Supporting Interdisciplinary Collaboration through Mindfulness and Contemplative Engagement

Cotter Christian, Latha Poonamallee

The New School University, New York, NY USA

Challenges such as dissimilarity in underlying bases of knowledge (Haythornthwaite, 2006) and disciplinary egocentrism (Richter & Paretti, 2009) hinder interdisciplinary collaboration, a critical competency (Mansilla, 2005). Egocentrism limits individuals’ ability to think beyond their own perspective (Ormrod, 2008; Poonamallee & Goltz, 2014), integrate and synthesize new information, and collaborate with and learn from colleagues (Richter & Paretti, 2009). The absence of in-person community building in a fully remote learning environment exacerbates this challenge.

Based on our experience of co-teaching an interdisciplinary 100% remote course - Mindfulness and Contemplative Engagement - we propose that utilizing mindfulness and contemplative pedagogy can facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration in tomorrow’s remote and in-person learning environments. Co-taught by a professor of management and a professor of interior design, the class introduced contemplative engagement through various lenses including, leadership, social justice, creativity, design practice,
place attachment, and environmental justice. Students hailed from backgrounds including management, psychology, music, fashion, and design.

Originally designed to be a hybrid class with a mandatory, two day, in-person mindfulness retreat, we had to convert the retreat into a virtual one. Student feedback suggests that the retreat even in online format created a sense of community and intimacy to transcend disciplinary egocentrism and be open for collaboration and learning. While limited in sample to one class, our experience supports the research findings that mindfulness can increase empathy, prosocial behavior, and self regulation essential for collaboration (Beer, et.al. 2015; Lucas and Jones, 2017; Poonamallee, et.al. 2018; Poonamallee, 2021; Vago and Silbersweig, 2012; Wimmer, et.al. 2016). The collective experience balanced the deep, individual work completed in the asynchronous portions, creating a more positive learning experience for everyone. Based on this, we propose that incorporating mindfulness and contemplative pedagogy practices will benefit interdisciplinary collaboration. We will present the results of our analysis of the student journals and course evaluations.

References


**Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Latha Poonamallee Biography:

Dr. Latha Poonamallee is Associate Professor, Chair of Management Faculty, and University Fellow at the New School in New York City. Latha’s scholarship, teaching and practice centers generative organizing for radical change towards building a more just, equitable, sustainable and prosperous world.

She is engaged in two primary projects.

How to decolonize, decapitalize, and demystify mindfulness and contemplative practice so it can be utilized to advance more expansive mental models and mindsets to lead social action and change in our complex world. She has an upcoming book on this topic (Routledge, 2021).

Her second area of scholarship is on socio-tech innovation and entrepreneurship. She recently published the book, "Socio-tech Innovation: Harnessing Technology for Social Good" with Palgrave Macmillan. She co-founded In-Med Prognostics, a neuroscience-AI social venture that brings affordable and accessible brain health tools to underserved markets. As a Fulbright Fellow, she worked with the Botswana Civil Society, Botswana Government, US Embassy in Botswana, USAID, and the private sector in Botswana to develop a social entrepreneurship ecosystem and leadership capacity building for the civil society.
Dr. Poonamallee received her Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior from Case Western Reserve University, U.S.A.

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/nextfrontiersolutions/

Cotter Christian Biography:

Cotter Christian is the Associate Dean of the School of Constructed Environments at Parsons School of Design at The New School University. He is also an Assistant Professor of Interior Design and a University Fellow who holds an MFA in Studio Art from Georgia State University, an MA in Interior Design from the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), and a Bachelor’s in Theatre from Marymount Manhattan College. Cotter has been teaching for over a decade and previously worked at Perkins+Will as an interior project designer on corporate, academic, and institutional projects. Before joining Parsons, he helped start the interior design program at SCAD’s Hong Kong campus. As a researcher and creative practitioner, he is interested in the intersection of contemplative studies, place attachment, and technology. In addition to his current investigation into the phenomenon of working from home, he has written on contemplative design pedagogy, citizen-driven placemaking, motion graphics and place, and explores everyday sacred spaces with colleague and photographer, Joy McKinney. He is a member of the Interior Design Educators Council and on the board for Interior Designers for Legislation in New York (IDLNY).