

Catalyzing the Field: Second-Person Approaches to Contemplative Learning and Inquiry

Olen Gunnlaugson, Charles Scott, Heesoon Bai, and Edward W. Sarath, editors

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This book is third in a series on Contemplative Learning and Inquiry (Gunnlaugson et al., 2014, *Contemplative Learning and Inquiry across Disciplines*; Gunnlaugson et al., 2017, *The Intersubjective Turn*), which focuses on intersubjectivity—an empathic experience of how others are experiencing the world. Drawing on Edmund Husserl’s insight that shared experience gives rise to intersubjective phenomena, Martin Buber’s description of dialogue and the *I-Thou* relationship, and Thich Nhat Hanh’s discussion of interbeing, or a shared ontological reality, the editors seek to bring greater attention to the intersubjective field of relationality. Whereas previous contemplative studies scholarship sought to redress the imbalanced attention to third-person perspectives by drawing attention the first-person forms of contemplative practice, this volume seeks to draw attention to second-person approaches of collaborative discernment and shared contemplative states of knowing through various applied case studies of second-person contemplative pedagogies.

Religion and theology faculty will be interested in Kathryn Byrnes and Jessica Caron’s discussion of contemplative inquiry in a community of learners; Nancy Waring’s discussion of insight dialogue; an interpersonal meditation practiced developed by Gregory Kramer; Ian Macnaughton’s exploration of bringing attunement, presence, resonance, feeling states, and somatic experiences within a group setting; Mary Keator’s application of *lectio divina* in purely secular contexts of higher education; and Sean Park’s outline of how to employ relational and contemplative practices in a first year seminar. Those who focus on faculty development may find Thomas Falkenberg’s essay interesting, as it discusses teaching as a contemplative professional practice that invites self-study and working with one’s inner life, or Arden Henley’s discussion of how to establish an intellectual and professional praxis-enhancing commons.

Several of the contemplative activities described could be adapted by religion or theology instructors, including Byrnes and Caron’s “educational autobiography” assignment where students prepare a creative five-minute presentation sharing meaningful educational experiences and their impacts, or their poetry recitation assignment where students choose or write a poem demonstrating mindfulness for them, and then memorize and recite it twice for the class. Véronique Tomaszewski outlines how she uses deep listening for conflict resolution, having students hear, understand, and then respond from a place of centered attention. Sean Park has students identify a skill to work on within three core values of self-awareness, empathy, and character, writing weekly reflections on what they are struggling with, where they saw growth, and what questions arose about the skill, and collecting evidence that they later share about how they worked on the skill and the outcomes that resulted from their work.

Mary Keator explains how she uses techniques of *lectio divina* (sacred reading) in her class, having students read aloud mindfully, slowly, and carefully, and then select a word, phrase or sentence that spoke to them, which they write down, repeat, and reflect on. They then share it to the class. Another activity she employs are listening cafés where students form groups of four or five, selecting three lenses in which to look at the story and three meaningful questions to prompt deeper reflection about the story.