

Summary

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Innov High Educ (2010) 35:217–231

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“Practice what you believe in, take the risks, be courageous, be loving, be compassionate. And through these behaviors we can create that tipping point where more and more of us are going to join in” (Personal interview, June 12, 2009).

It is my hope that this case study creates awareness of the potential benefits to bringing contemplative practices into the workplace. Doing so can lead to enhanced communication, increased dedication to the institution, and a greater sense of purpose in the administration.

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Contemplative Administration: Transforming the Workplace Culture of Higher Education

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Published online: 18 May 2010
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Abstract A contemplative approach to higher education is receiving increased attention and application in the classroom. Applying contemplative practices to administration, however, has received little attention in the literature. This case study offers a unique look at Naropa University and its implementation of contemplative administration. Findings indicate that incorporating contemplative practices into administrative life has benefits to faculty and staff members including an appreciation of being able to bring their personal lives into the workplace in a safe and supportive way and a strengthened commitment to the University's mission.

Key words spirituality · contemplation · respect · conflict resolution · well-being

Higher education constantly shifts and adapts to new trends in student demographics, educational needs, and approaches to management. In recent years a movement towards contemplative education, also known as mindfulness education, has occurred (Palmer 2007; Rendón 2009). Incorporating qualities of self-reflection and awareness, mutual respect, open communication, deep listening, and honesty into the educational setting transforms how faculty members teach (Boyatzis and McKee 2005; Cranton and King 2003; Rendón). Some educational researchers recognize these qualities as critical to conducting research that is directly meaningful and applicable to faculty and student lives (Fine 1994; Merriam 1998). One area that is not mentioned in literature pertaining to contemplative practices in higher education, however, is that of administration. Applying these practices in the classroom and in research is proving to have worth, yet integrating them into administrative roles and policies has thus far been ignored.

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The goal of this case study is to reveal how contemplative administration as practiced at Naropa University works and what its effects are on concrete tasks such as orientation, supervision, communication among departments, and faculty meetings. Results gleaned from the study may be of interest to other institutions. Here contemplative administration is defined as a way of performing administrative duties with a high degree of self-awareness, respect for others, active feedback, and acceptance of diverse experiences and backgrounds (Boyle et al. 2003). Contemplation as a practice is “the deliberate effort to examine ourselves and our actions with the intention of becoming more conscious of who we are and how this self-knowledge informs and influences our actions” (Boyle et al. 2003, p. 4).

The primary research question is how administrators and affiliates of Naropa experience contemplative practices as part of the workplace culture. Related questions include how these administrators and affiliates make meaning from the integration of contemplative practices into their job duties and how this contemplative program could be implemented by other institutions. Through a process of interviews conducted between June and August of 2009 with Naropa personnel, detailed transcriptions of each interview, and a document analysis of the final draft of Naropa’s written synthesis of contemplative administration, data has been collected to expand the understanding of this unique approach to administration.

One interviewee, Jane, is Associate Dean for Business and Academic Support. She has been on the staff for eight years and started her career as a student at the university, and she had this to say about Naropa’s approach: “What we’re aspiring to do here is to embody compassion in how we perform administratively, and in the classroom, and in our interpersonal dealings” (Personal interview, August 4, 2009). This study provides a way to narrow the gap between an ideal vision of working in higher education administration and what actually occurs, and suggestions for how results may be generalized to other institutions are offered. The study focuses on a non-traditional approach to administration, concentrating on concepts such as spirituality in education and the workplace.

While conducting this study, peers in my doctoral program often asked me “Contemplative administration? What is that?” One way to understand and implement contemplative administration is to identify what it is not (Wolcott 2008). This approach to educational administration does not require staff to ignore flaws in favor of love and lightness; it does not mean employees have a slower work pace; it does not necessitate lower expectations for work behavior and professionalism; it does not mean you can say whatever you want whenever you want to; and it does not oblige one to meditate on a regular basis or at all. Alma articulated questions that are asked of those who work in such an environment:

How willing are you to come into a work environment where you are going to be working on yourself, where you’ll be involved in a community here of people who are paying attention to being more compassionate and kind? Are you willing to open yourself up to that?” (Personal interview, July 31, 2009)

Contemplative Education: Spirituality and Transpersonal Theory

In reviewing current literature, I could find no articles or books that addressed the application of contemplative practices to higher education administration. In order to

gain a theoretical and historical perspective, I therefore began by looking at areas that have been discussed, specifically contemplative education and the larger areas of spirituality and transpersonal theory. These topics have become of greater interest to faculty and administrators in recent years, with research conducted, numerous articles published, and the creation of a website to disseminate information (*Spirituality in Higher Education*, n. d.).

Spirituality in Higher Education

Spirituality is in essence a subjective meaning-making process, incorporating personal values, emotive forces, and levels of consciousness in order to understand one's world. When looking at the inclusion of spirituality in the higher education setting I researched what benefits there are to doing so. Rendón (2009) suggested it is a way to view the world that transcends personal limitations of mind and creates in students and faculty a way to fuse personal insights with educational processes and involvement in community. This view values personal development yet also suggests a need to move beyond the personal and into influencing the world through social justice initiatives. Spiritual development is an integral part of our development as human beings and should be considered in faculty and student lives (Lindholm and Astin 2008). One of the ways Naropa is unique is how it values the spiritual paths of employees.

In their research Lindholm and Astin (2008) found a majority of both staff and faculty across institutions believe that spirituality and higher education are mutually exclusive and that spirituality does not belong in a collegiate setting. A student's spiritual development is considered to be a personal matter, as are the belief systems and pursuit of spiritual knowledge by faculty and staff. In recent years, however, spirituality has emerged as a powerful force in higher education (Lindholm and Astin 2008; Rendón 2009).

Spiritual concepts and practices have steadily gained momentum and support by offering innovative ways to teach, interact with students, and conduct research. A focus on social justice programs and a broader vision of society and its needs have also contributed to spirituality's growing influence on campus. Subbiondo (2005) stated, "As Americans move in varying degrees from either an exclusive or nonreligious tradition to a personal spiritual path within or without an organized religion, colleges and universities are beginning to reflect this migration" (p. 19). Naropa is a pioneer in its active inclusion of Buddhist principles in curricula, mission, and administration. An academic advisor at Naropa for 3 years and a graduate of the university, Davia Mae said in the interview I conducted with her as part of this study, "You can't really separate spirituality out from anything....It's always there, it's always welcome" (Personal interview, June 23, 2009). Her statement reflects a strong personal and professional commitment to the ideals and vision of Naropa. In the interview she shared how Naropa's welcoming of spirituality in the workplace helped her feel more accepted and at ease in its professional community.

Another area of inquiry that deserves attention has to do with how spirituality and techniques used to increase awareness (also known as mindfulness techniques) are implemented in educational settings. There are several approaches being successfully utilized in classrooms, including meditation, contemplative reflection, and journaling that is focused on a point of personal interest to the student. Using these techniques helps students develop their own knowledge base and way of processing information and deepens their understanding of what is being taught in the classroom (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski 2009; Rendón 2009; Wlodkowski 2003). Teaching techniques that focus on

self-awareness can empower individuals “in the construction of their own informed, but interconnected, content knowledge bases” (Brimhall-Vargas and Clark 2008, p. 55). Many of these ideas are supported in literature addressing the role of eastern philosophies in education. Eastern ideas have the potential to greatly enrich the educational process by bringing about a way of thinking and of viewing the world that is radically different from traditional western approaches. Some of the benefits of embracing an eastern versus a solely western approach include promoting a holistic education of students vs. compartmentalization of subjects and disciplines, utilizing paradoxes vs. dualistic (either-or) thinking, offering multiple perspectives vs. ethnocentric views of the world, and encouraging open mindedness vs. an emphasis on making value judgments (Subbiondo 2005).

In research, the positivist perspective has traditionally left out spirituality as a motivating force in the design and implementation of research projects. However, as paradigms continue to evolve and research becomes a science applicable to human life, spirituality is increasingly being recognized as “part of the basic foundational philosophical dimensions of paradigm proposal” (Lincoln and Guba 2000, p. 169). Post-modern paradigms reflect this incorporation of spiritual views.

Transpersonal Theory

Spirituality and contemplative research practices fall under the epistemology of transpersonal theory, which grew out of the fourth force of humanistic psychology (Lahood 2007). When first developed, transpersonal ideals “spun a precarious worldview into being that would need to have the miraculous capacity to enfold, nurture, and sustain not just a single people but, rather, the many peoples, cultures, and worldviews often in tragic collision with each other” (Lahood, p. 3). In its evolution transpersonal theory has come to integrate religious traditions, cultural differences, and psychospiritual development with an educational and research practice that honors diversity and the inner knowledge of each human being. What this offers to the field of higher education is an appreciation for and active solicitation of each student’s distinct learning process, needs, and goals. Without using transpersonal or spiritual language professors can engage students’ motivation to learn by openly or tacitly acknowledging the diversity of experiences each classroom holds.

The interface between personal beliefs and professional lives can be a difficult area of understanding for many staff, faculty, and administrative personnel. I find bringing spiritual awareness into the higher education workplace requires courage and an unusual set of personal characteristics. Individuals able to live in this state of openness and reflection are leaders in merging spirituality with higher education. Leadership in this sense becomes a vocation in which the shadow side of humanity is acknowledged and a commitment is made to projecting light into the world (Palmer 2000).

The benefits of bringing this enhanced perspective into administrative life are similar to those found when it is brought into research and the classroom: it becomes possible to enable “peer collaborators to inquire freely into the charismatic power relations between people, without defaulting to internalized external authority, in the spirit of transpersonal thriving” (Lahood 2007, p. 6). Rogers (2003) offered encouragement to those leaders in higher education who are willing to embrace the ambiguity and worry that spirituality will bring: in order to create deep change in higher education these visionaries must be willing to live in a state of ambiguity, have to be able to move beyond their own needs, and always hold to a vision of greater good.

David, the Director of Human Resources at Naropa, has over 25 years of administrative experience at other universities and brings an outsider's perspective to the challenges of melding personal and professional lives, which is encouraged at Naropa. In our interview he said:

We have to start with the understanding of who we are. And that we are both the individual and the organization: who am I today, and how do I interact with the others in the 'we'? And how do I hold responsibility for my actions while skillfully communicating with folks and skillfully interacting? And, add this, the idea of being open to possibilities. (David, personal interview, August 25, 2009)

Higher education administration is the area in which budget decisions are made, jobs are created and cut, and the determination is made as to whether a university's internal structure runs for the benefit of staff and students or for monetary gain. I found no literature or research that identifies or recognizes an administrator's involvement on a spiritual level with higher education. There is much work to be done to explore how administration and contemplative practices can be integrated, the effects of such integration, and the experiences of people who work in a culture that supports a contemplative path. This study addresses some of these issues.

The Study

A qualitative approach was used in this study as it provides a nonlinear way of viewing the world that supports a transpersonal view of spirituality and contemplative practice, two areas that do not blend well with quantitative examination. Qualitative research also reinforces the notion that "objectivity is a chimera: a mythological creature that never existed" (Lincoln and Guba 2000, p. 181). In other words, there is no completely objective truth awaiting our discovery; reality is illusional, dependent upon shifting modes of consciousness (Creswell 2007). This perspective supports the inclusion of mystical or transpersonal philosophies in higher education. I chose a qualitative research project in part due to its flexibility and emergent design, which allowed me to collect data in a mindful way and in a natural setting (Creswell 2007; Merriam 1998).

Theoretical Perspective

Constructionism as a theoretical perspective underlies this study with the assertion that human beings are constantly interacting with their world and forming significant insights and relationships that enrich and expand who they are (Creswell 2007; Lincoln and Guba 2000). At Naropa specifically, contemplative practices create shared meanings and experiences that are unusual. These practices include deep listening, self-reflection, continuous feedback, having an awareness of how rooms are set up, and starting meetings with a group bow and a few moments of stillness. Laura R. is a Naropa trustee, who is a nationally recognized leader in contemplative education and author of *Sentipensante Pedagogy* (2009). In our interview she offered this observation:

One of the things that stands out about Naropa is just the tone of the place.... Everything we do we really try to stay true to that mission of taking the time to take things in at a deeper level. And to be in the moment of what is being discussed. And treat others with the utmost respect and dignity. (Laura R., personal interview, June 12, 2009)

Researcher's Position

I was a professor at Naropa for 13 years in the Transpersonal Psychology Department's Music Therapy section, giving me insight, expert knowledge, and direct experience with contemplative practices in higher education. This personal history offered a way to gain entry and conduct the study in a respectful and trustworthy manner (Yin 2009). Through my professional experiences at Naropa I had witnessed the power of students, professors, and administrative staff coming together in a spirit of mutuality, with the awareness that each of us is more than who we appear to be. I found Naropa to be a place where honoring values of respect, community, communication, and attention to the growth needs of each person enables faculty members and other personnel to merge interior life with mundane work tasks. This results in a richness and vitality that is often difficult to attain in other institutional settings (Rendón 2009).

Case Study Design

Within the qualitative framework I chose a case study design for its flexibility, use of multiple data collection methods, freedom to explore nuances within a bounded system, and focus on an end product (Merriam 1998; Yin 2009). The case is bounded by place and offered the opportunity to acquire in-depth understanding of how the active inclusion of contemplative practices influences a single work culture. The choice of design was not made lightly, for it can be a daunting process; the researcher must have intuition, sensitivity, and "an enormous tolerance for ambiguity" (Merriam 1998, p. 20). The site was also chosen for its accessibility in terms of geography and trust: my role as former professor made immediate recognition and acceptance within the campus community possible.

Setting

Naropa University is a private, nonsectarian, liberal arts institution in Boulder, Colorado. It was accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools in 1988 and is a member in good standing of the Council of Independent Colleges. Naropa's creation in 1974 was built upon the tenet that bringing contemplative practices into education will produce students who are engaged, self-aware, and motivated world participants. Its mission includes the following statement: "Naropa recognizes the inherent goodness and wisdom of each human being. It educates the whole person, cultivating academic excellence and contemplative insight in order to infuse knowledge with wisdom" (*Naropa Mission Statement*, n. d.). The university is a recognized leader in contemplative education, valuing cultural, religious, and lifestyle diversity "with the aim of fostering a more just and equitable society and an expanded awareness of our common humanity" (*Naropa Mission Statement*, n. d.). What makes the institution uniquely suited to this case study is its commitment, from the time of the university's inception, to create a workplace environment that is grounded in contemplative practices and values. The formal document defining contemplative administration was introduced in 2003.

Methods and Participants

A combination of interviews and document analysis was utilized in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the experience of contemplative administration. I purposively selected the participants (Creswell 2007) for their involvement in either the creation of the

contemplative administration document or in the administrative process, including but not limited to administrative personnel, faculty members, and affiliates of the university. The five people selected for interviews were familiar with the concepts and practices of contemplative administration. Jane, Davia Mae, David, Laura R., and Alma were all drawn to Naropa for its commitment to contemplative practices; and each has a daily reflection practice. Each brought a different perspective to the study, representing administration, trustees, and former students. I contacted interviewees by phone and followed up with an email, inquiring as to their willingness to engage in the study and be interviewed. The average length of interviews was 62 minutes; participants also sent me written feedback on the transcriptions as well as the final manuscript.

The questions posed to interviewees had a range of complexity and detail. The following are examples of the questions. What is your involvement or role at Naropa University? What is your overall impression or experience of contemplative administration at Naropa University? What theories and practices support a contemplative approach to administration? What are the customs, language, and behaviors that support a contemplative approach to administration? What suggestions do you have for introducing this practice to other institutions? Alma, the Dean of Admissions, has been with the university for 10 years and has a commitment to integrating wellness practices into the hectic pace of the admissions office. She offered these additional questions: “How do we walk our talk? How do we create community? How do we become involved in governance and decision making?” (Alma, personal interview, July 31, 2009).

A document developed and written by administrators at Naropa (Boyle et al. 2003) to use as a guideline for administrative staff and new employee orientation offered additional layers of meaning. I relied upon this document, which is entitled *The Path of Contemplative Administration at Naropa University* (Boyle et al. 2003), to balance interviewees’ statements of personal experience with institutional goals. At the time I was conducting the study Naropa did not have a formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, but I sought and gained IRB approval from my current university (University of Northern Colorado). Alma had been involved in the creation of *The Path of Contemplative Administration* and explained that it had been created out of a “real desire to connect with the mission and understand the role that staff play within the university” (Personal interview, July 31, 2009). The hope was to create an atmosphere on campus in which the administrative and educational sectors worked in harmony to achieve the vision of the university, to “weave in, almost like a DNA structure” (Alma, personal interview, July 31, 2009) these sometimes disparate elements. The authors, a mix of administrators and faculty leaders, expressed their desire to “focus on a vision of a diverse, healthy, and effective work environment....This personal and collective work is the path of contemplative administration—the path of ‘waking up’” (Boyle et al. 2003, p. 3). Anticipated outcomes of the document included improved communication and decision making, a more comprehensive and inclusive institutional framework, and team building within and among departments (Boyle et al. 2003). The document was afforded respect and legitimacy by upper administration and made available to every staff and faculty member on campus, and it continues to be discussed in faculty and staff meetings as well as employee orientation sessions.

Observations made while I was an adjunct professor of students’ interactions with each other and teachers, Naropa’s mission statement, marketing materials, and course descriptions were also part of data analysis. I considered my personal recollections of formal and informal meetings, memos, and mandates from upper administration to be part of the data and factored these memories into the analysis.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data analysis was conducted throughout the collection process. Merriam (1998) suggested this approach as an effective way to review new data continuously and compare it to previous collections. In this way I was able to compare intuitions, guesses, and theories as they emerged from the data. Organizing and refining the data as it was collected also made it easier to separate what was relevant from what was irrelevant. Themes were identified and categories created as part of the analysis process. I utilized Creswell's (2007) suggestion to divide the writing of the report into three parts, i.e. description, themes, and interpretation, due to the lack of literature on the subject and the study's exploratory nature.

Validity and trustworthiness of this study is achieved through the image of a crystal (Ellingson 2009; Richardson and St. Pierre 2005). Crystallization is a way of looking at the data that "combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach" (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005, p. 936). Initial findings suggested that many staff members at Naropa are engaged in a process of individual reflection and community interaction. This ongoing interplay can be viewed through the three-dimensional perspective of a crystal, in which externalities are reflected and internal realities are "refracted within themselves" (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005, p. 936). These realities and refractions will change depending upon the angle from which a researcher approaches them. Crystallization, with its infinite varieties of approach and reflected response, encourages a researcher to identify central tenets, engage in a step-by-step process to reveal what the data looks like, change viewpoints, and alter interpretations depending upon which aspect of the data is reflected (Ellingson 2009). I found this approach to have power and strength in its alternative view of synthesis and expression of data.

Interviews were analyzed for common themes and dissonances and then compared to *The Path of Contemplative Administration* (Boyle et al. 2003) document through varying lenses. I engaged in self-reflective activities (meditation, journaling, writing poetry) to prevent getting stuck in one perspective and to express my own fears, biases, hopes, and assumptions. Member checking (Creswell 2007) was conducted by sending participants transcriptions and written manuscripts and offered a more traditional means to assure consistency of emergent themes with participant experiences.

Results

Participants in this study identified explicit benefits to integrating contemplative practices into a professional setting, including consistency of expectations among departments, transparent communications, increased job satisfaction and performance, improved planning, and greater feelings of employee health and well-being.

Alma described human resources as a field that "used to be about complaints, benefits, required trainings. Now it's a lot more about mediation, employee wellness, and support" (Personal interview, July 31, 2009). Analysis of the data, however, suggests that Naropa has been successful in moving beyond wellness and support and into respectful and compassionate interactions between and among administrative staff members, staff and faculty members, and employees and trustees. These interactions are rooted in a shared commitment to the University's mission.

One area missing in the document compiled by Naropa administrators is how it is being implemented in everyday tasks and meetings. The findings of this study serve to fill this

void, and suggestions are offered for comprehensive application. The potential for transferability to other settings is strong and is addressed later in this article. David shared his belief that contemplative administration at Naropa is “a pretty phenomenal concept when we manage to pull it off, which is frequently. I think it is a fabulous concept that could be used in any organization, certainly in other college or academic situations” (Personal interview, August 25, 2009). His statement demonstrates the power of the approach.

In *The Path of Contemplative Administration* (Boyle et al. 2003) five themes were identified as central to contemplative administration: openness, clarity of intellect, appreciation and gratitude, communication and relationship, and effective action. In conducting the research and analyzing the data, however, there were other themes that rang strongly through each interview. These were respect, individual strengths and weaknesses, stillness, and bringing your whole self to work. These are discussed in the following sections.

Respect

Having respect for self, co-workers, and the university is a theme that resonated strongly with each person interviewed. Davia Mae said “it always feels like we can pull each other aside and have a conversation or just be really vulnerable” (Personal interview, June 23, 2009). Being open to others’ histories and personal situations was viewed as being critical to building and maintaining respect. David commented:

There is a real sense of appreciating peoples’ experiences of who they are and what is going on in their life...This whole concept of respect, where we actually feel safe to acknowledge what one is feeling, is huge. It’s safe to acknowledge one’s frustrations and those can be acknowledged by others, and that we can actually take time to do that. All of this is novel in the workplace. (Personal interview, August 25, 2009)

Respect is emphasized in the orientation process as an integral quality of Naropa’s workplace culture, and it manifests itself in all interactions. Davia Mae stated, “There is something about just sitting down with each other and hashing out ideas, not knowing answers....It evens the playing field” (Personal interview, June 23, 2009). When there is a miscommunication, hurt feelings, or divisiveness between staff, there is a shared commitment to sitting down and talking with each other. These incidents happen in every workplace, in every institution; yet the difference at Naropa is the intent given to resolving difficulty and the mutual agreement amongst staff members and administrators to do so. The qualities of compassion, respect, and openness to others come fully into play in a conscious attempt to acknowledge and decrease conflict.

Another aspect of respect that all persons actively seek to practice is to remind themselves continually that, while they may have power and authority over others, this does not mean that they have the right to wield this power selfishly. Alma said, “I don’t have all the answers. I have to keep learning and being able to hear feedback and take it myself and at the same time hold the space of a meeting” (Personal interview, July 31, 2009).

Inner Qualities and Outer Actions

The interplay between administrators’ awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses and how these affect their actions is a strong theme in the interviews. Having a personal connection to spirituality is highly valued at Naropa as part of having a strong self identity,

though this can take myriad forms. Some people prefer to meditate every day, and some find nurturance in nature while others find their joy in family interactions or artistic expressions. Other qualities of personal significance that participants spoke of include the ability to recognize and admit mistakes, communicating openly with co-workers, being able to ask for support, and being able to offer support.

Laura R. said both educators and administrators who wish to see social change in the world “need to have a sense of self, need to understand the relationship between the inner and the outer. Between being out there and interacting with people but also to know one’s place in the world” (Personal interview, June 12, 2009). Recognizing one’s own positive inner qualities and putting philosophical ideals into concrete application is the only way change, whether personal, institutional, or global, can be effectively and permanently achieved.

Moments of Stillness/Reflection/Contemplation

Each person interviewed spoke of the importance of incorporating what Laura R. called moments of stillness into meetings and interactions and bringing self-reflection or contemplation into every interaction. Davia Mae explained:

Whenever things feel heated or nerve-wracking, or overwhelming, or my desk is too full of paper, just come back to the moment. You can get through the next moment, you can be in this moment now, instead of letting the overwhelm [*sic*] get to you. (Personal interview, June 23, 2009)

Laura R. also spoke of the importance of bringing stillness into her workday as a department head:

Being as much as I can a contemplative administrator also allows me to just take a step or two back from the chaos of the day. To really focus on myself and just calm down, to look at things more openly and more carefully. And not just get stuck with “I have to do this.” It allows me to pull back and look at things in a different way. (Personal interview, June 12, 2009)

Each meeting at Naropa is opened and concluded with the practice of the Warrior’s Bow, which will be discussed later in greater detail, by which the participants in a meeting take a few moments to still their minds and bow respectfully to each other. “Just those few moments of reverence really set the tone for the discussion that is going to take place....To be in the moment of what is being discussed. And treat others with the utmost respect and dignity” (Laura R., personal interview, June 12, 2009). Inviting silence into the group offers a brief respite from the mind’s tendency to always think about what needs to be done next and simply focus on the people and conversation at hand.

Inviting the Whole Person into the Workplace

Another unique quality of contemplative administration is that it intentionally invites employees to bring their whole selves into the workplace and not rigidly separate home life from work life. The outcome of this integration is a sense of satisfaction and continuity between personal and professional identities. Alma explained this attitude as follows:

There are often times you hear new folks say how much they appreciate being able to bring themselves into the work place. That it’s not that you leave whatever is

happening in our life [*sic*] when you come in. We don't have to shut all that off to come in and just be at work. There is a real sense of appreciating peoples' experiences of who they are and what is going on in their life. (Personal interview, July 31, 2009)

David stated that this invitation to be present fully is “refreshing, it feels much more like we are each a whole person, and we can bring all of our selves to work. It is a safe environment” (Personal interview, August 25, 2009). His perspective is especially powerful here as he had worked in more traditional university settings for many years. When he came to Naropa, he experienced firsthand the differences between a traditional approach to administration and a contemplative one.

Discipline

Discipline is a word utilized often in higher education, usually alluding to specific areas of study. There are the disciplines of philosophy, language, and biology to name a few, each with its own history, theories, and applications. After interviewing personnel affiliated with Naropa, I wondered if higher education administration, with its own history, guidelines, and analytical skills, should not also be considered a discipline. This word came up often in the interviews, more in the context of self-awareness and interactions with others; yet it prompted a deeper question as to the role and identity of administration. Jane shared the following thoughts:

My aspiration is to bring whatever I'm doing to the spiritual path, and so to be mindful, to be open to what's hard, to let it all be grist for that work....Making the commitment in our work together to not shy away from what is difficult, and at the same time come to it with compassion, and with openness to the other person's humanity. It's challenging. (Personal interview, August 4, 2009)

All those interviewed spoke about how it is a rigorous process to engage fully at work and be expected to have an authentic presence. Earlier it was acknowledged that the path of contemplative administration is not all love and light but includes a discipline of self in terms of words spoken, tone of voice, and behaviors. *The Path of Contemplative Administration* (Boyle et al. 2003) also reveals how each quality valued in this approach to administration has a positive as well as neurotic expression. For example, the quality of openness can enable staff “to see things as they are and work with whatever arises in our direct experience, including our own state of mind [or can turn] to ignorance, actively ignoring, numbness, ... and confusion” (Boyle et al. 2003, p. 9). With disciplined determination to avoid neurotic or negative expressions, the work environment becomes a safer place and the administration becomes “genuinely responsive to the students, faculty, staff, and community whom it serves” (Boyle et al. 2003, p. 9).

This acknowledgement of neurotic tendencies as natural components of every person is part of what separates this path from many others that simply emphasize good communication, being nice, and having respect. It offers a language and space for staff to identify and speak up when disrespectful or destructive behaviors manifest themselves, and it encourages a reorientation to the mission driven values of the university.

Connection to the University's Mission

Naropa has a unique mission which incorporates self-reflection, awareness of interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics, and a commitment to service in the world (*Naropa Mission*

Statement, n. d.). Working within an administrative unit can sometimes lead to a feeling of disconnect between faculty members and staff (Rendón 2009), yet Naropa strives to bridge this division through an actively shared commitment to the mission. Jane explained:

The vision is for this to be a process of bringing mindfulness and clarity and intention into how the administrative departments are working and how we are collectively assessing what is happening, and making plans and setting intentions for going forward. (Personal interview, August 4, 2009)

Suggestions for Practice

Imbedded within the structure of Naropa's administration, there are specific practices and protocols that are followed. These practices and protocols provide a foundation for the application, nurturance, and sustainability of contemplative administration; and they can be applied by individuals as well as faculty development or upper administrative professionals at other institutions. These include meeting guidelines, the Warriors Bow, fostering community, an active commitment to well-being and personal reflection, and shared dedication to the institutional mission statement. One can argue these rituals are specific only to Naropa due to its unique mission; yet each, once stripped of potentially foreign concepts or language (for example contemplation, Buddhism, or meditation), can be generalized to other institutions.

Meeting Guidelines

Each participant described in various levels of detail their appreciation for how meetings are conducted. Guidelines for meetings are part of the institutional culture and followed by every department. The following describes the traditional conduct of meetings at Naropa, and I encourage faculty leaders and administrative supervisors to consider replication at their own institutions.

How a room is set up is carefully considered before each meeting or event. Is there enough natural light? Are refreshments available (each faculty meeting I attended at Naropa had water and snacks)? Whenever possible, a circle of chairs is formed to facilitate eye contact and open communication. Those setting up a room ask themselves what else can be done to enhance the discussions and training to follow.

Within the meeting format each administrative department sets its own parameters for conduct and has the flexibility to re-visit and re-shape these as needed. One purpose of having these parameters is to create a sense of safety so that employees feel they can bring their whole selves into the meeting. With this grounding the leaders of the meetings can periodically review with the group how meetings are run and solicit changes in protocols. For example, the order of items can change; training in deep listening, continuous feedback, and transparent communication can be introduced; or a sharing of personal life events can be expanded from one minute per person to three minutes per person with time allowed for responses from other group members. Laura R. spoke of a trustee meeting in which more time was allowed for getting caught up on each other's lives, and one trustee spoke of the difficult time he was experiencing in his life. Other members were able to offer support and affirmation; the rest of the meeting had a different tone, one of deepened respect and greater care in responses to each other.

Another example was offered by Jane, who related how a meeting about budget cuts became very heated. One person's emotions became inflamed, and others became agitated as a result of her outburst. People began talking over each other, no one listened to each

other, and there was a marked level of frustration evident when the meeting ended. Jane and two other people who had attended talked about what had happened and formulated guidelines to be enforced when a meeting is either anticipated to become emotional or becomes so while being conducted. A time out is called by the facilitator who then reminds the group of conduct parameters. After a brief period of silence, participants are asked to raise their hand to speak and wait two to three seconds after being called upon to begin speaking. This insertion of silence draws from the practice of meditation and has clear benefits:

It can help open up and lengthen that miniscule little gap between the initial thought, the initial flash of feeling, the initial impulse to do something, and the expression of it. It can help to create a little more space in there, which can shift how things go. When things are difficult or hot that can help. (Jane, personal interview, August 4, 2009)

All interviewees expressed an appreciation for these moments of stillness, whether inserted into the middle of a meeting or implemented at the beginning. Taking even 20–30 seconds to quietly sit together quietly can have a profound bonding effect and help calm emotions, focus thoughts, and bring each person more fully into the meeting. A group facilitator or department chairperson could introduce this practice, or an individual can practice it privately before each meeting.

Warriors Bow

The practice of the Warriors Bow is an integral part of the culture at Naropa; this may be difficult to introduce at other institutions, but the essence of this practice has merit. The bow is completed at the beginning and end of every meeting to symbolize respect, bring a few moments of self-reflection, and through the silence enable participants to listen to each other more fully. This bow is used at Naropa to open and close class sessions and meetings, whether faculty, staff, supervision, or advising. The bow is a way of acknowledging and honoring the qualities of warriorship. By this I do not mean aggression or warfare (which usually come from a place of fear), but rather the quality of bravery. Through the bow participants honor the inherent bravery, gentleness, and wakeful intelligence each of us has and can share. In the educational setting the bow is a way to acknowledge our desire to cultivate these qualities and bring them to fuller expression (Berliner, n. d.).

For David completing the Warrior's Bow is a powerful embodiment of respect. He explained how the bow is practiced frequently in his Department of Human Resources:

We talk a lot about this during new employee orientation, to show respect for each other in the room, to show respect for the very moment we're in, to help us clear our thoughts from some other meeting we just came from, or what's happening later in the day, and also to show respect for the institution. (David, personal interview, August 25, 2009)

One way to transfer it comfortably to another setting might be simply to call the Warrior's Bow a bow and introduce it as such.

Fostering Community

Three years ago Naropa implemented a practice of blocking an hour and a half every Wednesday during which time no classes or meetings were scheduled. This time is for

faculty members, students, administrators, and staff to come together. Any department or student group can request time to present, perform, provide a campus-wide event, or hold a meeting on a topic. Using time in ways inclusive of all members of the campus community creates a stronger sense of community within the university. A faculty development professional could suggest this as an institution-wide event or, in a large university, use the time to hold open departmental meetings with students, staff, and faculty encouraged to attend.

Commitment to Well-Being

A commitment to the well-being of each individual is a central tenet of Naropa's administrative philosophy, and that means each person is encouraged to achieve a healthy balance of work and personal life in order to increase overall well-being. Individuals can make this commitment, but a college or university could also do so. Promoting health fairs for employees, offering seminars on how to reduce stress and balance personal and professional demands, giving paid time off for well-being and not just illness, and teaching staff how to find meaningful ways to renew their energy and maintain good health are a few ways to do this.

Shared Dedication to the Mission Statement

Those who work at Naropa share a strong dedication to its mission and overall values. Other institutions have positive and motivational mission statements; yet these may not be brought into the everyday lives of administrative personnel. Focusing on the mission statement is a cost-effective and powerful way to strengthen staff loyalty and communication. Team leaders could do any or all of the following: consider one aspect of the mission statement each month; have staff sign up to bring in their thoughts or short readings that enhance understanding of the mission; and promote conversations, either in small groups, dyads, or triads, about how the mission statement affects the lives of those who work there.

Personal Reflection

At Naropa each staff member is supported in their personal reflection practice, whatever form that may take. Time is occasionally set aside in meetings for silent contemplation or writing that is not shared with the group as a way to deepen a staff member's understanding of who they are as an employee, what their strengths are, and in what areas they might improve. This may seem to take more time than many meeting facilitators are willing to give; yet, when agendas are tight, even 30 seconds can suffice. This is another practice that could be implemented by a supervisor or meeting facilitator at any institution. Perhaps it could be termed a time for "gathering your thoughts" or, more simply, a brief period of silence. Incorporating this type of reflection can lead to staff feeling more understood and appreciated and promote in-depth discussions about job fulfillment.

Conclusion

The application of contemplative administration principles leads to outcomes that can have significance for any administration, on any campus. Laura R. provided encouraging words to those interested in applying a contemplative approach to their personal and work lives:

“Practice what you believe in, take the risks, be courageous, be loving, be compassionate. And through these behaviors we can create that tipping point where more and more of us are going to join in” (Personal interview, June 12, 2009).

It is my hope that this case study creates awareness of the potential benefits to bringing contemplative practices into the workplace. Doing so can lead to enhanced communication, increased dedication to the institution, and a greater sense of purpose in the administration of higher education.

Acknowledgments I am grateful to Drs. Katrina Rodriguez and Jana Schwartz at the University of Northern Colorado for their unwavering support and contributions to this article.

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