

**Logs from the Way Out:**

**Non-Teleological Self-Care for Teaching during Difficult Times**



Image: *The Matrix* (1999)

**Participant: A. Marisa Harris**

Final Project

“John Steinbeck: Social Critic and Ecologist”

NEH Summer Institute

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## Starting Points



- "External reality has a way of being not so external after all."—*John Steinbeck*
- "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it."  
—*attributed to Albert Einstein, physicist*
- "There's a dimension that looks at the universe and just sees it as it is. When you push against somebody, even the subtlest model in your head that they should be different than they are awakens in them at a very subconscious level a pushing back. What does it mean to be a safe space for another human being? That you don't have any agenda. We could say: how do we go behind love and hate, get behind the polarities, and find a place where we merely acknowledge ourselves, where we just allow our humanity."—*Ram Dass, spiritual teacher*
- Sometimes when we attempt to listen to another person, we can't hear them, because we haven't listened to ourselves first. Our own strong emotions and thoughts are crying out so loud for our attention, that we can't hear the other person. Before we listen to someone else, we need to spend time listening to ourselves.—*Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk and peace activist*
- "The most important moment for meditation is the moment you remember to be mindful. The same in a conversation. The most important moment is the moment you remember that you have some tools. In that moment, anything is possible." —*Oren Jay Sofer, meditation teacher*

## Non-Teleological Self-Care for Teaching during Difficult Times

By A. Marisa Harris

### Context

My project is a restorative justice from within, fusing mindfulness and meditation with my professional practice in the classroom. I am new to meditation, and this project is personal. It is not about teaching others mindfulness, but learning about myself through mindfulness.

Post-lockdown, during the tumultuous return to in-person instruction, I was awed to find that the lasting way out of challenging student dynamics and escalating conflicts was *in*. That is, rather than solely looking outward to solve student misconduct—with more restrictions, conversations, hall talks, referrals, and calls home—I also went *inwards*, through meditation, to my inner experience.

As Steinbeck wrote in [Travels with Charley](#), "External reality has a way of being not so external after all." The more internal Spaciousness I had, the fewer external conflicts escalated. It got to the point where some of the usual classroom conflicts simply ceased to be, not because of outer management, but inner Space.

Mindfulness involves close observation of one's experience in the present moment—without judgement and without dualities of good or bad. My project will be about formalizing my own process. Eventually (but not this year), I would like to incorporate mindfulness in my mentoring of new teachers.

### Credits Due

None of this is original.

- This project is based on the work and words of neuroscientists, psychologists, psychotherapists, coaches and spiritual teachers, among them:

*Thich Nhat Hanh, Gabor Mate, Sarah Peyton, Bessel van der Kolk, Thais Gibson, Alan Robarge, Stan Tatkin, John Gottman, Byron Katie, Oren Jay Sofer, Joseph Goldstein, Alexis Santos, Sharon Salzberg, Jeff Warren, Matthew Hepburn, Dick Schwartz, Ed Tronick, Dan Siegel, Deb Dana, Peter Levine, Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, Eckhart Tolle, Ram Dass, Nick Keomahavong*

- For meditations, I use the app Ten Per Cent Happier, created by Dan Harris.
- See also the California-based organization Center for Council, which incorporates mindfulness meditation in police, educator, business, and community training.

## Non-Teleological Self-Care for Teaching during Difficult Times



**Project Objective:** How can mindfulness and meditation impact a teacher's moment-to-moment interactions with students, particularly during conflict?

### Personal Intention-Setting

By allowing my own Self to be, and being with my Self as I am, to thus enable my students to be, and to be with them as they are

### Process

- I. Mindfulness: Attuning in real time to experience what is, as it is
- II. Compassionate Inquiry: Transforming the relationship to one's Inner World
- III. Self-Action: Cultivating response-ability vs. reactivity
- IV. Practicing Presence: Remembering to be here now

### Special Terms

#### Compassionate Inquiry

Self-inquiry to support *reflection*—as opposed to rumination

#### Meditation

Training in awareness while sitting still, walking, or lying down

#### Mindfulness

Non-judgmental awareness in the present moment

#### Spaciousness

Non-reactivity

Capacity to see and be with reality as it is

Presence and Awareness

## Supporting Meditations



*The following are meditations (as titled in the Ten Per Cent Happier meditation app) that have been especially helpful in my personal practice.*

### **I. Mindfulness**

Body Scan  
Ten Good Breaths  
Relax. Allow. Observe.  
It's Okay to Feel This  
Inner and Outer Awareness  
Open Awareness

### **II. Compassionate Inquiry**

Being with Guilt  
Being with Anger  
Being with Anxiety  
Working with Grief  
Being with Sadness  
Forgiveness  
Lovingkindness  
Self-Compassion  
Self-Forgiveness  
Giving a Crap About Yourself  
A Very Simple Meditation

### **III. Self-Action**

Surf the Urge  
Investigating Patterns  
Making Space  
Self-Empathy

### **IV. Practicing Presence**

The ABCs of Emotions  
Being Simplicity  
Containment  
Simply Staying Open  
The World of Sound  
Practicing Joy  
Welcome to the Party  
Contentment  
What's Good?  
Nightly Gratitude

**My Process\***

**Non-Teleological Self-Care for Teaching during Difficult Times**

 <b>I. Mindfulness (DURING)</b>	 <b>II. Compassionate Inquiry (AFTER)</b>	 <b>III. Self-Action (NEXT STEPS)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What am I feeling, emotionally and somatically?</li> <li>-How am I relating to my feelings?</li> <li>-What is the nature of my thoughts?</li> <li>-(How) Can I be with this feeling, emotionally and somatically?</li> <li>-What about this feeling is difficult to be with?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What helped me self-soothe and regulate in the moment?</li> <li>-Why does this situation matter to me?</li> <li>-How am I relating to the situation now?</li> <li>-What am I making this situation mean?/What beliefs am I carrying?</li> <li>-What part of me holds these beliefs? Where do these beliefs come from in my life?</li> <li>-What in me needs/expects the other person or the situation to be a certain way?</li> <li>-What are the roots of this?</li>   <li>-What stories and assumptions was I making in/about this situation?</li> <li>-Can I absolutely know these to be true?</li> <li>-How can I challenge these stories or assumptions?</li> <li>-Who am I with these thoughts, beliefs, stories and assumptions?</li> <li>-Who am I without them?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What feedback is this dynamic or conflict communicating to me about my internal environment (thoughts, needs, values, growth areas)?</li> <li>-What do I need from myself internally?</li> <li>-How can I support myself the next time a similar situation happens?</li>   <li>-Where can I seek external support?</li> <li>-What external changes, protocols can I put into place to support myself in this?</li> <li>-What, if anything, do I want to communicate to others, and how?</li> <li>-What do I want to result from that communication? Why?</li> </ul>
 <b>IV. Practicing Presence (AGAIN AND AGAIN)</b> -How can I be here now?		

\*See credits