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# FINDING SANCTUARY AND STRENGTH IN THE LIS CLASSROOM (Panel)

**Abstract:**

In the spirit of contemplative pedagogy, this panel introduces "The Tree of Contemplative Practices"—a graphic representation that helps educators and students to understand the main principles and seven major types of contemplative practices. Using the Tree as a framework, enthusiasts can learn contemplative practices in a systematic, secular, and bespoke manner. Sequentially, the moderator and presenters will: 1) Encapsulate their commitment to contemplative pedagogy; 2) Recount an application of The Tree of Contemplative Practices in their teaching; and 3) Demonstrate several of the Tree's major limbs (e.g., GENERATIVE) and branches (e.g., loving-kindness meditation).

## 1. Background

Contemplative pedagogy has potential to transform graduate education in positive ways (Zajonc, 2016). It is an educational philosophy that prioritizes the development of student attention, emotional balance, empathetic connection, compassion, creativity, and altruistic behavior (Zajonc, 2013). The tenets of contemplative pedagogy can be traced to psychologist William James (1890), who asserted the importance of cultivating attention; and to philosopher John Dewey (1938), whose vision of education included the realization of one's full potential. Applied to graduate education, contemplative pedagogy may lead to a more liberating, authentic, and spacious classroom culture; alternative forms of assignments and evaluation; and the use of contemplative practices during class (Berbezat & Bush, 2014). For instance, a pioneer of contemplative pedagogy in LIS, Dr. David Levy of the University of Washington, begins each class with breathing meditations and an 'emotional check-in.' Then, across the semester, he teaches students to mindfully observe their use of technology in order to craft more satisfying

and balanced digital lives (Levy, 2016). Our panel will lightly touch foundations and relevant precedents, and then focus upon the organizers' forays into contemplative pedagogy and their use of one outstanding device: The Tree of Contemplative Practices.

## 2. The Tree of Contemplative Practices

Shown below, The Tree of Contemplative Practices is a product of research conducted by Maia Duerr at the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society[i] (CMIND). It is a grounded framework of contemplative practices that emerged from 84 interviews with educational and private sector leaders in the United States. The Tree appeared in the Center's 2004 report, *A Powerful Silence: The Role of Meditation and Other Contemplative Practices in American Life and Work*. Inspired by nature during a springtime walk, Duerr thought a tree diagram would show the great range of contemplative practices revealed in the study.
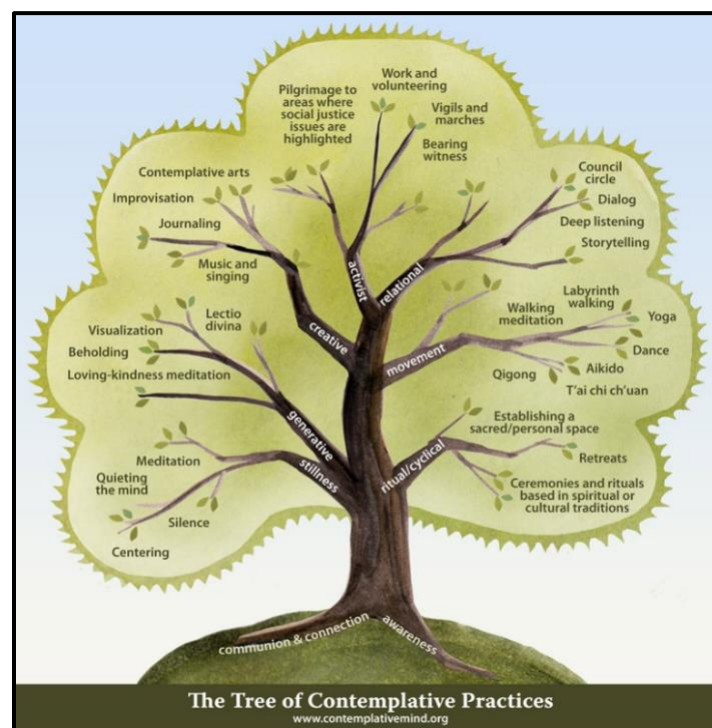


*Figure 1.* The Tree of Contemplative Practices.

The distinguishing qualities of contemplative practice – communion, connection, and awareness – appear as taproots of the Tree and reveal the social nature of contemplative practice. The Tree's seven limbs display major forms of contemplative practice – STILLNESS, GENERATIVE, CREATIVE, ACTIVIST, RELATIONAL, MOVEMENT and RITUAL/CYCLICAL. Narrower expressions of contemplative activities are shown as branches. For example, the MOVEMENT limb is the site of yoga, tai chi, and walking meditation. The ACTIVIST limb displays social justice endeavors such as vigils, pilgrimages, and marches.

Using some of the technical language of the social sciences, one can say the Tree is a pictorial metaphor (Forceville, 2008; Hartel & Savolainen, 2016). It also qualifies as a graphic

representation (Engelhardt, 2002), and specifically, a grouping diagram that "expresses the categorization of a set of elements" (p. 141). Since its publication, the Tree has become popular among the general public and scholars and is likewise a boundary object (Star & Griesemer, 1989).

In the light of their teaching experiences, the organizers of this panel attest that the Tree makes the esoteric and abstruse notion of contemplative practices immediately evident and accessible to students. Indeed, at first contact, newcomers are often surprised that contemplative practices already enrich their lives within hobbies or self-care routines. While the Tree has a spacious and welcoming quality, its creator, Maia Duerr, states that the activities represented in the current iteration are not comprehensive and many other manifestations of contemplative practices exist. The traditions and practices of the tree are largely derived from traditionally Eastern (particularly Buddhist) and Christian practices. What could be said to be missing from the Tree include practices like Soulfulness (Harrell, 2018) drawn from diasporic African traditions, as well as indigenous perspectives (Celidwen, 2020). The CMIND produces a blank version of the same structure (available here), which invites people to articulate their own conceptions of contemplative practice on a bespoke Tree. A further point of attention is that the Tree on its own does not immediately offer a direct spiritual and cultural link to the traditions and cultures from around the world from which many of these practices have roots. Some additional self-education into the history and origins of these practices is encouraged to dissuade some of what could be said to be the more negative aspects of naïve adoption of contemplative techniques: cultural appropriation and contemplative practices' capitalization by technocrats into a lucrative "McMindfulness" (Purser, 2019). For the record, alternative visions of contemplative practices have been published (e.g., Komjathy, 2019) but we believe the Tree's simplicity, power, and charm provides a useful introductory tool for those wishing to incorporate contemplative pedagogical approaches and activities in the classroom.

### 3. Panel Presenters and Agenda

The panel presenters (Jenna Hartel, Kiersten Latham, Beck Tench, Hailey Siracky, and Roger Chabot) and moderator (Hugh Samson) are LIS educators and researchers with more than 50 combined years of teaching and research experience. For the past decade, we have been exploring contemplative pedagogy (Hartel et al., 2017a; Hartel et al., 2017b; Browning et al., 2018; Lenstra & Latham, 2019; Kinane et al., 2019; Hartel, in press) and its research-oriented counterpart *contemplative inquiry* in both scholarly (Latham et al., 2020; Gorichanaz & Latham, 2019; Samson, 2021) and personal contexts (Siracky, 2013; Chabot, 2019). In the spirit of contemplative pedagogy, this panel will unfold principally through storytelling and embodied learning (Christensen, 2004). Sequentially, and with deft use of PowerPoint, the presenters will: 1) Encapsulate their commitment to contemplative pedagogy; 2) Recount an application of The Tree of Contemplative Practices in their teaching; and 3) Demonstrate one of the Tree's major limbs and branches (such as the GENERATIVE limb and its contemplative practice of loving-kindness meditation). Ample time will follow these presentations for open discussion. At the conclusion everyone will be invited to join a virtual community devoted to extending contemplative pedagogy across LIS. Each presenter's contributions are offered in more detail below.

*Jenna Hartel*
Dr. Jenna Hartel will report upon using the Tree of Contemplative Practices as an organizing framework for her course *Information and Contemplation*. She will share outcomes, positive impacts, and shortcomings of the Tree as a pedagogical device. A visual version of the syllabus and detailed assignment instructions will be provided for attendees who may wish to incorporate the Tree in their classrooms.

*Kiersten Latham*
Dr. Kiersten Latham will offer some guidance on the generative and stillness practices outlined on the Tree and how she has incorporated those into her classroom teaching Museum Studies and non-profit leadership.

*Beck Tench*
Beck will provide a contemplative pedagogical approach from the creativity branch of the tree, explaining and guiding participants in a practice called the Zen of Zooming, a practice well-suited for the online and at-a-distance classroom.

*Hailey Siracky*
Hailey will relate how she uses the dialogue branch of the Tree in her teaching of information literacy by inviting students into discussion on the emotions associated with the research process, what students already know about when doing research, and finding out how we can make research more pleasurable and joyful. Through this dialogue students are given permission to think about their experience in new ways and to seek pleasure in tasks that they have previously only considered mundane or stressful.

*Roger Chabot*
Dr. Roger Chabot will present on the use of Buddhist teachings of wishing love and compassion (from the generative branch) in a lecture focused on spiritual approaches to social justice in LIS. He will present on how these teachings can be used to develop and enhance a genuine service-orientated attitude.

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[i] On its website, CMIND states its mission as: "We envision an education that promotes the exploration of meaning, purpose and values and seeks to serve our common human future. An education that enables and enhances personal introspection and contemplation leads to the realization of our inextricable connection to each other, opening the heart and mind to true community, deeper insight, sustainable living, and a more just society."