Vice President's for Diversity & Community Initiative  
Evaluation of the Mindfulness into Action Initiative

Background information:

TC sponsored the “Experiencing Diversity at TC study.” Based on data from interviews and focus groups in this study, Mindfulness into Action is an action research initiative addressing assumptions about diversity through cycles of reflection.

At the TC study, the authors describe; a) the “lack of space” to discuss diversity that they found while doing their study (p. 5, Integrated Report 2013); and b) formed assumptions regarding diversity (p. 6, Integrated Report 2013). The authors of this study found that at TC there are few spaces embedded in the structure of the institution to conduct the work of diversity. So, Mindfulness into Action began as an initiative to address these diversity issues from a student perspective with the creation of a “space” for communal understanding of diversity work and shared meaning about what constitutes diversity work. This space is created at weekly meetings applying adult development techniques, like Collaborative Inquiry. Collaborative Inquiry will facilitate inclusivity with a dialogue about diversity and diversity work to address this sense of separation and the silo-ed climate at TC.

The aims for Mindfulness into Action Initiative are: a) to address with participants their “taken for granted assumptions” around the definition of “diversity” and what it means to each of the individuals and the group as a whole; and b) to provide the space to take participants on a journey within to transform underlying assumptions to change individually in order to work collectively.

Description of the Event

Mindfulness into Action is a process where participants meet weekly to do cycles of reflection and application of indigenous traditional practices.

Mindfulness into Action facilitates in participants the identification of taken-for-granted assumptions and stereotypes that allows for a neutral ground where varied perspectives can meet to explore and move beyond the initial positions. New positions allow new solution to make new possibilities for the diversity issues at hand.

Mindfulness into Action starts from the insight that many personal and societal issues occur due to people being unaware of their taken-for-granted assumptions at a subconscious level. Through various cycles of reflection, and application of indigenous traditional practices, Mindfulness into Action helps participants to become more present and aware. It takes them through a process of growing self-awareness and inner transformation. As a result, people are able to tap into various faculties of their conscious mind that are normally inaccessible when a person is in a purely reactive state. Thus, with greater clarity, people can make better decisions for themselves, their families, and society at large.
Number of people in attendance

In order to address the issue of diversity, we do cycles of reflection. We met weekly on Mondays from 4 to 6 pm. At the weekly meeting we do "Collaborative Inquiry." We have around 15-18 people, students at TC and people from the community around Columbia University. But, we have reached over a hundred people in personal conversations and conference presentations about this Initiative. One of the presentations of this Initiative at a high school resulted in the field trip of 15 high school students to TC on May 29th, 2014 (http://www.tc.columbia.edu/i/a/document/32482_Mindfulness-into-Action-May-29-Report.pdf).

Conferences where participants presented or are going to present this Initiative:

1. December 5 -6, 2013 - Presented at the 2013 Workshop on Transforming Humiliation and Violent Conflict representing the 22nd Annual HumanDHS Conference and the 10th Workshop on Transforming Humiliation and Violent Conflict 'The Urgency of Educating for Dignity' held at Teachers College.

2. March 8th - 12th, 2014– Presented at the “23rd Annual Conference of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies 'Returning Dignity” held at the Chiang Mai, Thailand.

3. May 3rd, 2014 – Presented at the “Diversity in Research and Practice” Conference with the theme: Connecting People to Purpose and Practice for Progress” at TC.

4. October 23-26, 2014 – proposal accepted to present at “the 11th International Transformative Learning Conference” to be held at Teachers College. Our proposal was selected, after a three-person review, from 215 submissions from around the world.

5. November 20-21, 2014 – proposal accepted to present at “the 15th Conference on Social and Community Psychology”, to be held at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway.

Evaluation of personal outcomes

In January 2014, OLA began this action research initiative called “Mindfulness into Action”. By using a) Action Inquiry, and b) Collaborative Inquiry through various cycles of reflection, and Indigenous ancient knowledge, help participants to become more present and aware. We do a reflection exercise during the week as pre-work. These aspects, to get participants to actively reflect for 30 seconds every hour for 7 days prior the weekly meetings, and keeping a journal, are essential for building a synchronistic team.

Participants have been asked to read their journals and look for a shift in their perception. When looking at the changes in perception, we found four themes: awareness, observation, belonging and authenticity/transformation. Please see below data from three participants.
As a result of this work, participants wanted to expand our Mindfulness into Action Initiative around the TC community. We decided to do an Independent Research Study of this Initiative.

**Independent Research Study**

We have around 15-18 people, students at TC and people from the community around Columbia University. These students will be asked to participate in the study. Only students who are willing to participate will respond to a pre, during, and post-assessment interview protocol regarding the experience from January to now. As a result of this work, we would like to expand our Mindfulness into Action Initiative. Some participants have connections to high schools, and we will do Mindfulness into Action with students during their after school activities (with the students who are willing to participate). These are new participants we want to recruit.

At TC, we would like to recruit more students to participate. Anyone can participate in Mindfulness into Action without having to participate in the study. This will be included in the Description of the Research section in my informed Consent Form. All participants will be asked to fill up an initial quasi-qualitative survey about “surprise” that would last about one hour. If people are willing to participate in the Mindfulness into Action Initiative, the total time participating in this Initiative will depend on the comfort level and availability time of participants. In May 2015, after they participated in Mindfulness into Action Initiative, they will be asked for a follow-up interview about their participation in the Initiative. This follow up interview will include a pre, during, and post-assessment interview protocol.

The results of this Independent Research Study will be presented at the “11th International Transformative Learning Conference” at TC, and the “15th Conference on Social and Community Psychology” at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Themes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Participant 1</strong></th>
<th><strong>Participant 2</strong></th>
<th><strong>Participant 3</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shift 1</strong></td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Resistance to do reflection exercises</td>
<td>Becoming more aware of my time</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shift 2</strong></td>
<td>Observing</td>
<td>Consciousness</td>
<td>Emotions back to equilibrium</td>
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<td><strong>Shift 3</strong></td>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Synchronicity</td>
<td>Mindfully in action</td>
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<td><strong>Shift 4</strong></td>
<td>Authenticity/Transformation</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Cultivated greater consciousness</td>
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Common themes that have defined our experiences at Mindfulness into Action