory structures within ourselves and in society (see also Kumar 2013).

Recommendation: Try introducing students to issues like racism and other forms of discriminations and create an openminded space to have dialogues about these issues and the ways in which they influence our lives at micro and macro levels. Our pedagogical space cannot be neutral because neutrality does not exist. When we make a choice of keeping contentious issues out of the classroom, we are simply losing opportunities to create critically transformative educational spaces. It is our ethical obligation to challenge Eurocentrism and incorporate Indigenous, African, Asian, and other perspectives from different cultures and worldviews.

Holistic Engagement

Insight: Our contemporary education system whether in schools or in universities is cognition centered. It is entirely focused on the development of the cognitive capacities, and it

leaves behind the participation of body, heart, and being in the process of learning. Meditative inquiry aims at the holistic participation of students which includes their intellectual, physical, emotional, creative, and spiritual engagement. We need to challenge the head-centred model of education as it leads to lop-sided development. Instead, we should emphasize the significance for learning and growing holistically.

Recommendation: We encourage our colleagues to incorporate physical movement in classes such as stretches to disrupt unnatural sitting for hours. It is important that we include elements of aesthetic experience in our teaching. Students can be encouraged to include artistic expression to convey their ideas and develop their projects. We should encourage students to explore their emotional connection to the subject matter rather than approaching what they are studying or learning about purely intellectually. For example, when reading about the residential schools or *Indian Act*, students may have a range of emotions which they should be encouraged to express. In order to invoke spirituality in curriculum and teaching, we can engage students in exploring how their education can nourish their beings and can enable them to best serve their society and the world at large.

Self Awareness

Insight: As outlined above, self-awareness is the central focus of the teaching as meditative inquiry approach. A deeper connection with oneself enables an understanding of how we have been conditioned by the social structures that we have been subjected to. With that connection comes a deeper comprehension of the internal state of conflict and a greater sense of empathetic engagement with ourselves and others. This engagement with the internal conflict may enable each individual to live a meaningful, creative, and passionate life.

Recommendation: All of the above recommendations can help to foster self-awareness. True and meaningful self-awareness requires a relaxed state of being. Educators may consider introducing students to relaxation activities like body-awareness exercises, free writing exercises, and silent nature walks, among others. These exercises can be done in the beginning of the course to bring everyone to a place of being that is relaxed, and therefore prepared to learn and explore; or, they can be introduced in the middle of the class as breaks to give them a space to rejuvenate and regain their level of attention. It is important, however, to *not* use these exercises for their instrumental value for teaching the subject matter. Self-awareness is valuable in itself and should not be used as another technique of effective teaching. Before introducing students to any form of meditative exercise, it is important that the instructor knows how to conduct the exercise and has experience with it and that they explain to students why they are doing it. It is also important that you ask students how they feel about these exercises and give them a choice to not participate if they wish not to—self-awareness or an interest in self-awareness cannot be imposed.

Conclusion

All of us who are engaged in higher education globally care deeply about what we can do in our classrooms to contribute to a progressively better and more harmonious society. There may be many approaches to teaching, learning, and class design that are guided by that general purpose. This paper is an invitation to those involved in higher education to reflect on our approaches to teaching and learning, to observe who and what is really prioritized in our course design, and to mull over whether our approaches are truly well-aligned with promoting a good, sustainable

society. We have proposed that true societal progress depends on all of us experiencing an internally harmonious life, and that this can and should be prioritized in higher education contexts.

At the heart of the teaching as meditative inquiry approach is the idea that the individual comes first, but not in a neoliberal, individualistic sense of the individual as a capitalist consumer. Far to the contrary, the individual is seen for their potential to become so deeply aware of themselves that they develop a tremendous capacity for sensitivity towards others and their community. As their awareness deepens, they become less internally conflicted because they perceive the roots of their conflicts without the encumbrance of judgment. They become more empathetic to others because they appreciate that whatever arbitrary conditioning exists in them similarly exists in everyone. Their freedom from conflict results in space for creativity and passion to flow through them. As such, when awareness awakens among individuals, societal betterment is a natural result. This is the key proposition of teaching as meditative inquiry, and it leads to the various ideas expressed above about allowing freedom and space in higher education to prioritize individual passions, enabling free-flowing dialogue, encouraging authentic self-reflection, and promoting criticality.

Our hope is that the combination of conceptual explanation and practical examples provided in this paper has given an accessible introduction to the teaching as meditative inquiry approach, and it will invoke further dialogue on the nature of higher education, its purpose, and its role in continually building the foundations for a peaceful, just society comprised of self-aware, integrated human beings.

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