



Garrison Institute Report

Envisioning the Future of Contemplative Education

An Education Leadership Forum
convened by the Garrison Institute's
Initiative on Contemplation and Education

October 22-24, 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2004 the Garrison Institute has documented pioneering work in Contemplative Education and has convened a series of six symposia and expert forums focused on key issues in the field. Building on this strong foundation, the leadership forum brought together 20 leaders in K - 12 education including school administrators, academic researchers, teacher educators, educational psychologists, developmental scientists and education funders to explore the avenues by which contemplative wisdom can impact educational reform at three levels:

1. As a catalyst for change in educational policy
2. As a means to improving educational environments by enhancing teachers' ability to provide social, emotional, and instructional support
3. As both a curricular subject and a method of enhancing curricular content

The meeting was co-chaired by Mark Greenberg, director of Penn State's Center for Prevention Research and chair of the Garrison Institute education leadership council; Patricia (Tish) Jennings, director of the Garrison Institute Initiative on Contemplative Education (ICE); and David Rome, Garrison Institute senior fellow. It was facilitated by Art Kleiner.

This gathering was an effort to render visible an emerging field or body of work, provisionally called Contemplative Education (CE), that up to now has mostly consisted of isolated efforts by individuals operating "below the radar" and lacking a sense of collegial community. The identity and scope of Contemplative Education as a field is not yet clear. Indeed, some would not define it as a field at all, preferring to see it as a collection of related methodologies or as a component of a broader field such as Social Emotional Learning. In many ways the meeting itself exemplified the practice of self-awareness that Contemplative Education seeks to bring into mainstream education, representing the efforts of an emergent field or body of methodology to become aware of itself.

ABOUT THE GARRISON INSTITUTE

Founded in 2003, the Garrison Institute is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization exploring the intersection of contemplation and engaged action in the world.

Our mission is to apply the transformative power of contemplation to today's pressing social and environmental problems, helping build a more compassionate, resilient future.

We envision a future in which contemplative methods are widely used to cultivate insight, caring, ethical behavior and courage in individuals, contributing to much-needed value shifts and positive changes in society.

THE NEED

David Rome welcomed participants and gave a brief review of the Institute's work over the past four years. He introduced the general theme of the forum with a quote from *The Mindful Brain* by Daniel Siegel:

So much of school experience focuses on acquisition of important skills and knowledge regarding the outer world. We learn to read, to write, to calculate numbers. Perhaps this approach stems from our educational system's emphasis on a curriculum of content rather than one that focuses on the process of cultivating the mind itself. Wouldn't it make sense to teach children about the mind itself and make reflection become a fundamental part of basic education? If teachers became aware that attuning to the self, being mindful, can alter the brain's ability to create flexibility and self-observation, empathy and morality, wouldn't it be worth the time to teach such reflective skills, first to teachers and then in age appropriate ways to the students themselves?

Mark Greenberg introduced the need for Contemplative Education at this time with the observation, "We're in the age of the whole child left behind." Schooling has become central to our society in a way that it never was even 40 or 50 years ago. For many it is the only socializing institution that can impart the kind of long-term values and goals that family, church and community used to.

At the same time, schools are being undermined in their ability to provide this socialization function. Teachers' confidence is under assault and there is a severe manpower problem, with the dropout rate of teachers almost as high as that of urban children. And far too many children are being lost—40 to 50 percent in most urban schools do not graduate high school.

Mark cited the work he and other participants have been doing for a long time in social-emotional learning and trial studies that have proved its effectiveness. Social-emotional learning is now an accepted and broadly used term. But there is something further that hasn't been achieved yet: how to bring the deeper parts of inner life into schools, not only to children, but to teachers and parents, in a way that is not threatening but rather brings people closer together in caring communities.

Contemplative practices help people come to the core of what it means to be human, facilitating the insight that other people are more similar to ourselves than different. This insight leads naturally to a sense of togetherness and compassion for others' suffering.

In her opening remarks Tish Jennings drew attention to three important components of the contemplative life. The one that most people think of is contemplative practice—meditation, prayer, mindful walking, etc. But practice by itself doesn't achieve what Contemplative Education is fully about. There also has to be a mindset, a philosophy, a meaning context to the practice. Beyond that there has to be community, a shared sense of connectedness and interdependence.

Tish also defined three levels of work in the field. At the macro level there are people like Peter Senge who are using contemplative means to facilitate reform at the policy level by bringing key stakeholders together. At the micro level the questions center on the developmental needs and faculties that children have, and how contemplative methods can be applied in educational settings in developmentally appropriate ways. Finally, there is a "transactional" level, which is the level of the teacher. How does the macro level get to the transactional level? We need teachers and principals and people who are contemplative practitioners who can bring these ideas into practice.

STATE OF THE FIELD

Surveying the topology of this new field, there are more unexplored areas than explored ones. Research is in its infancy. Model programs exist but are not connected to the elements that comprise a recognizable field such as shared identity and knowledge base, leadership, resources, infrastructure for collaboration and systemic support.

Along with the question of whether Contemplative Education is a field per se, there are questions of how it relates with existing fields and trends in education and culture. Two of the most frequently cited of those are the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) movement and various efforts to integrate spirituality into mainstream education without running afoul of church-state issues.

There are a multitude of strategic questions. Where can Contemplative Education gain leverage on the existing landscape? Should it attempt to fly above or below the radar? Should it focus on constituencies that are already inclined in the direction of Contemplative Education or take on the system as a whole?

Questions of framing and languaging resurfaced throughout the forum and were discussed at length, suggesting that this is a critical area for further work at this time. It was noted that we should avoid making any “premature cognitive commitments” and should be open to utilizing a broader vocabulary for new and different ways of describing the work. Several participants suggested that public health and wellness may be a more effective—and more fundable—policy framework than education for introducing contemplation into schools, or should be used in combination with education. Tying Contemplative Education to improvements in academic achievement was suggested as politically advantageous, but it was also noted that there is little evidence at this time to link the two. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has addressed this issue by revising its definition of school success to include indicators like classroom engagement and students’ sense of being cared for by teachers. One participant expressed apprehension that in the prevailing political climate the desired outcomes would be reduced to test score results.

There was a divide between those who felt that reference to spirituality, whether explicit or implied, should be avoided altogether and those that felt a strong need to find ways to discuss inner life and meaning outside the context of religious belief. Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner were cited as models for the latter. One participant objected to the word

“contemplative” itself, suggesting that “inner life” better describes the range of the field; another referred to Daniel Siegel's preference for the word “reflective.” One participant emphasized the need to be careful not to proselytize but rather to invite schools as co-creators. However, there is a delicate balance between not transgressing boundaries out of respect or concern and finding words that truly communicate what we are about.

In differentiating Contemplative Education from Social Emotional Learning it was suggested that CE seeks to inculcate “deeper virtues” that can move the trajectory of society away from aggression. The importance of cultural changes among teachers and other adult stakeholders was emphasized. A participant from a large urban school system described a process in which some school cultures had evolved from hierarchical to interdependent. The role of teachers was critical in this evolution. In the typical environment of hierarchy and control, students are kept in highly dependent roles. But when teachers shifted to a more interdependent way of interacting with students and families, the students were empowered to find new ways of being and thinking and caring about others.

Mark Greenberg put forward a two-part framework for understanding the “value-added” of CE that differentiates it from SEL as conventionally understood. The first part relates to *orientation*. In CE this includes:

1. a greater focus on adults and on the embodiment of an already implicit ethical framework
2. a worldview based on interdependence
3. a view of “basic humanness” that elicits compassion for all people regardless of differences

The second part concerns the acquisition of specific *skills*. These begin with the ability to voluntarily shift and sustain one’s focus of attention. As William James said, “The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again is the very root of judgment, character and will. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.” Second is the ability to have awareness vs. automaticity of thought, which is the mental skill of meta-cognition, the ability to reflect on cognition. This includes emotions and the understanding that emotions are something to be aware of but are impermanent experiences—like thoughts, insubstantial.

Two other aspects of contemplative skills acquisition are the idea of attaining wisdom as an antidote to suffering and the cultivation of positive affect. The Dalai Lama talks about how the mind is like a muscle—the more it lies in certain states, the more it will seek them.

NEXT STEPS

Four broad areas emerged that the Garrison Institute and the field should focus on going forward:

1) Convening people to develop networks and ideas

There is need for ongoing expert forums and public symposia with a broader range of reputable presenters. In particular, classroom teachers, contemplatives and younger stakeholders should be included. The Garrison Institute can play an important role here. These gatherings should foster the creation of a network that connects researchers with the people who are doing the work. Face-to-face encounters can serve to develop a foundation of personal relationships that can then be extended in virtual environments. The Garrison Institute is currently upgrading its web and staffing capacity to provide a hub for interactive communications and document sharing within a Contemplative Education learning community.

This forum was exploratory and did not intend to reach conclusions. Future gatherings should plan for more concrete outcomes. A number of topics for the future were mentioned. Mindful parenting was discussed in some detail, with suggested resources for a forum on this topic including Daniel Siegel's *Parenting from the Inside Out*, Tobin Hart's *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*, Robert Coles' *The Spiritual Life of Children*, and a new conceptual model of mindful parenting (Duncan, Coatsworth and Greenberg, 2009).

There was also a call for gatherings that would focus on the work of key CE program developers and implementers such as Rachel Kessler, Tobin Hart and Pamela Siegle. Along similar lines, a forum devoted to presenting several different contemplative practices and examining their similarities and differences was proposed.

A further theme is defining the scope of Contemplative Education—does it include movement practices like yoga and chi gong, art-making and art appreciation, nature observation, etc? Or is it more a question of the quality of intention and attention brought to activities of all sorts? Also questions of context—should contemplative practices be presented as

autonomous mind-training methods or should they be introduced within an explicit philosophy, worldview and/or ethical framework?

In general, there needs to be a lot more exchange among both researchers and practitioners. They should attend the meetings of others engaged in similar work. Evidence-based practices should be showcased.

2) A broad research agenda

As noted earlier, there is a paucity of scientific evidence regarding Contemplative Education. CASEL has relied on science-based evidence to undergird advocacy for policy changes. There needs to be research on a range of specific contemplative interventions, distinct from SEL interventions. When possible, sub-components should be isolated and measured to determine which aspects of contemplative training are most effective in achieving desired outcomes.

Contemplative applications for teachers, children and parents should be systematically studied. The developmental needs of children should be studied in relation to different methodologies. Likewise, the personal and professional developmental needs of adults—teachers, educational administrators and parents—should be examined. It was suggested to approach the New York City Department of Education and teachers' unions to test programs that could improve teacher wellness and lower illness, staff stress and sick days.

Research on interventions oriented to parents was discussed. This will call upon researchers to be sensitive to family nuances and the privacy of homes as well as to language and culture. A number of contemplation-oriented parenting programs were mentioned including *Mindful Parenting* in Australia, *Minding the Baby* in New Haven with inner-city African-American parents, a mindfulness-based version of *Strengthening Families* recently studied at Penn State, the use of Angeles Arrien's "four universal healing salves" (singing, dancing, storytelling and silence) with families, *EPIC (Every Person Influences Children)* and programs currently being developed by Mark Greenberg, Linda Lantieri and Marc Brackett.

3) Deeper study of practices

There is a need to develop a framework for the study of contemplative practices within the educational context. Adult practices cannot be applied wholesale to children. They may not be appropriate for children at all since they are rarely found applied to children in cultures from where they originate. The assumption some are currently making that

secularized contemplative programs designed for adult clinical populations can be directly applied to youth in educational contexts is especially problematic. On the other hand, there was support for some form of contemplative interventions in early education—things as simple as having children pause before giving a response—to build up self-regulatory capacity. Both the developmental stage of the child and the nature of the classroom context bring important considerations to any contemplative practice.

There are developmentally appropriate contemplative practices deserving of study that have been used in alternative educational settings with great success (Montessori, Waldorf, Friends, etc.). Many of these employ sensory modalities and movement including art, dance, music, etc. Before a section studying fish, for example, children might gather around an aquarium or fishbowl and observe in silence, attending with all of their senses alert. These alternative educational systems also bring contemplation into the way that teachers teach, helping to make traditional lessons more contemplative experiences and thereby enhancing attention and learning.

4) Communications and research on language use and people's understanding of key terms

One goal is to develop an “elevator speech” that can quickly convey the essence of Contemplative Education to non-initiates. This may involve doing focus groups with administrators, teachers, parents, business leaders, congressional aides, etc. The Frameworks Institute and the Communications Consortium Media Center were mentioned as groups with expertise in framing and languaging in the social change sector. *The Political Brain* by Drew Westen and the work of George Lakoff were recommended. This might be an area in which the Contemplative Education and Social Emotional Learning fields can share costs since they have overlapping concerns. Languaging in the new field of “positive psychology” may be relevant.

In addressing communications questions, we must first ask, “Where are the leverage points in building this field?” Different constituencies such as educators and health practitioners respond to different languages. Also, different choices may result if we are trying to address the general public, school boards, specific opinion leaders or “early adopters,” and we need a vocabulary that is welcoming of different faith traditions. Last but not least, languaging issues for children and adolescents should be considered.

There is need for a general statement characterizing what is meant by Contemplative Education—what it is and what it is not. Some participants felt such a statement should be written and disseminated soon, while others saw that as premature. Certainly articles and other media presentations presenting facets of CE to a wider audience should be encouraged.

CONCLUSION

There was broad consensus among participants on the need for additional research, expert forums and open symposia. “Mindful parenting” was highlighted as an area needing more attention. Additional topics should be generated and prioritized. The need for careful consideration of strategic framing and languaging emerged clearly. A concrete plan to address this area should be developed, perhaps under the guidance of an ad hoc committee drawn from forum participants. The Garrison Institute can make an important contribution by serving as an information and communications hub as the field of Contemplative Education grows and attracts a broader range of stakeholders.

In sum, there is much significant and exciting work to be done. The challenge will be to sustain the right balance among convening meetings, doing scientific research, theory development, policy development, experimenting with methods, rigorous program evaluation and communicating to the public.

May 4, 2009

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS

Lawrence Aber is a Professor of Applied Psychology and Public Policy at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, New York University, where he also serves as board chair of its new Institute for Human Development and Social Change. Dr. Aber is an internationally recognized expert in child development and social policy and recently co-edited *Child Development and Social Policy: Knowledge for Action* (2007, APA Publications). His basic research examines the influence of poverty and violence, at the family and community levels, on the social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive and academic development of children and youth.

Clancy Blair earned his doctorate in developmental psychology and a Masters degree in public health from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 1996. He is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Penn State University. His primary research interest concerns the development of various aspects of self-regulation in young children, particularly children from low-income homes.

Brenda Anita Boyd-Bell is President of Chrysallis Empowerment and Transformation, a professional consulting firm that provides specialized curriculum design for academic and human relations programs and individual and group counseling strategies that uniquely assist in shifting both individual and organizational paradigms. Dr. Boyd-Bell is also a major contributor to the enhancement of educational and faith-based organizations in her home community of Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn, New York, and has served as a secondary school English teacher with the New York City Department of Education and a tenured professor with the City University of New York.

Bob Dandrew is executive director of the NoVo Foundation, a private foundation based in New York City. NoVo is committed to a paradigm shift in global society, moving from a culture of domination and subordination to partnership and collaboration. NoVo has granted more than \$54 million in 2008 toward its four initiative areas: ending violence against women and girls, leadership development, social emotional learning, and economic empowerment for girls in the developing world. Prior to joining NoVo, he was Director of Philanthropic Services at the Rudolf Steiner Foundation (RSF), a \$100 million public charity.

Adele Diamond is the Canada Research Chair Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of British Columbia. She is one of the pioneers of the field of "developmental cognitive neuroscience." Dr. Diamond studies the development of the prefrontal cortex and the cognitive abilities that depend on this brain area, such as planning, cognitive flexibility, abstract thinking, rule acquisition, initiating appropriate actions and inhibiting inappropriate actions, and selecting and

attending to relevant sensory information. Her earlier work changed medical practice worldwide for the treatment of PKU (phenylketonuria), improving children's lives, and her current work on early education practices that improve executive functions is affecting school curricula around the world.

Charles Elbot is founder and director of the Office of Intentional School Culture in Denver Public Schools. He has been a principal in public and independent schools, including Slavens School, a K-8 Denver public school which in 2001 was honored as one of eight "National Schools of Character" and recognized for its extraordinary student academic achievement. Charles has shared his ideas with other schools in Denver and around the country, and was invited by the New Zealand government to share these approaches with educators in New Zealand. He is co-author of *Building an Intentional School Culture: Excellence in Academics and Character*.

Katherine Fox currently supervises pre-service student teachers at Pennsylvania State University. Additionally, she is a mentor to first-year principals in the Principals' Leadership Network for the Pennsylvania Department of Education. She began her career in New York as a Head Start teacher prior to becoming a Title I math and kindergarten teacher in the Lynbrook Public schools. For the last ten years of her career in Lynbrook, she was Principal of the Lynbrook Kindergarten Center. During this time she founded the Early Childhood Educators Group for administrators of Early Childhood Education Centers on Long Island.

Mark Greenberg holds The Bennett Endowed Chair in Prevention Research in Penn State's College of Health and Human Development. He is currently the Director of the Prevention Research Center for the Promotion of Human Development and the Associate Director for the Penn State Consortium on Children, Youth and Families. Since 1981, Dr. Greenberg has been examining the effectiveness of school-based curricula (The PATHS Curriculum) to improve the social, emotional, and cognitive competence of elementary-aged children. His research has focused on the role of individual, family, and community-level factors in prevention.

Patricia (Tish) Jennings is the Director of the Initiative on Contemplation and Education at the Garrison Institute, as well as a Research Associate with the Prevention Research Center at Penn State University. Dr. Jennings directed the Cultivating Emotional Balance (CEB) Project, a randomized controlled clinical trial to assess the effectiveness of the CEB training. As a faculty researcher with the Department of Child and Adolescent Development at San Francisco State University, she was the principal investigator on a study with Head Start teachers to determine whether the improvements in teachers' well-being resulting from CEB may translate into improved teacher-student relationships, increased student pro-social behavior, and a more positive classroom atmosphere. In addition to her psychological research, Dr. Jennings also has extensive research and teaching experience in the field of education.

Art Kleiner (*forum facilitator*) is the editor-in-chief of strategy+business, a long-standing management writer (his books include *Who Really Matters?* and *The Age of Heretics*), a scenario planning practitioner and educator since 1991 (at New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program and elsewhere), and the former editorial director of *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* series.

Linda Lantieri serves as the Director of The Inner Resilience Program which equips school personnel with the skills and strategies to strengthen their inner lives in order to model these skills for the young people in their care. Linda is also one of the founding board members of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). She has 40 years of experience in education as a former teacher and director of a middle school in East Harlem, and faculty member at Hunter College in New York City. She is the coauthor of *Waging Peace in Our Schools* (Beacon Press, 1996) editor of *Schools with Spirit: Nurturing the Inner Lives of Children and Teachers* (Beacon Press, 2001), and author of *Building Emotional Intelligence: Techniques to Cultivate Inner Strength in Children* (Sounds True, 2008).

MAK Mitchell is currently the Director of Policy and Planning for the 500 Empowerment Schools, a public school support organization in New York City. Previously, she served as Executive Director of Urban Assembly, an intermediary with 19 schools. There she led the formation of new schools and the instructional development of principals, and co-designed a major periodic assessment initiative jointly funded by Gates and DOE. In addition to her work in New York City, Ms. Mitchell has experience as a change consultant and a Superintendent in Seattle, and as an Area Principle and founder of a high school for Eskimo students in Alaska.

Craig Richards is Professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University where he has taught and conducted research for the past twenty years. He is author and coauthor of several books and numerous research publications. He is the founder and director of the Summer Principals Academy (SPA), an intensive principal preparation program dedicated to preparing committed, competent and highly self-aware school leaders. He is currently working on a book manuscript for publication entitled *A Pedagogy of the Self*.

Elizabeth Robertson has been with the National Institute on Drug Abuse since 1995 and has been the Chief of the Prevention Research Branch since 1997. Since becoming the Chief of NIDA's Prevention Research Branch, Dr. Robertson has broadened the Branch mission of preventing drug abuse and drug-related HIV infection to include a developmental focus from early childhood through adulthood in multiple contexts such as the family, community, social service and clinical settings, and the media.

David I. Rome is a Senior Fellow at the Garrison Institute developing innovative contemplation-based programming and advising the program initiatives in education, trauma, and ecology. A Buddhist practitioner since 1971, he has brought together mindfulness-awareness meditation with the *Focusing* method developed by Eugene Gendlin, Ph.D. at the University of

Chicago in a workshop called *Deep Listening*, which has been presented in the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

Diana Calthorpe Rose is President of the Garrison Institute, which she co-founded in 2002 with her husband Jonathan F.P. Rose. Throughout her professional and philanthropic career she has been committed to building bridges between spirituality and social action. She has served on the boards of several national Buddhist organizations in America and is also President of the Lostand Foundation, a private charitable organization she and her husband founded in 1997 that supports organizations involved in social action, land conservation and sustainable development.

Robert W. Roeser is an Associate Professor of Psychology in the Department of Applied Psychology at Portland State University and the Senior Program Coordinator for the Mind Life Institute. He received his Ph.D. from the Combined Program in Education and Psychology at the University of Michigan and holds master's degrees in religion and psychology, developmental psychology and clinical social work. In 2005 he was a United States Fulbright Scholar in India, and from 1999-2004 he was a William T. Grant Faculty Scholar. Dr. Roeser's recent work has focused on education and immigrant adolescent identity development; education and adolescent identity development in the context of globalization in India and South Africa; and how contemplative education— how practices like yoga and mindfulness meditation can be taught in school settings with the aims of reducing stress, enhancing well-being, strengthening self-regulatory capacity, and cultivating clear and compassionate forms of awareness among educators, staff, and students alike.

Ilene Smith is a nationally known leader in adult learning and group facilitation. She specializes in teacher training and her workshops include topics such as Cultivating Mindfulness, Thinking Like A Genius, and Gender Issues: From The Schoolhouse To The Courthouse. She holds advanced degrees from New York University and New York Medical Colleges and has been a faculty member at SUNY Purchase, York College, and Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

Robin Stern is an author, educator and licensed psychoanalyst who has developed and implemented programs to promote personal and professional growth through self-awareness, emotional competence and ethical leadership. She is on the faculty of Teachers College Columbia University, Hunter College, and The School at Columbia University, where she is a Social-Emotional Learning Specialist and a leadership coach for faculty members. Robin is the co-author of *Understanding Emotions in the Classroom*, and *Emotionally Intelligent School Counseling*. Her book **The Gaslight Effect: How to Spot and Survive the Hidden Manipulation Others Use to Control Your Life** was published by Random House in 2007.

Rona Wilensky is principal and founder of New Vista High School, a small, innovative, public school of choice in Boulder, Colorado. Rona plans to retire at the end of this school year, and become a Resident Fellow at the Spencer

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Foundation in Chicago writing about her experiences and lessons learned. In addition to being a school administrator, Rona is a frequent contributor to the national conversation on high school reform. She holds a PhD in Economics from Yale University. She began a meditation practice four years ago and is a member of the Boulder Shambhala Meditation Center.