Promoting a Culture of Wellness

Facilitators:
Jenna Gehl Jones - igehl@nd.edu
Dominique Vargas - dvargas2@nd.edu

Goals
Upon successful completion of this workshop, you will:
● Learn the definitions of well-being, mindfulness, and resilience
● Reflect on current well-being practices and identify areas for growth
● Understand the ways that engaged, contemplative pedagogy can encourage deep learning through focused attention, reflection, and heightened awareness
● Build repertoire of resilience-based practices to enhance instructor and student well-being to promote a culture of wellness

Exercise 1: Why did you choose this session? What do you hope to gain? How does well-being impact your life, your work, or our students?
Mindfulness

The American Psychological association defines mindfulness as “a moment-to-moment awareness of one’s experience without judgment. In this sense, mindfulness is a state and not a trait. While it might be promoted by certain practices or activities, such as meditation, it is not equivalent to or synonymous with them.”

“Mindfulness 101”

- Paying attention:

- Practicing non-judgment:

- Space between stimulus and response:

- Practice:

- Open:

Mindfulness in pedagogy

Thich Nhat Hanh is a vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist. He coined the term “Engaged Buddhism,” which promotes the role of the individual’s mindful reflection as an agent of social and political change.

Gloria Jean Watkins, better known by her pen name, bell hooks, is a writer, professor, and social activist. Her writing reveals race, class, and, gender to be intersectional sites of oppression producing and perpetuating systems of domination. In Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom, hooks draws on Hanh and other theorists to describe a transgressive pedagogy. Education as a practice of freedom is, according to hooks, “a way of teaching that anyone can learn.”

- **Engaged mindfulness:** Hanh writes that mindfulness must be engaged. Mindful engagement with the world implies both political activism and intellectual critique for transformation. In order for reflection and action to lead to transformation, we need to engage in the practice of mindful contemplation. This enables us to see how the self and others “inter-are.”

- **Engaged pedagogy:** Using components of critical and feminist theories, hooks defines engaged pedagogy as one deeply concerned with education as a practice of freedom. According to hooks, an engaged pedagogy requires instructors
to be fully present in the classroom, bringing both their intellect and their spirit into practice. This pedagogical practice engages the particular identities, cultures, and locations of both students and instructor as part of the classroom curriculum. As instructors encourage students to embark on their journeys of learning and growth, so do they need to engage consciously in their own, self-reflexive process of growth. A recursive, pedagogical process allows instructors to develop a synthesis across the differences they and their students bring to the classroom.

Mindfulness activities:

- **Silence:** In Western cultural contexts, classroom practices often favor speech as a way to demonstrate presence, power, and agency. In such frameworks, silence represents disengagement and disinterest. It is important to note that the kind of pedagogical silence that mindfulness calls for is not the marginalization of diverse voices; rather, this silence is one that encourages self-reflection and critical attention.
  
  a. Critical silence
  
  b. Reflection

- **Attention:** Cultivating attention can improve critical thinking skills and promote neuroplasticity. In contemplative inquiry, we move between focused and open attention.
  
  a. Beholding
  
  b. Lectio Divina

**Managing the Inner Critic**

This is the often harsh or critical inner voice that runs commentary on our lives. The way that we talk to ourselves can negatively impact our ability to complete goals and interact with others. If the inner voice is focused on the ways that we will fail, or not perform, we are likely to follow through with a self-fulfilling prophecy. If nothing else, this self-criticism decreases confidence and self-esteem. This is true for instructors and students: an instructor’s beliefs about their own and their students’ abilities impact the classroom environment. We can use mindfulness strategies to mitigate the inner critic’s impact on our well-being.
Kinds of Self Talk:

- The Worrier
- The Critic
- The Perfectionist
- The Victim

Techniques to manage the inner critic

In our personal practices:

- Notice and challenge:
- Self-compassion:

In the classroom:

- Deep listening:
- Growth reflection:

Rest and Restoration

Rest and restoration are two different things, and each have specific conditions that define them. Oftentimes, we believe we are “resting” but aren’t actually cultivating any restoration for ourselves or those around us.

Restorative Niche

A restorative niche is more than a hobby. These practices can help us to overcome the detrimental effects of burnout, alleviate stress, reduce fatigue. (Matt Bloom, https://wellbeing.nd.edu/)
- Something you can do well:

- Intrinsic motivation and joy:

Restoration and Mindfulness:
- “Losing time”:

- Activities that “fill” us:

Cultivating restoration in the classroom
In conversation about critical thinking, spiritual life, and activism, bell hooks insists that much of what has to be restored in us before we can make meaningful change is an “integrity of being,” which is connected to self-recovery.

- Authentic spontaneity:

- Open time:

- Build into assignments:

Managing Energy
We are constantly spending and restoring energy, and understanding and being mindful of how we are spending energy can be a useful strategy for recognizing and mitigating burnout and stress.

Exercise 2:

1. *What gives you energy?*

2. *What drains you of energy?*
Energy and Mindfulness

Connections here

(energy “audit”?)

Managing energy through reflection

Reflection (directed or open) can activate metacognition by allowing students to think about their habits and how they form, allow students to inquire with open-minded curiosity, and help them to generate justifiable, contextual understanding individually and in collaboration.

- Collaborative self-assessments:

- Free writing:

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to “bounce back” when things don't go well, and to adapt to and navigate the bumps of life and work. We each manage resilience in different ways, but the good news is that “being resilient” is not a characteristic. It is a series of skills and behaviors that can be learned.

Cultivating Resilience Skills

(From: https://positivepsychology.com/resilience-skills/)

- Recognize Signs of Stress

- Build Physical Hardiness

- Strengthen Relaxation Response
• Identify and Use Your Strengths

• Increase Positive Emotions

• Counter Unhelpful Thinking

• Create a Caring Community

Resilience through the growth mindset

Carol Dweck differentiates between “fixed” and “growth” mindsets: Individuals who believe their talents can be developed (through hard work, good strategies, and input from others) have a growth mindset. They tend to achieve more than those with a fixed mindset (those who believe their talents are innate gifts). Students’ mindsets play a key role in their motivation and achievement.

**Fixed Mindset:** Students believe their skills, talents and overall intelligence are fixed traits. They may resist learning and trying to improve, typically feeling embarrassed when not understanding something.

**Growth Mindset:** Students know they can develop their skills and talents through effort and persistence, as well as being receptive to lessons and feedback. They generally believe they can improve through hard work and trying new learning methods.

Cultivating Resiliency through engaged pedagogy

• **Collaborative goal setting & reflection:**

• **Model process over product:**

Caring for our Academic Community

Mindfulness and engaged pedagogy are important to building a healthy community and cultivating a culture of wellness. In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks writes, “when teachers teach with love, combining care, commitment, knowledge,
responsibility, respect, and trust, we are often able to enter the classroom and go straight to the heart of the matter, which is knowing what to do on any given day to create the best climate for learning.” Moving from oppression to an attitude of love, hooks insists on community building as a means of supporting student success.

Exercise 3:

1. What does well-being look like in a community setting?

2. How do we cultivate that for ourselves and our students?

3. How does well-being impact the lives of our students?

4. How does their well-being impact our work with them?

Caring and Self-Compassion

High levels of self-compassion correlate with lower levels of distress caused by anxiety and depression. Further, self care can provide the grounding to notice feelings instead of fearing imagined consequences. We can help students understand they don’t have to be perfect to be worthy in a way that doesn’t diminish integrity or standards of accountability.

Helping students cultivate self-compassion

- Practice and model self-compassion:

- Intentionally build skills into the course:
References and Resources


