



*The*  
**UNIVERSITY**  
*of* VERMONT



Laura Hill, PhD

Senior Lecturer, Plant Biology Department

Director: Contemplative Faculty Learning Community

Email: [lhill@uvm.edu](mailto:lhill@uvm.edu)

# Contemplative Teaching & Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice



# Contemplative Teaching and Learning

## What is it?

A pedagogical approach that infuses “first-person” activities to focus and create opportunities for greater connection and insight to course material.

*At the heart of contemplation is the same quality that is at the heart of all great scholarship: profound attentiveness to the phenomenon that one is trying to understand. – Parker Palmer*

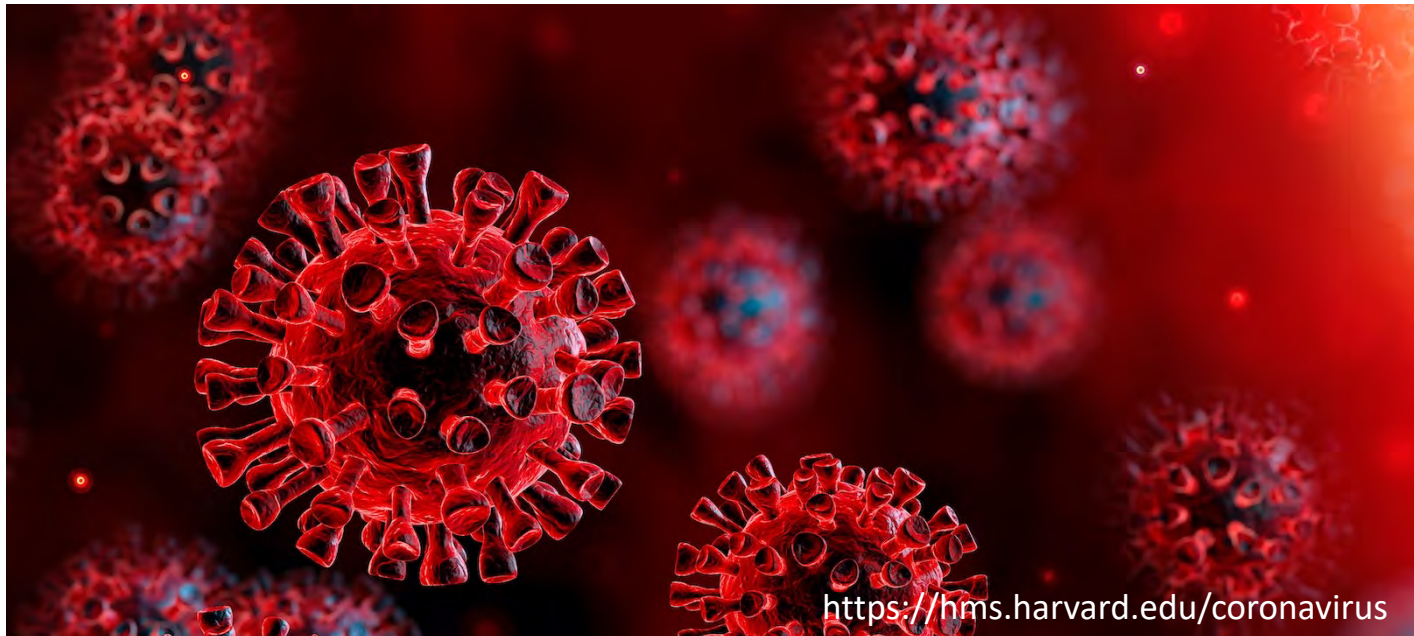
# The principles of contemplative teaching practices

- See things as they are
- Be open to new ideas
- Appreciate the contribution of silence to learning
- Value each human voice
- Honor the constantly changing nature of ideas

# Contemplative Pedagogy in Times of Grief and Uncertainty: Teaching in a Global Pandemic

Laura M. Hill

University of Vermont



## TAKE A MOMENT TO NOTICE...

- We are collectively navigating unprecedented times
- We are all facing new challenges although our individual situations vary
- There is much uncertainty





## Four main stages to navigate and move through strong emotions

1. Recognizing the truth
2. Talking about it
3. Taking rest
4. Moving into empowered action

Dr. Jennifer Atkinson Associate Professor of Environmental Humanities at the University of Washington; Host of *Facing It* podcast







I CHOOSE NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE EXERCISES.

I DO NOT FEEL THESE EXERCISES ARE A GOOD USE OF TIME.

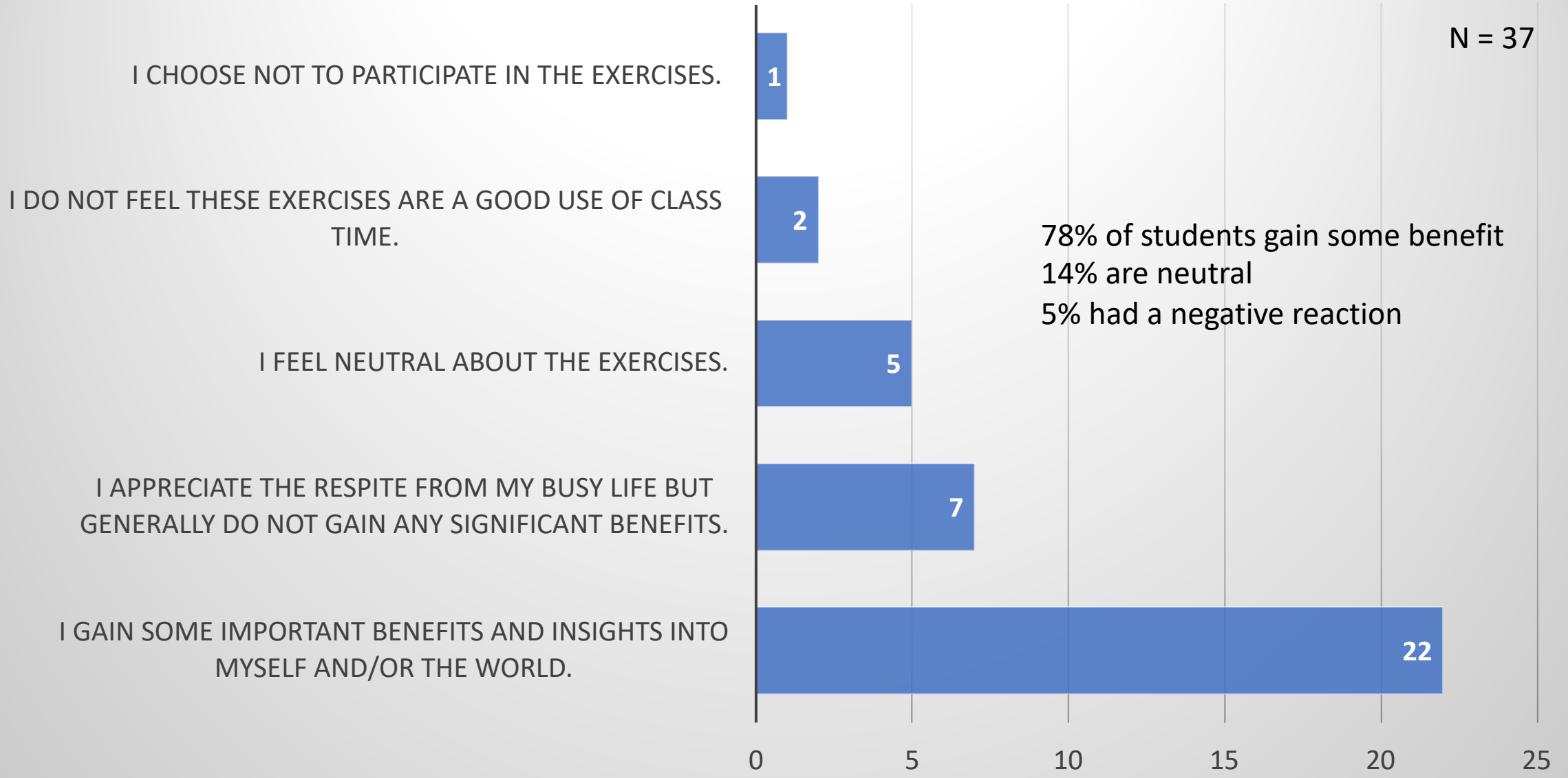
I FEEL NEUTRAL ABOUT THE EXERCISES.

I APPRECIATE THE RESPITE FROM MY BUSY LIFE BUT GENERALLY  
DO NOT GAIN ANY SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS.

I GAIN SOME IMPORTANT BENEFITS AND INSIGHTS INTO MYSELF  
AND/OR THE WORLD.

A series of 11 vertical lines of equal length, spaced evenly across the right half of the page. These lines are intended for users to mark their level of agreement with the statements on the left. The lines are thin and light gray, matching the background.

N = 37



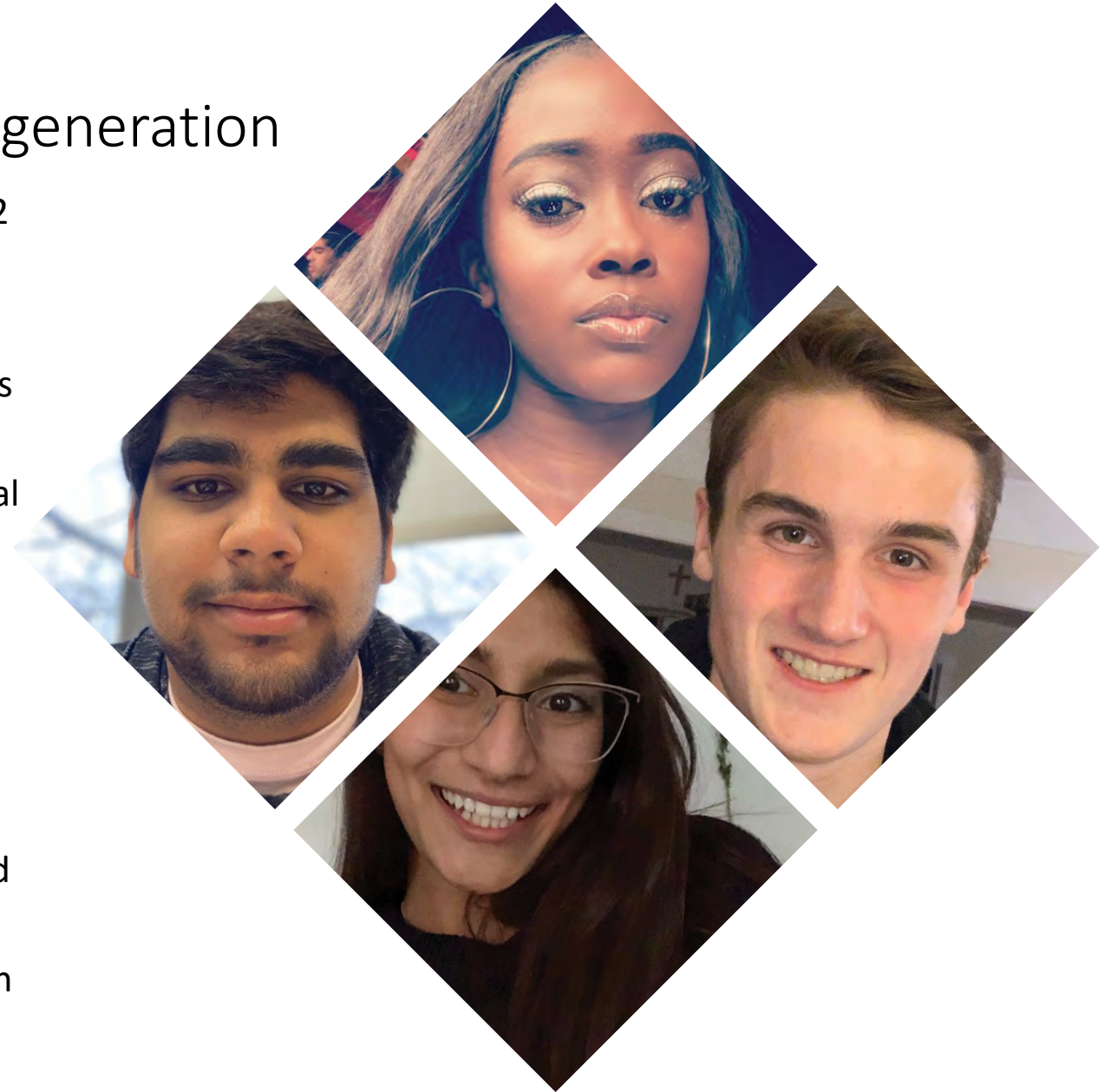
78% of students gain some benefit  
14% are neutral  
5% had a negative reaction



# Who are our students?

## Generation Z - the “post-Millennial” generation

- Born after 1996, the most senior of them will turn 22 this year
- The most racially and ethnically diverse generation
- Liberal attitudes and an openness to emerging trends such as gay marriage and gender identity
- 70% say government should do more to solve societal problems
- Anxiety and depression are rising
- On track to be the best educated in U.S. history
- Academics tops the list of pressures facing young people
  - 61% say they feel a lot of pressure to get good grades (much higher than pressure to look good – 29% - or fit in socially - 28 %)
- Overwhelmingly live in metropolitan area rather than rural areas.
- Technology plays a central and natural role in their lives



[College students reap benefits of meditation thanks to professor-led practice](#)



WCAX, April 2019



Three safety  
measures  
when  
implementing  
contemplative  
processes

They should be voluntary.

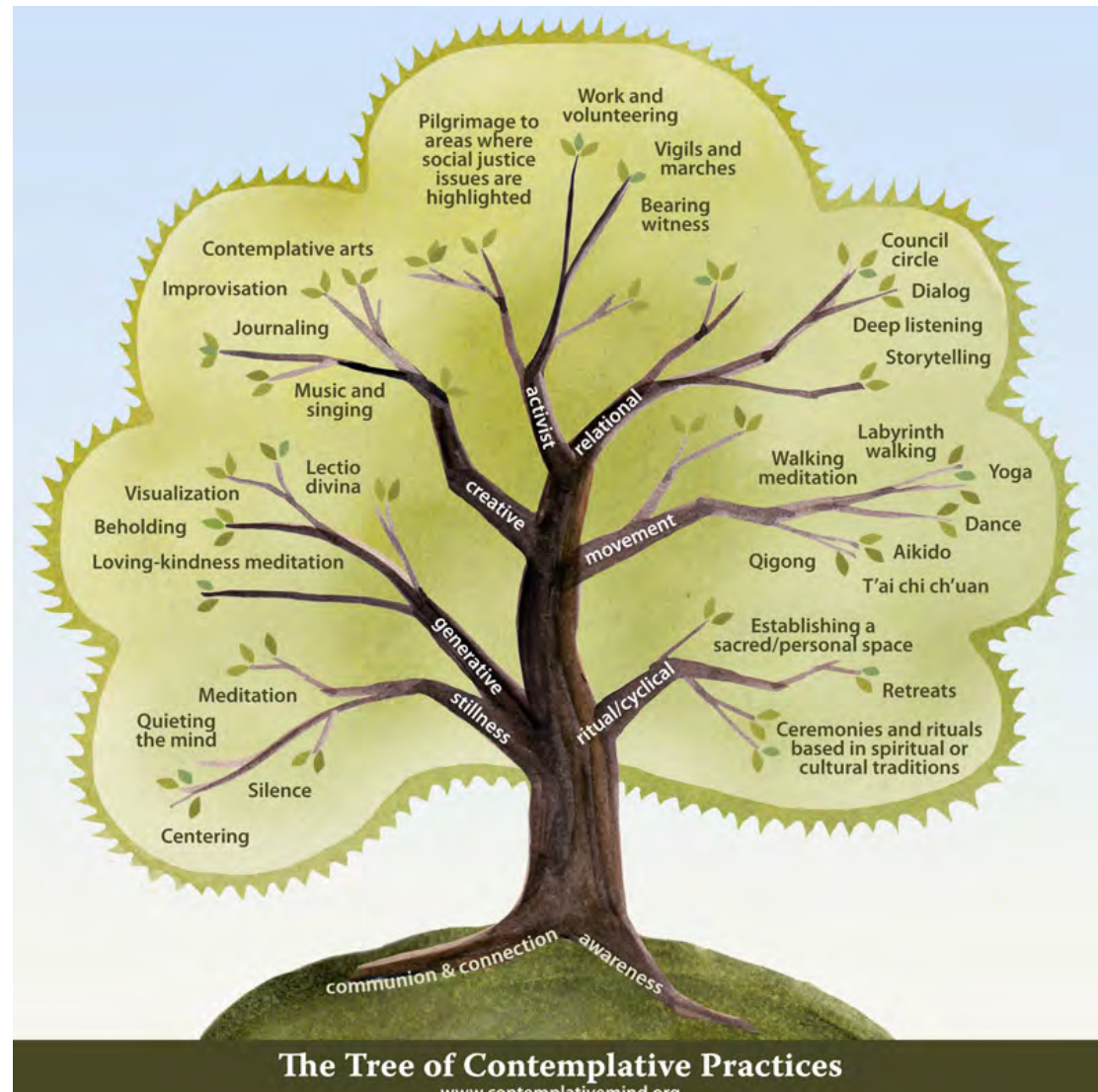
Students to be told they can terminate the practice of it and experience becomes aversive.

The frequency kind and length of the practice should be limited.

# What is contemplative teaching?

Activities connect both the *mental* (cognitive) and *affective* (non-cognitive) dimensions of the course material.

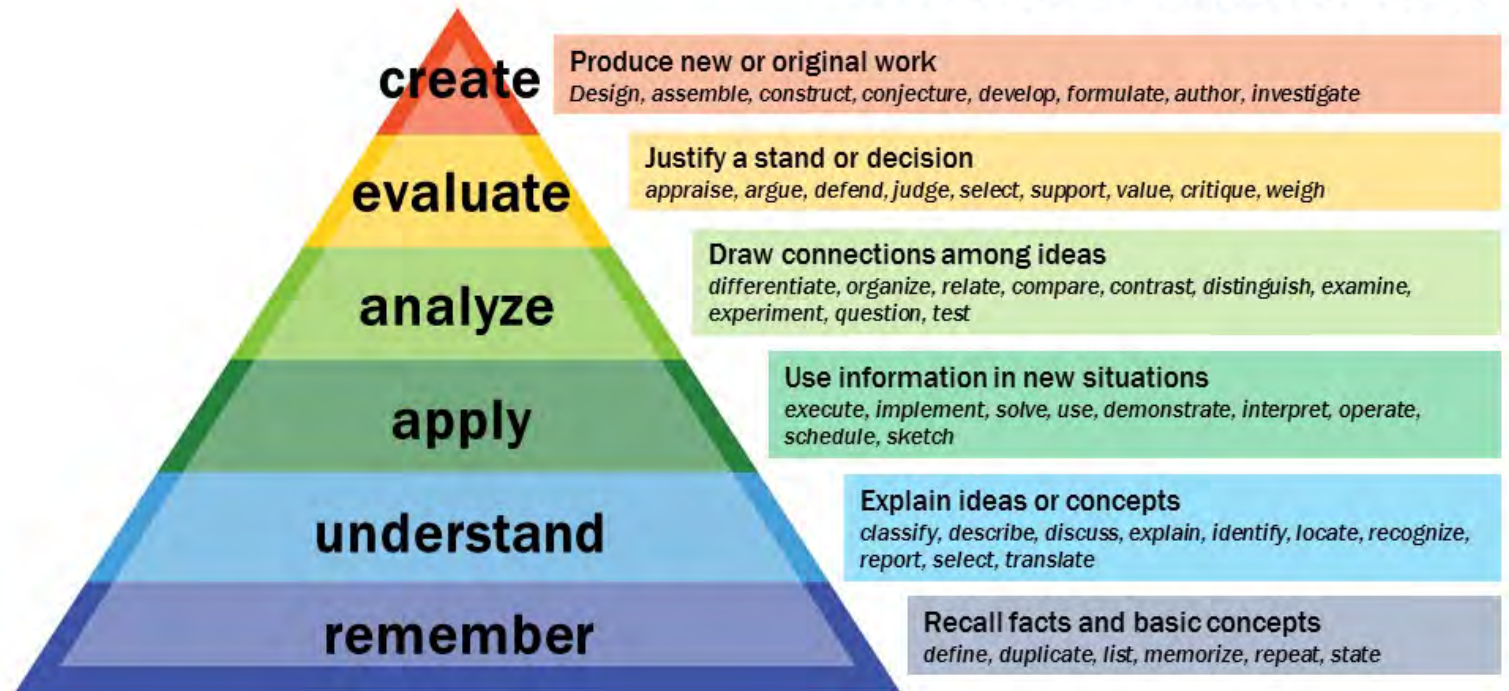
The critical aspect is for students to discover their *own internal reactions* without having to adopt any specific ideology.





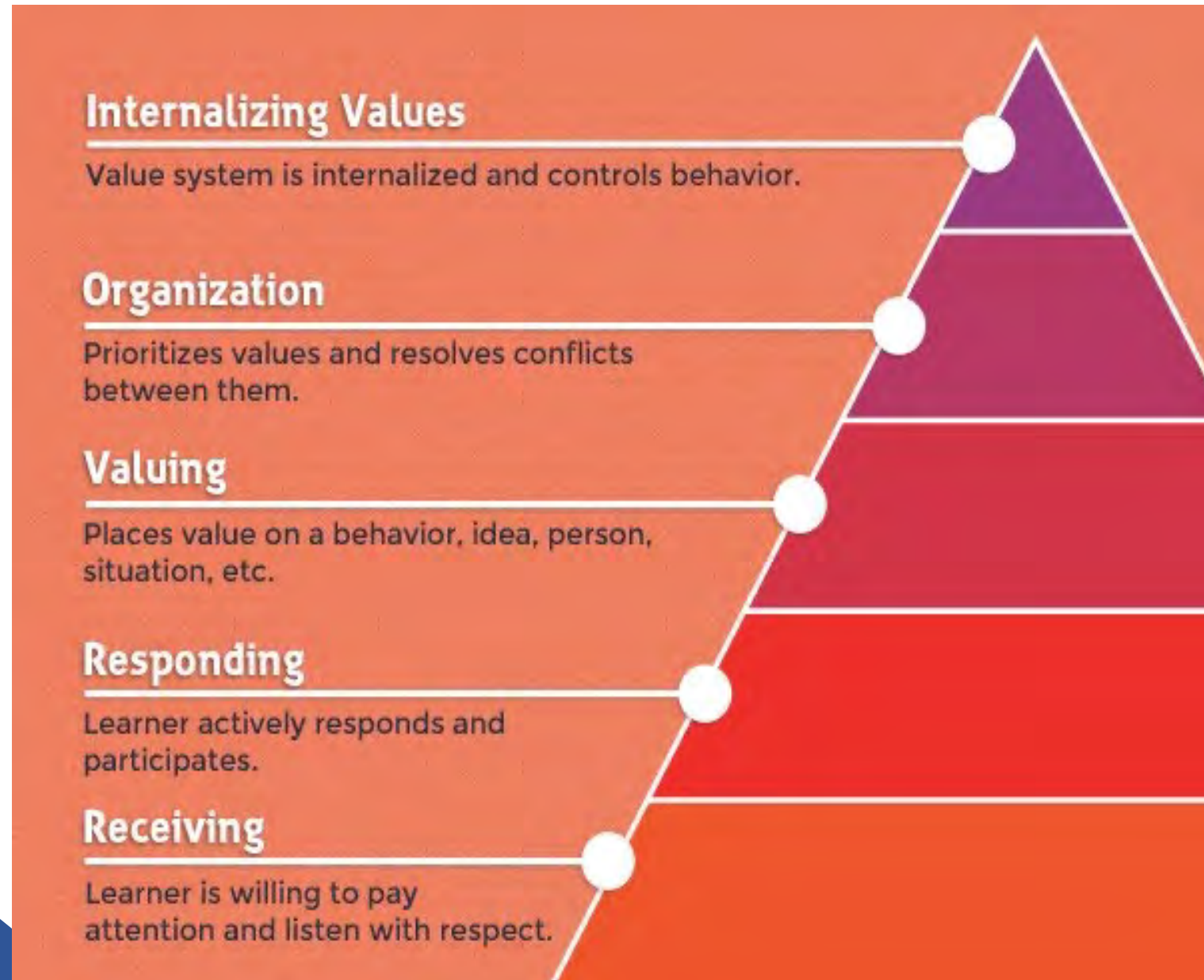
Why use  
contemplative  
teaching and  
learning?

## Bloom's Taxonomy



Scholars of teaching and learning call for assessment of the *affective* domain

## Krathwohl's Taxonomy - Affective Domain of Objectives



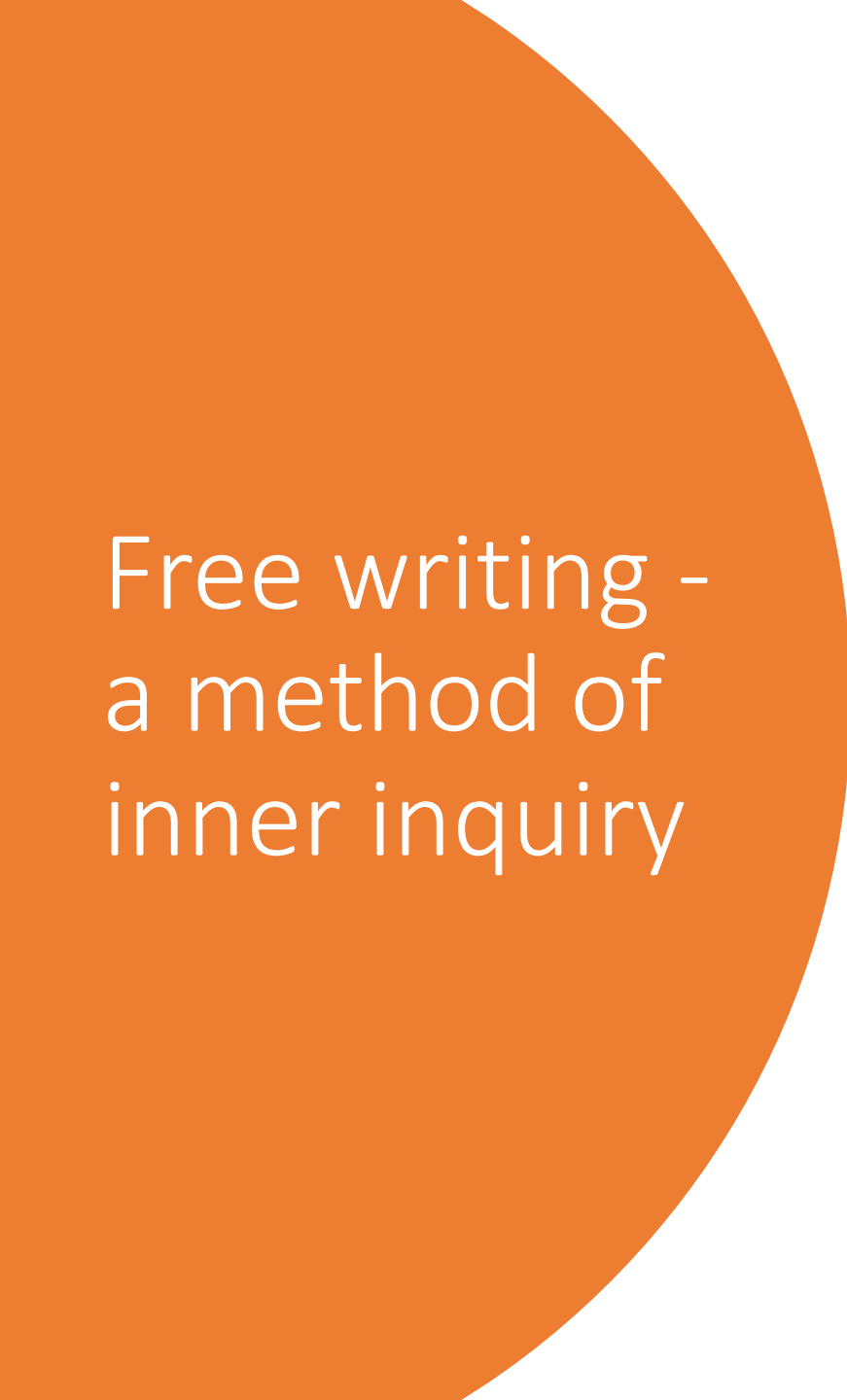


# Free writing - a method of inner inquiry

Used to help students observe their emotional, intuitive, or physical responses to course material.

Instructions:

- Write continuously for a set period of time (e.g., 5 to 15 minutes)
- The pen should be constantly moving with no pause to correct spelling and grammar and punctuation.
- Some teachers begin with a prompt.



Free writing -  
a method of  
inner inquiry

## Writing prompt

Please write a short reflection about your experiences this past year as a new faculty member at UVM. Focus on your attitude, values, feelings, and emotions, i.e., the *affective domain*.

Please write continuously for 5 minutes. I will begin and end with a chime. Try to keep your pen moving constantly. If you don't know how to begin, write "I don't know how to begin" and see what comes next.

We will follow with an interpersonal dialogue in pairs.





# How do contemplative practices enhance student learning?

Contemplative and mindfulness research has tended to focus on *physiological & psychological well-being*. Studies have shown that contemplative and mindfulness-based activities in college students...

- increase students' attention (Jha 2007; Tang et al. 2007)
- improves cognition (Zeidan 2010) and cognitive flexibility (Moore 2009)
- decrease stress (American College of Health Association, 2015a&b)
- decrease anxiety (Godbey and Courage, 1994)

# How do contemplative practices enhance student learning?

What effect does integration of first-person pedagogy and mindfulness training in the classroom have on intellectual conceptions in college students compared to a control group?

- increases in attention capacities among the first-person pedagogy students
- improvements in body awareness
- reduction in anxiety and depression
- increase in compassion for self and others





Key questions  
about  
contemplative  
education and  
the  
scholarship of  
teaching and  
learning

Academic integrity and rigor

Assessment of learning

Classroom efficiency

Student agency

The appropriateness of affective and introspective  
dimensions of teaching and learning

# Some guidelines for using contemplative practices in the classroom

- Explore and deepen your own personal contemplative practice
- Define the intention for the practice and share with students. How does it deepen student learning?
- Give some context to the practice (e.g., pranayama from yoga tradition)
- Evaluate contemplative activities on a pass/fail basis
- Embed practices throughout the course in a meaningful way
- Offer different options
- Provide a mix of intrapersonal (private) and interpersonal (social) activities



# Faculty Learning Communities

A faculty learning community is “a cross-disciplinary group [of faculty] who engage in an extended (typically yearlong) planned program to enhance teaching and learning, and which incorporates frequent activities to facilitate learning, development, and community building.”  
(Cox, 1999)

Natkin, L. W., & Hill, L. M. (2020). Faculty integration of Sustainability learning outcomes Into curriculum: A case study of a faculty learning community and teaching practices. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 2020(161), 123-138. doi:10.1002/tl.20377



# Aims of UVM's Contemplative Faculty Learning Community

- Train faculty how to effectively integrate contemplative teaching into existing and new courses across the curriculum.
- Foster the development of concrete models of implementation and assessment of these practices across disciplines.
- Support a deepening of personal contemplative practices by providing structure, guidance and encouragement.

<https://www.uvm.edu/ctl/programs-services/contemplative-faculty-learning-community/>

# Activities – UVM's Contemplative Faculty Learning Community

## 2020

- August – Introductory Meeting and Council Circle
- September – Transformation and Renewal in Higher Education
- October - Mindfulness and Introduction to Contemplative Practices
- December - Contemplative Pedagogy in Practice

## 2021

- February - Teacher Preparation and Classroom Challenges + Trauma-Informed Practices
- March - Current Research on Contemplative Practice + Student-Led Practice
- April – Invited Speaker Workshop: The Power of Pause
- May – Final Retreat with Contemplative Course Story Share

# UVM's Contemplative Faculty Learning Community



Center for Teaching & Learning

Teaching Continuity

Events

Open Hours

Blackboard

Faculty-to-Faculty Consulting Program

Programs & Services

Designing and Teaching

[Programs & Services](#) / [Contemplative Faculty Learning Community](#)

## Contemplative Faculty Learning Community

The Contemplative Faculty Learning Community (CFLC) for UVM faculty seeks to develop a forum of scholars engaged in a yearlong exploration of contemplative teaching and learning and pedagogical approaches to classroom practices. Contemplative practices are applied across the disciplines in higher education and are unified by classroom activities that invite students to mindfully integrate their own rich experience into their learning experience.

We seek to create a place for UVM scholars to gather in a supportive contemplative community espousing radical care for others and ourselves. We will engage in our own contemplative practices ("inner work") while reinventing our classes to infuse contemplation and reflection into the curriculum ("outer work"). While contemplative practices vary greatly, they focus on the present experience and include a "first-person" orientation that creates opportunities for greater connection and insight.

[To apply, fill out this form](#)

More info and to apply: <https://www.uvm.edu/ctl/programs-services/contemplative-faculty-learning-community/>



# Resources for contemplative teaching and learning in higher education

## Center for Teaching and Learning

- Contemplative Faculty Learning Community is accepting new applications now
- Join the CONTEMPLATIVE listserv at UVM
- Faculty consultation by request (lhill@uvm.edu)

## Association of Contemplative Mind in Society (C-Mind) web resources

- <https://www.contemplativemind.org/>



“Without a context to develop the awareness of the implications of our actions and a clear idea of what is most deeply meaningful to us, we will continue to act in ways that force us into short term, myopic responses to a world increasingly out of control.” (Barbezat and Bush, 2014)