

CONTEMPLATIVE EDUCATION NETWORK SECOND VIRTUAL WORKSHOP

APRIL 4, 2025

SUMMARY

PROPOSED DEFINITION OF CONTEMPLATIVE EDUCATION DRAFT 2 (Based on 1/31 Inaugural Workshop Discussion)

“Contemplative Education” is a new branch of the field of Education that considers the philosophies and applies the practices of contemplative studies and traditions.

This leads to the integration of research and a range of contemplative, creative and embodied practices conducive to improved individual awareness and collective learning.

Contemplative Education aims to foster transformative personal growth by cultivating attentional focus, sustained inquiry, and a broader perspective on the various contexts in which one is embedded, including family, schools, communities, society, and nature.

Studies suggest that these approaches encourage an increased curiosity for learning and other-regarding virtues, including humaneness, compassion, and kindness.

Summary of the Discussion at the Second Workshop on the Proposed Definition DRAFT 2:

While most of the commentators appreciated this updated definition, people made the following suggestions for improvements:

1. “Contemplative” needs to be more precisely defined. How?
 - a. Add some examples, e.g., mindfulness, meditation, yoga, qigong, focused listening, etc.
 1. How do contemplation and mindfulness differ? Short answer: “mindfulness” is a practice that centrally involves focusing attention. Contemplation is a much broader idea that includes all practices – such as meditation, qigong, prayer, and yoga – that increase mindfulness in people.
 - b. Contemplative Education includes “non-verbal” and “non-conceptual” knowledge and learning, making CE unique. Something should be said about this.
 - c. Include “reflective” or “reflection” in the definition. “Space for reflection” would make CE more understandable.
 - d. We should be clear about the difference between contemplation and reflection. Reflection is conceptual, and contemplation is non-conceptual. We need to be clear and distinguish them. Some contemplation is reflective, and some is non-reflective.

2. The definition focuses on personal growth and personal qualities. It would be strategic and vital to highlight the cognitive outcomes of CE. Doing this makes the definition an essential tool for stimulating improved learning.
3. This definition would be helpful to people in educational institutions. But it's not the same as "Contemplative Studies." We should be clear about whether CE is an area of CS or an "enhancement program" that is helpful to teachers and students but is 'housed' differently. It would be handy to ask people who are committed members of contemplative communities for their feedback on the definition. Some Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians would find this definition extraordinarily odd and not represent what contemplatives say and do.
4. Interpersonal and intercultural growth could be added in some way.
5. Including "the work environment" more broadly as a context in the third paragraph would be good.
6. Many definitions of Contemplative Studies and CE do not manage to express all the aspects, so there is a need to have several definitions of different lengths and scales.
 - a. It would be great to have a single-sentence definition. And an operational definition with publications. Such an operational definition would include jargon that is only clear by looking at publications. We need to all speak a similar language.
7. The second paragraph is a bit confusing. What does "this [approach]" refer to? Does CE lead to the integration of research into practices – too much going on in the sentence?

PRIORITIES OF CEN

Summary of the Discussions (in 4 breakout rooms) at the Second Workshop on the 4 main priorities of CEN that emerged from the 1/31 Inaugural Workshop Discussion:

1. Further Developing the Network (9 participants)

- How can we connect to already-existing networks with a similar mission? What are the similarities and differences? Do the organizations still exist? Are they active? A long list of these was produced.
- What can we learn from the previous attempts at forming groups and networks? Can we build upon the work of the past? Some were North American centric. Some lost funding. Some weren't clear about CE.
- How would it look to have dues for CE? Seniors could be amenable. Others might not be.
- Could there be regional meetings? CEN could create guidance for emerging regional groups.

- What features could be in the website and on an online platform? What kinds of forums would be useful? What materials? The website could be the base for the network for guidance and networking and sharing challenges. There are challenges to bringing CE platforms into schools, and supporting efficacy.

2. Curriculum Development and Resource Sharing (12 participants)

- How can we share resources and ideas? What's important? How to do it?

- Collect examples of research and an evidence-based perspective. Aware of contradictory results and what is missing so far, to be clear of what we're promoting.

- Should we divide the group based on education levels? We should stay as one group for the time being and collect all the common themes - and then try to divide it up for practical measures.

- How to share resources and what should be good to add to the website? How can we learn from each other's experiences? A form where we can share our own projects? Is it a high bar for people to just jump in and share all our details? Could we start with a call for projects, and later ask for elaboration?

- What should be on the platform? Upcoming projects? Skills? What people have experienced so far? Difficulties faced and provide support for others? Many people don't currently have a network for support.

- It would be nice to have localized places for people to upload published research.

- There is already a wealth of resources available. We could consolidate a library and references that people could share with colleagues.

- Collect knowledge around research, including good practices, evidence, and research.

3. Mentorship and Support Systems (13 participants)

- An informal peer-support group might be needed - effective with minimal structure.

- Creating forum to share problems and concerns and get advice from others.

- Create safe-spaces for educators to discuss challenges.

- Different levels where we should think of mentoring - supporting peers within the network, and outside the communities.

- There is a need for sensitivity to trauma, religious diversity, cultural context, etc. How important is it to be sensitive to religious diversity? Is it an issue or a problem?

- How to document the evidence for the efficacy of CE and mentoring?

- How to balance senior members and younger members?

- How can we share resources, including syllabi and mentoring protocols?

4. Advocacy and Awareness (10 participants)

- Advocacy could and should provide a ground for all CE activities, but it's not there yet.
- We should be aware of safety risks related to CE practices - e.g., how can students be safe in a mainstream academic setting when they are concerned / confused by contemplative practices?
- How can we find a contemplative way of advocacy, to not just add yet-another voice?
- How can CE initiatives be presented without threatening mainstream education systems? Humour? Trickster approaches?
- What goals do we want to see CE fulfil? What is it we are advocating for? How can we make CE more visible, understandable, and researchable?

WHAT'S COMING NEXT

- The next virtual workshop within the CEN initiative will take place on **27 June**.
- Until then, we will **activate working groups** related to the identified priority areas.
- We **invite all interested participants** to actively engage in the working groups if they wish to contribute.