MIND-BODY STATE LITERACY: A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH THAT USES MINDFULNESS AND BRAIN LITERACY TO SUPPORT LEARNING AND RELATIONAL NARRATIVE WORK

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Rhetoric and Writing—Doctor of Philosophy

2020

ABSTRACT

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Mind-Body State Literacy: A Pedagogical Approach that uses Mindfulness and Neuroscience to Support Learning and Relational Narrative Work describes the literacies necessary to develop the habits of minds presented in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*: "curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility and metacognition" (WPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011, par. 2). Such habits, because they deal with students' openness in the learning process, are key to students' ability to receive a liberal education. I suggest that before instructors or students can develop these habits, they need to learn to develop an open mind-body state, defined as the ability to let one's narrative incorporate other narratives/perspectives through listening. The Mind-Body State model is comprised of three facets: brainwaves, narratives, and emotions. The Mind-Body State Literacy (MBSL) approach suggests that students develop literacies related to these three facets, drawing primarily from mindfulness practices and philosophies the center the body and compassion. I anchor my presentation of the MBSL by suggesting why it might be especially relevant as students engage in personal narrative writing in the Rhetoric and Writing classroom.

For Mom and Eleanor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To My Parents: I am first and foremost grateful to my mothers, who have supported me in every way possible in the process of writing this dissertation, in my pursuit of higher education, and in life. *Mom and Eleanor*, you have given to me so openly and lovingly. You have been constant sources of guidance and wisdom. *Mom*, without you, none of this would have been possible. You showed me how to transform a painful journey into something that gives back to help others. You introduced me to mindfulness and neurofeedback. You've taught me how to think deeply about the world, my relationships, and myself. Your intellect, drive, wisdom, and love have opened doors for me beyond my imagination. You also modeled a great work ethic. You put great care into everything that you do, and much of the work you do has been for me (and your family). Your ideas and your passion for using them to make the world a better place have allowed us to take this unbelievable journey! I feel so privileged to take that journey with you, and am excited about what is to come. Mostly, you have shown me the true meaning of compassion, and embody it more than anyone I know. Thank you. *Eleanor*, I could not have done any of this without your example. Being a first generation college student, getting your Ph.D., followed by years of teaching and leadership in higher education opened doors for me and our family in so many ways. I am similarly in awe of your intellectual capacities as well as your attitude. I admired you when I was a little girl as you taught at the University, and when I saw you take action to protect marriage equality during the "Vote No" campaign. You are gutsy, and I'm proud of you. I am grateful for your unbelievable generosity. Thank you for your hard, careful work editing the many drafts of this dissertation. You have helped me become a better

writer and showed me how important it is to say what you mean. *Mom and Eleanor*, you have worked so hard and made so many sacrifices for me to be able do this and live my dream, and I am forever grateful. You are incredibly loving people. I am so lucky to have you both as my parents, my best friends, and my heroes.

To My Committee Chair: *Dr. Dànielle DeVoss*, I will always remember how I felt after I visited your office. I was so struck by your contagious excitement for my work. You have shown great enthusiasm for the many scholarly directions I considered taking prior to my proposal defense, as well as patience as I narrowed down my topic and found just the right project for this dissertation. You have also provided structure, direction, and guidance to help me put my ideas into action and make them shareable. Thank you for your unbelievable generosity of time, energy, and attention. Your notes, lists, and "next steps" have pushed me through this challenging process, and also taught me how to create these on my own. Your positive attitude and encouragement were a constant source of motivation. Thank you, too, for your wisdom about navigating the job market and the dissertation—especially during a pandemic. Your humor and openness made a safe space for me to ask many, many questions, and I have learned so much as a result.

To My Committee: *Dr. Julie Lindquist*, thank you for our many talks and your intellectual guidance throughout my academic journey. The time you spent during my independent study, along with your feedback, were pivotal in developing what later turned into my first major article. You gave of your time and your energy so freely and generously. Thank you. I am grateful for our shared research interests. Your scholarship—as well as the readings you pointed me to—have been so helpful to my writing and to this dissertation. Your work on narrative and emotion inspired me to join the Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures

department and continue to inspire me intellectually. The class I took from you on *Research Methodologies* will similarly continue to inspire future projects. We have shared many laughs, which brought me a great deal of joy. Thank you for your wit, sense of humor, and fantastic storytelling.

Dr. Bill Hart-Davidson, I remember when we first met during (I believe) the 2014 Cultural Rhetorics conference. I had not yet applied for the PhD program, and was nervous to share my somewhat unusual research interests with you. I remember my excitement building as we talked, because you were interested not only in my research, but you could also see the kinds of contributions it would make to the discipline and beyond. Since then, you have periodically reminded me of the value of my work. This means so much to me. Thank you. I also appreciate your thoughtful feedback on my many different intellectual pieces. I feel more confident, going forward, that I will be able to continue sharing my work with the world. I have enjoyed your intellectual curiosity and the wisdom you imparted during my first semester in the *Research Colloquium* class that I took from you. I continue to engage in constant "Self Studies" as I develop personally and professionally. I also appreciate your introducing me to coding languages, which I thoroughly enjoyed learning during my program, and which allowed me the amazing opportunity to teach *Introduction to Web Authoring*.

Dr. Ben Lauren, thank you for encouraging me to develop and submit a proposal for the *Computers and Composition* special issue. This was an extremely valuable opportunity, one I would have missed had it not been for your careful reading and interest in my work during *Professional Writing Theory and Research*. I learned so much from you during this class. You created a space for me to explore my own research in this sub-discipline and also encouraged me to make connections between the readings and my teaching. This made me a better scholar and

teacher-scholar. Your class also provided a strong foundation from which to enter into new scholarly conversations. Thank you. I am furthermore inspired by the projects you have done with organizations and with sound, and very much appreciated the opportunity to take part in your sonic lecturer class.

To the Scholars and Leaders Who Have Inspired Me: Michael O'Neil, my first mindfulness instructor, thank you for introducing my family and me to mindfulness. Your teachings have been very influential to my path. To the leaders who have shared mindfulness with the world—Thich Nhat Hanh, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Sharon Salzberg, Richard Davidson, Antonio Damasio, Les Fehmi, and the monks who have kept the mindfulness practice alive—I am grateful for your inspiration and gifts. Thank you, too, to all of the Rhetoric and Writing scholars who have written about embodiment, listening, and the importance of compassion, including those in the Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures department at Michigan State University.

To My MSU and WRAC Friends: Thank you for the laughs, stories, and support. I am grateful for your friendship. I am also in awe of the graduate students, faculty, and workers in this department. You are amazing human beings doing such important, hard, and world-changing work. Thank you for being you.

To My Brother and Sister: Matt and Amanda, I love you both with all my heart. Thank you for your love, support, and many beautiful memories.

To My Friends, and Neighbors: Thank you for your love and being a part of my life. I am so blessed to be part of yours.

To My Pets: Thank you for your constant companionship.

PREFACE

Purpose of Dissertation

In this dissertation, I offer a pedagogical approach called Mind-Body State Literacy. This approach, I argue, can support Rhetoric and Writing student and instructor development of the habits of mind put forth in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (*FSPW*): curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility and metacognition (WPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011). Such habits of mind, the FSPW suggests, are critical in the writing classroom but also, more broadly, for all college/university students to receive a liberal education.

I am especially interested in developing an approach that supports these habits of mind because I see them as necessary for fruitful narrative encounters to take place in the Rhetoric and Writing classroom. First-year writing classrooms are often spaces centered on the examination and transformation of narratives. Narrative, broadly defined, "covers a wide range of discourse, from personal life stories, to social histories, from myths, fairy tales, to fictions and novels, as well as everyday storytelling—all used to explain human actions" (Goodson and Gill, 2014, p. 32). Ivor Goodson and Scherto Gill (2014), who study narrative pedagogies and life histories, explain that the process of learning is the process of transforming narratives.

Transforming narratives, however, requires narrative encounters, the process of engaging in dialogues so that we may be more creative in the narrative-building process. They are "inward-looking exercise(s) but also…an outwardly oriented application(s)" (Goodson and Gill, 2014, p. 32). Like Julie Lindquist, I recognize that narrative "encounters are *exploratory drafts*—they are most certainly not *final*" (2019, p. 423, emphasis in original). Practices such as

rhetorical analysis, personal narrative assignments, and research, provide opportunities for students to engage in such dialogic learning. The concept of narrative learning through ongoing dialogic encounters requires both students and instructors to embody the habits of mind mentioned earlier. Curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility and metacognition (WPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011) are all important to the ongoing process of reflecting on, expanding, and transforming one's narratives.

One of the things I explore in this dissertation is the mind-body state which close down students' and instructors' ability to be open in these dialogic encounters. Specifically, I look at how our emotions and brainwave states (a dimension that influences the type and narrowness of our attention) lock us into one particular narrative—often a problematic, prejudicial one. In such mind-body states, I suggest, students and instructors may experience a straw person effect. Many composition instructors refer to the straw person argument or straw person fallacy. Someone uses this fallacy when they create a distorted version of another's claims, and then engage in an argument with the distorted claim rather than the real person's arguments. I suggest, as have other scholars in Rhetoric and Writing, that writers (including students and instructors in the writing classroom) always use constructions of who others are (Cooper, 1986; Ede and Lunsford, 1984; Long, 1980; Ong, 1975; and Said, 1986). These scholars would likely suggest that we create a straw person, to some degree, of others simply by the limitations of knowing others. (I.e. we cannot know what another person is thinking, or ever truly grasp the full complexity of their individuality.)

In what I term a closed mind-body state, one marked by fear, narrow focus, and narratives that contain objectifying versions of others, these straw persons come to life. I later compare this mind-body state to a bell jar that seals us into our own inner world, dominated by

our straw person versions of others. The embodied dynamics of emotions and our narrowly focused/attached brainwave state cut off our ability to update our constructions of other people through listening and through narrative encounters.

This dynamic of constructing our versions of other people without external input through listening extends, as I will show, to the environment and Native Americans. I offer numerous examples of early American narratives that created straw worlds, which justified the dominant culture's conquest of nature and Indigenous peoples. These dominant narratives, which are still influential, objectify Native Americans and the natural environment and are human-centered and individualistic. I compare such narratives, which often result in violence, with examples of more relational narratives that view the wellbeing of individuals as inseparable from the wellbeing of their fellow humans and the planet.

Rhetoric and Writing has often described the power of narratives, which are based on the objectification of others, and discussed the effects of such objectification. As scholars in the field (e.g., Cobos, Ríos, Sackey, San-Franchini, & Haas, 2018; King, 2003; Riley-Mukavetz, 2014; Wilson, 2005) and others have pointed out, "Stories have an effect. They are real. They matter" (Powell, 2012, p. 390). In this dissertation, I similarly acknowledge that narratives often contain prejudicial content and limited constructions of others. I call these narratives exclusionary or closed narratives. I insist, however, that if we are to teach students how to work with these kinds of narratives through narrative encounters, we need to examine them as part of a dynamic inner environment, which is the mind-body state.

Although I anchor much of my discussion of this "inner environment" in the body, by examining the ways in which emotions and brainwaves co-mediate our narratives, I also view this inner environment relationally. Our inner environment is always in conversation with the

external environment, including the people with whom we interact and the natural environments in which we live. Thus, I suggest that the goal of taking care of one's mind-body state—one's inner environment—and the goal of taking care of the external environment through compassionate communication and environmental care—the external environment—are one in the same. My work therefore compliments the important work of Indigenous scholars and others in Rhetoric and Writing (Brownlee, 2020; Powell, 2012; Ramírez & Zecena, 2019; Riley-Mukavetz, 2014), who have demonstrated the importance of relationality for the sustainability of the planet and our communities.

In offering this approach, I simultaneously make a case that we recognize these qualities as happening not only in unique individual minds or bodies—as if these two are separate—but in ever-changing, diverse mind-body *states*. I frame the mind-body state as having three dynamic facets: emotions, brainwaves, and narratives. Each of these facets reinforces the truth that the boundary between inner environments and outer ones is fluid to varying degrees for each individual in any given moment.

Why Mind-Body State Literacy?

Why Do Scholars in Rhetoric and Writing Need to Examine Brainwave Research?

The MBSL approach includes what I see as an extremely important but largely unstudied facet of scholarship on embodiment in Rhetoric and Writing: brainwaves. Studying brainwaves helps us understand a person's conscious psychological state, including their type of attention (e.g., narrow focus or open awareness) (e.g., Chen, Wang, & Yu, 2017) and emotions (e.g., Li, Chao, Zhang, 2019). In " Using Neurofeedback and Mindfulness Pedagogies to Teach Open Listening" (2018), I introduced brainwaves as a way to conceptualize the open listening process. I suggested that discourses which describe how brainwave frequencies work (including those

associated with highly narrow focus, "regular" conscious attention, and a more open, observational awareness associated with mindfulness), along with the neuroscientific studies that validate these affordances, can be brought into conversation with the narrative encounter in the composition classroom.

This dissertation builds on my previous work by considering how different brainwaves share information with another. Like my 2018 article, it recognizes that the work of the narrative encounter "implies attending 'with' and attending 'to' the body" (Csordas, as quoted in Schaefer, 2018). As I've argued, it is useful to consider what brainwaves we are attending to, and what brainwaves we are listening with. Brainwaves are just one element in a complex constellation that makes up our consciousness—as my multifaceted mind-body state model[1] illustrates—but it is a crucial element.

In positioning brainwaves in relation to narrative work in the composition classroom, I offer a starting point for further interdisciplinary conversations about them. Brainwaves, after all, are already the subject of interdisciplinary scholarship. They are studied in largely empirical ways: neuroscientists and cognitive neuroscientists study brainwaves using fMRI and EEG equipment, focusing on one narrow question at a time in a highly controlled environment, asking what they are associated with and how they affect cognition. In neurotherapy, therapists study brainwaves in the context of things as complex as narrative therapy, examining how the process of reflecting on one's narratives might be more fruitful if the client learns how to foster a brainwave state associated with the openness of mindfulness. Furthermore, neuroscientists, cognitive neuroscientists, and those in the neurofeedback field have all looked at brainwaves in relation to learning in general. This work is not—and indeed, should not—be silo-ed. I hope that

[1] As I will explain when I introduce the MBSL approach in greater detail in Chapter 1, the MBSL *models*, such as this core model, are used to illustrate and explain part of the MBSL pedagogical *approach*, a way of teaching that supports desirable habits of minds.

it inspires interdisciplinary studies around brainwaves, anchored in the critical narrative work that happens in the writing classroom.

An Opportunity to Appreciate the Uniqueness of Students' and Instructors' Learning Process

The MBSL is an approach oriented to respecting the unique individuality of all people, as well as the richness of the environment as something that is valuable in and of itself, rather than an objectified setting for our narratives. It is about recognizing that there is a difference between our straw persons and real people, and that we can be mindful of these differences through listening. Furthermore, it is about listening to our own narratives—and the narratives of others—with compassion and curiosity. This is why the approach is anchored in mindfulness and mindful communication. Scholarship on contemplative practices in Rhetoric and Writing, as well as in other disciplines, have shown how these practices support one's ability to notice nuances inwardly and outwardly (Fox, 2014; Chaterdon, 2016; Gunnlaugson, Sarath, Scott, & Bai, 2014; Uusberg et al. 2016; Wenger, 2015; Winans, 2012).

Although I make some generalizations about what students and instructors might experience in a particular mind-body state, which includes generalizations about how brainwaves influence this state, it's important to recognize that I make these with an important caveat: They are oversimplified generalizations meant to convey the larger point—that narrow focus, combined with fear, plays an important part in how many (but not all) folks relate to, build, and stay immersed in exclusionary stories. Moreover, brainwave patterns, and the transfer of information that happens in the brain, are complex; e.g., multiple information transfers happen simultaneously, some below our consciousness. Still, focusing on the dynamics of the general effects of brainwave patterns associated with stress helps us begin to recognize that our brainwaves are always co-mediating the meaning making process.

I do not pretend that the model I offer is a comprehensive theory of consciousness. I know, from having done neurofeedback, that when we hook up to many different parts of the brain, we find that each site has a different configuration of brainwaves. Each part of the brain, too, utilizes brainwaves in different ways. The complexities of the brain, I believe, deserve a great deal of interdisciplinary attention—more than I can offer here. I see my discussion of brainwaves as a kind of opening, a conversation starter. This dissertation, as a whole, offers much to consider—many claims that require further exploration and study. I will describe the dissertation's limitations, and areas for future study, in more detail in the conclusion.

My Personal Narrative

Content warning: this section contains references to prejudice-based violence. The path to this dissertation, as well as to becoming a teacher and emerging scholar in Rhetoric and Composition, has been a long and often difficult one. My desire to pursue higher education has been driven largely by my personal experience with the effects of fear, isolation, prejudice, and discrimination. I grew up with two moms in a rural area of one of the most conservative counties in the state of Minnesota. Many people in the surrounding communities tended to condemn same-sex couples like my parents. My parents, while not technically "in the closet," did not disclose their relationship to our neighbors or those we dealt with at school. They did this to protect my brother and me from judgment and violence.

While withholding their identity helped to some degree, we were still afraid and people inevitably found out anyway. In school my brother and I dealt with violent bullies as well as teachers who passed judgment on our family because of the absence of a father figure. We also learned to be afraid at home. My parents once hired a family member to build the fence that surrounds our property. At one point, this young man came up to our house, shaken with fear

because a neighbor had trespassed and screamed, among other things, homophobic slurs and threats, some of which were too awful to repeat to my mother.[2] To further prove his point, the neighbor shot his gun into the air repeatedly.

One of my mothers taught American and Women's Studies at the state university nearby. This put another target on our backs. Among other things, she taught about sexism, racism, and the history of oppression in the United States. I am still very saddened and angry as I imagine what it was like for my parents to, as a result, receive numerous anonymous calls in the middle of the night. Some were silence followed by the click of the receiver. One particularly terrifying call woke one of my moms up. The voice on the other end shouted viciously, "You're dead, bitch!" followed by the click of the receiver. My mother recently recalled what it was like receiving such calls, pointing out how much worse these experiences were in the context of her Post Traumatic Stress. She had PTSD because of violence she experienced when she was younger, including her cousin being shot in the head while he slept because he was gay. She learned at a young age that somebody mistaking you for their straw person can be very dangerous. The fear, my mother explained, was also so powerful because you never knew when you might be in danger; you always had to be on your guard.

The reality of how extreme prejudicial violence could become made her situation of needing to protect two young children in a rural, isolated area, even more terrifying. One night, my mothers came home to find the doors open and the lights on. They called the police to check out our home. Our neighbor (the same one who shouted threats and shot off his gun) stumbled drunkenly into our house demanding to know what was going on. His expression of care was to say, "you should have called us because, even though we hate you, we're your neighbors." The neighbor put his arm around the cop, and said, "I had a little to drink and put my car in the ditch

[2] I refer to my biological mother as my mother or mom, and my "second" mother, by her first name, Eleanor.

when I drove over here; is it okay for me to drive home?" The police chuckled as they escorted him out and helped get his car out of the ditch.

As I grew up, and throughout my adulthood, I listened to my mothers' stories of the violence they experienced as a couple in a very prejudiced area. I listened to stories of violent threats they received, their pets being stolen and killed, and awful phone calls to my grandparents. Their house was set on fire, with a beloved dog inside, just before Christmas. They were at work at a university in a nearby city when they got a call from the local fire department telling them they had saved the dog, but every room of the house was damaged. It was unlivable and they were homeless because someone had set their Christmas tree on fire. This was their first home together and was at the end of a dead-end road with only one neighbor. This neighbor had threatened violence before, so they knew who did it. They told the fire chief they believed it had been set but it was never investigated because they were afraid to tell the police why they were being threatened. The neighbor later threatened to kill my mom if they did not move out. This situation left them in a bind: it was not safe to come out of hiding and ask for help or protection, but it was also not safe to remain hidden.[3]

These experiences—these stories—taught me that the world was not safe, and that I (and we) belonged on the margins. They planted the seeds of fear and isolation into many of my most important stories about the world. The fear was exacerbated by the fact that, like many LGBTQ people, we did not feel we could go to our larger family for safety or support. This left us with a feeling of isolation on every front. (However, our immediate family—my moms, my brother and myself—have been an example to LGBTQ friends I had growing up of what it could feel like to

[3] Though we had the privilege to remain closeted in certain circumstances, we were sometimes permanently marked as "other" once "outed"—by choice or not.

at least have accepting parents.[4])

I have felt the effects of fear and isolation caused by prejudice and its resulting violence on my body; I still do. Fear and violence are powerful teachers. They teach you—including your body—that you do not belong, that you cannot belong. I internalized this narrative, and fear became my prejudice. As a result, I was extremely sensitive to being left out. Throughout my childhood, common difficulties like not being picked at recess and unsigned yearbooks had deeper meaning for me, making them particularly painful. Being a person from a marginalized family caused such experiences to be associated with beliefs that I had internalized; they reinforced stories in me that there was something wrong with me and that I would always feel isolated.

These stories began to take on a life of their own. They came up in social situations where I would believe I was being excluded socially even though I was not, because I perceived the present moment through the lens of a narrative that said I was. They then became a self-fulfilling prophecy by causing me to isolate myself. For example, when immersed in a narrative that said I did not belong, I would not take part in conversations or I would leave social gatherings despite my desire to connect. In this way, my stories of isolation bred further isolation. These stories would resurface and then be reconfirmed, resulting in a vicious cycle that grew a whole web of stories that said I did not belong. I experienced this vicious narrative cycle as depression, anxiety, and chronic fatigue[5].

My mothers, recognizing the effects of fear on our family, sought support from a local

[4] I should also note that while I experienced a great deal of isolation, particularly in my youth, I have often leaned on the power of narratives, even from a young age, to connect with others. I would often address the homophobia of my classmates, as early as elementary school, by telling my family's story. I wrote and shared a creative narrative in Junior High about the isolating effects of homophobia. I read, listened to, and connected with narratives of social justice and peace activists.

[5] In Chapter 2, I will discuss relational-cultural theory, which similarly describes the embodiment of isolating narratives on the brain and body (A. Banks, 2011).

mental health facility. While this center was useful in offering some strategies for handling difficult emotions, there benefit was offset by a lack of understanding about how living with prejudice affected the content and the context of our stories. As a result, the support they offered was not especially helpful and in some ways it made things worse.

In most cases, the first thing one needs to do in order to get insurance coverage for mental health treatment is to receive a diagnosis. For my family and me, these diagnoses, largely based on a sickness model, were harmful. Not only did they carry with them the social stigmas that surround mental health issues, they also problematically located mental/emotional issues largely in the individual[6]. In our experience, receiving a diagnosis was an institutionally verified reconfirmation—ironically—that we were the problem. This model and process did nothing to directly address the biggest source of our ongoing fear and suffering—the culture and cultural prejudices that surrounded us. More importantly, they could not teach us how to update the narratives that said that we were what was wrong.

Yet, during my early teen years my mother and I both received individual therapy. For my mother, this was a continuation of a long journey of seeking resources. She had done her best during my childhood and early teen years to hide her emotions, including her fears, from me to protect me. We learned over time, however, that despite her best efforts to compartmentalize her difficult stories, emotions, and experiences, they would always end up affecting me. There was no way around it; we were interconnected, intertwined. Thank goodness.

As time went on, we came to more fully realize that we were already dealing with the legacy of prejudicial violence together and thus needed to respond to it together. It was our

[6]There are mental health models and resources that understand mental health issues systemically, such as family systems theory and community psychology studies. Unfortunately, there were none near or accessible to us. Drawn to these more holistic understanding of mental wellness, I integrated Community Psychology as one of my undergraduate degree emphases.

discovery and shared practice of mindfulness that helped us make this shift. Mindfulness is, simply put, the practice of regularly cultivating an open, observant awareness of things as they are in the present moment. While it has Buddhist roots, it has gained attention as a secular practice in the United States and other Western countries because of its implications for how we interact with ourselves and the world, how easily we learn, how flexible we are in our ways of thinking, and our ability to empathize. When I was sixteen years old, my mother shared what she had learned from an interview on NPR, and we decided to learn more about the practice by taking an 8-week course on Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. Once a week, we drove over an hour to attend the class in a St. Paul.

This class included formal mindfulness practices: sitting meditations and body scans.[7] During a typical class night, our instructor guided our group of about fifteen through mindfulness meditations lasting as long as 45 minutes. In our very first guided sitting meditation, we began with posture. We were invited to become aware of our bodies as we sat in a way that embodied both dignity and care. For me, this was a revolutionary act.

Before I learned this meditation, I usually was not aware of my body at all. When I was aware of it, like many teenagers, I often viewed it in an objectified way, judging its appearance according to media narratives. I was self-conscious, not self-aware of my body, and I experienced this self-consciousness from a young age. When I was in elementary school, I was an avid artist and always entered my drawings and/or poetry into our school's annual student art exhibit. The school's hallways were busy when I took my parents to the evening exhibit to show them my art. As we came in my mom noticed my body shrink and my head lower. (She encouraged me, with much kindness, to lift my head up.) In that moment, my body reflected and

[7] In the body scan, a person practices moving their awareness throughout the body, often guided by an instructor or recording.

even reinforced the way I sometimes felt during this time—apprehensive, isolated, and self-conscious—as a result of (among other things) bullying.

During the first meditation class, my body probably looked much the same. I was rather shy, and I was in an unfamiliar situation. During my first sitting meditation, however, my self-consciousness started to organically melt into open awareness. The meditation began with just becoming aware of each in breath and each out breath, knowing that we were breathing as we were breathing. After several minutes of this calming, grounding practice, we expanded our awareness to include the rest of our bodies. Then, we were asked to expand our awareness to the environment around us. I suddenly became aware of the sounds of the city, someone vacuuming above us, and the slight shifts of my classmates' bodies. I experienced a significant shift in my mind-body state that allowed me to take in all of these details simultaneously. It was like the difference between hearing one instrument at a time while listening to music vs. hearing all the nuances of each individual instrument at the same time while listening to a symphony.

I remember this first meditation quite vividly because I had never before experienced this level of open awareness, especially while in a group of people. It felt incredibly empowering, and a bit counterintuitive: I had to anchor my awareness in my body and breath and calm myself first, before I could expand my awareness outward. This simple act of becoming aware of my body *and* my environment helped me feel that I actually was part of the environment and community around me. Mindfulness helped me access what my mind-body state often cut me off from: recognition of myself as part of something bigger.

In addition to formal ones, our course emphasized informal mindfulness practices. We would practice fostering calm, open awareness during our everyday activities, such as eating a meal, washing the dishes, waiting for a stoplight to turn, or interacting with a bank teller. We

were prompted, as we engaged in these activities, to become aware of our bodies, our emotions, and our inner story lines. We recorded these different dimensions of our experiences on paper, and shared them with the group during class.

Our instructor, along with our texts, Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1975) and Jon Kabat-Zinn's *Full Catastrophe Living* (1991), taught us to view everyday activities, interactions, and objects with beginner's mind. To view, listen, touch, and even taste them as if we had not seen them before. In one evening's class, we each spent time eating three raisins[8] with this enhanced sense of awareness, noticing the moment that we could smell them as we slowly brought them towards our nose, noticing their textures, and experiencing the burst of flavor when we finally bit into them. We looked at a paper cup, and reflected on the story behind it: where the materials came from, how it was constructed, and how it might be used outside of its traditional functions. We were encouraged to practice mindfulness in nature, heightening our awareness while in it and also being mindful of the impact of our everyday actions on the environment.

One of the most profound informal practices that my parents and I experienced, during this class (and beyond), was mindful listening/mindful communication. With mindful listening, you exercise the same beginner's mind and curiosity as with the raisin and cup exercises. My regular formal practice of sitting meditations and body scans, along with this informal practice, completely changed how open I felt and was with other people. Being aware of my self (and my body) without self-consciousness, along with my curiosity towards others, helped me be a better listener. Most importantly, perhaps, it helped me relate differently to the vicious narrative cycle that I described earlier (i.e., having a narrative come up that said I did not belong, and then perceiving others from within, and operating accordance with, the context of that narrative).

[8] See Zinn's (1991) *Full Catastrophe Living* for a description of this activity.

Mindfulness helped me become aware of my own straw persons: the straw person of myself as outsider, and the straw person of others as excluders.[9] During sitting meditations, as well as my interactions with others, I was able to call up another part of myself to act as a sort of outside observer to notice the difference between my straw persons and the real people around me. The emotional literacy skills we learned as part of the mindfulness practices further supported this. I was often able to consciously calm myself when I felt afraid in social situations, for example, or when the fear attached to the "I don't belong" narrative came up. Responding to my fear lessened the power that this narrative had over me; it dissolved the narrative bell jar that cut me off from others.

After our class ended my parents and I continued our practice of mindfulness together. We would often sit and meditate (with our pets by our sides, of course) around the kitchen table. Afterwards, we would talk about how the meditation shifted our awareness, what memories and narratives it called up, and what we learned from observing these changes with beginner's mind. The compassionate nature of mindful communication was restorative for us; we were often able to listen to one another's narratives with empathy and care.

Our practice of mindfulness, along with these conversations, gave us a deeper understanding of the prejudice and violence that we had experienced. My parents, both scholars in American Studies, and I reflected together on the embodied dimensions of prejudice. Connecting to our own mind-body state shifts and how our own narratives were transforming as a result of mindfulness, we asked how people's lack of mind-body awareness contributed to their immersion in prejudicial narratives that produce and sustain violence. We reflected on the nature of narratives, themselves—how certain narratives obscure the many ways that we are

[9] Of course, sometimes my perception of being excluded was based on the truth. I am referring to situations where I was basically projecting past experiences of exclusion onto people were, in reality, different.

interdependent. (I draw the sample exclusionary American narratives in Chapter 3 from these many discussions.) We wondered, too, how education about the literacies we were developing through our ongoing mindfulness practice might create cultural changes in the way people relate to closed mind-body states and closed narratives.

These conversations eventually led us to open a local center called the Mindful Heart. The purpose of our center was to provide mind-body state literacies to help people practice self-aware listening as they engaged in narrative encounters. We were motivated, in opening the center, to teach mindfulness as a socially responsible practice, one that lets our narratives be informed by listening, rather than mindlessly listening to others through the lens of our existing narratives. In addition to our desire to create a more caring culture, we also wanted to provide a space that would recognize that the responsibility for transforming the effects of exclusionary narratives should not fall solely on the shoulders of those who have been victimized by them.

To support our work, we integrated neurofeedback. We used neurofeedback discourses to visualize and explain to our clients/students the dimensions of our conscious attention and awareness as we listen to and reflect on our narratives. Neurofeedback furthermore allowed our students to experience, first hand, how the more open awareness afforded by Alpha—a brainwave frequency associated with mindfulness—changed their relationship to their narratives and fostered open listening. Neurofeedback was like a mirror that allowed participants to guide themselves—through their own conscious direction—to a more open state. (I will discuss brainwaves in greater detail in Chapter 4.)

My pursuit of higher education arose organically from my relationship not only with my parents, but also with my friends, fellow students, and surrounding community members. It is their narratives, and my connection to those narratives, that still inspire my research, teaching,

and activism. Rhetoric and Writing provided a space that allowed me to pursue this interdisciplinary, community-grounded work. It also provided me with students, colleagues, and faculty mentors who gave me incredible support in the form of care and listening.

I offer this dissertation in the hope that it will inspire practices that acknowledge the role that our bodies—including our brainwaves and fearful emotions—play in co-mediating exclusionary and/or violent narratives. I also hope that this dissertation will inspire the creation of more relational narratives. While narratives have the power to do unbelievable harm, as I've illustrated in this preface (and will describe in Chapter 3, especially), they also have the power to connect and heal. We can reflect on our narratives with compassion to lessen the power of fear that keeps them stagnate. We can learn to practice embodied self-awareness to recognize when our narrative lens has become too opaque, or when we are interacting more with straw persons than real people. We can listen to other people's narratives with compassion and curiosity. Finally, we can develop relational narratives informed by listening, as well as those that reflect the reality of our interconnection and interdependence.

I am writing the end of this preface at the end of 2020, what will surely go down in U.S., if not global, history as one of the most difficult years in terms of violence, individualism, and political polarization. The need to see our planet outside the lens of linear narratives that objectify it and to recognize the full complexity of who we are as human beings has never seemed so critical. I offer the Mind-Body State Literacy approach, centered on compassionate listening and relationality, to help address these issues. The mind-body state literacies, I will argue, can support habits of mind, such as openness, curiosity, and engagement, that are critical if students are to receive the liberal education (and hopefully life long narrative learning through narrative encounters) needed to address these complex problems.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1: Introducing the Mind-Body State Literacy Approach

Introduction

What kind of world do we want to live in, our children to grow up in, our parents to grow old in, for ourselves to grow old in, and for our grandchildren and their grandchildren? Especially as educated people, we probably want it to be a world where people care: care for children and grandchildren, parents and grandparents, neighbors—care about each other. We want them to care about animals, nature, the environment and the planet. We also hope, of course, that they care about justice and peace for all of these people and things because a democratic society, like ours, depends on everyone taking responsibility for the common good.

Ideally, students can learn to nurture compassion and empathy in a consistent way that can become part of their lifestyle. However, it is not enough to show them how to care; to be a sustainable practice, they need to learn how to foster their own desire to care. We want them "to increasingly care about caring" (Lamay, 2016, p. 21). They can then use that concern as motivation to act on behalf of the greater good. I agree with Goodson and Gill (2014) when they

> join Freire in recognizing that the act of love is an expression of our ethical commitment and moral responsibility to the goodness of humanity and of the world. Freire writes: 'If I do not love the world – if I do not love life – if I do not love people – I cannot enter into dialogue' (Freire, 1996, p. 71). (p. 57)

When students are taught skills that show them how to have more self-awareness of their stories, of their emotions, and of their classmates, they can nurture a state of openness that helps them remember that it is their world, and that when they work to make their world a better place, they are the first to benefit from their kindness. If students maintain stories that do not frame their relationship to the world in this way, they are more likely to view any helpful contributions

they make to it as altruistic. In this case, they will see care as an effort they put forth for others, assuming that it in no way benefits them as well. They will not be able to see that tending to the world makes that world better for them. Without this understanding as an impetus, they may become apathetic and not be moved to take part at all; but, if they can see themselves as part of the society and the natural world, they are more likely to develop a sense of agency and an increased desire to be helpful. This is the ultimate act of self-care. They are also learning the skills they will need to be the kind of concerned and thoughtful citizens with whom we want to share our world.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter I will introduce a pedagogical approach called Mind-Body State Literacy (MBSL). Specifically I am interested in helping students gain the ability to fully take part in all aspects of the liberal education that can help them grow to become mindful and compassionate members of society. They can do this by learning mindfulness techniques to help them deal with the stressors that affect their mind-body state and create obstacles to that learning. MBSL integrates a narrative view of learning (Goodson & Gill, 2014; Yam, 2018), and thus frames the relationship between one's mind-body state and one's narratives. It helps address a major problem in Rhetoric and Writing: that of closed, alienating, and divisive stories. This approach accounts for the relationship between students' body-minds and their worldviews, and offers literacies necessary to understand what helps us be open in the narrative learning process. The MBSL is intended for use by teachers in Rhetoric and Writing but could be adapted to fit in any college classroom. Congruent with its focus on narratives, however, I will discuss how it might have the most profound impact when used in conjunction with personal narrative assignments.

I have designed this approach to coincide with the *Framework for Success in*

Postsecondary Writing (*FSPW*) that was put together by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, The National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project (2011). Therefore, in this chapter I will briefly introduce the MBSL, show how it aligns with the *FSPW* and conclude with an overview of the chapters to follow. I want to begin by discussing why a liberal education is vital in helping students become more socially and ecologically responsible. I will follow this by listing some key issues that inhibit students' abilities to truly access that education.

The Importance of a Liberal Education

One of the main purposes of a liberal education is to prepare students to feel social responsibility, help awaken in them a sense of agency, and teach them the skills they will need to be thoughtful, proactive citizens. If students are able to receive the liberal education they are being offered, they can use the skills and knowledge they acquire to continue to open up and grow as they attend to the experiences life brings them. Among other things, their education should teach them to nurture self-awareness and social awareness. They should learn to question the validity of their stories and, when appropriate, work to transform them. The development of the *FSPW* is evidence that those of us who have chosen to work in Rhetoric and Writing have been tasked with helping students prepare to receive that education and to acquire the skills needed to share their knowledge with the world (WPA et al., 2011). This is an awesome responsibility; the nature and the quality of the world we live in may depend on how well we can fulfill it.

As a teacher in the Rhetoric and Writing classroom I am especially concerned that students gain a well-rounded understanding of the issues that should concern all citizens, including those involved in our legal system, disability rights, environmental protection, climate

change, racism, xenophobia, and social equality, just to name a few. I do not think it is possible to divorce teaching students about these issues from teaching them the basics of writing and professional communication that they need to succeed in college. Whether students are learning to share their thoughts and perspectives through good writing or learning to be active, empathic listeners, they are increasing their relationality with others. At the same time, when students are able to let in the knowledge and new perspectives offered by their education, they may be encouraged to care enough to be motivated not only to act in the present, but also to continue to care and be active on behalf of their society and nature long after they have left college.

The Challenges

People who teach about social and environmental justice are usually passionate and are often able to impassion their students to take up such causes, but many things can prevent them from truly receiving this education. For example, students have a high demand on their time and attention; they are trying to finish their degree, find a job, start a career, socialize, and maybe even have a family. All of these demands on their personal lives are, understandably, bound to take precedence over their civic and environmental responsibilities. However, even more concerning is that constraints on their time and attention also mean that students are often under an enormous amount of stress in addition to the pressure to do well in school (Garcia & Dutro, 2018). In addition, many students are dealing with anxiety, depression, family problems, and even suicidal ideation (Harding, 2020).

These stressors can have an enormous impact on the state of the minds and bodies students bring into the classroom. They alter the brainwave frequencies they are using for paying attention and learning (Siegel, 2007; Robbins, 2000/2008). And, most importantly, they close down, color, and even warp the lens through which students see the world. This means that, at

the same time they are trying to use this new knowledge, to update their stories about the world, their perceptions of those stories may be distorted.

I contend that how students' stories frame their relationship with the world around them can be a primary obstacle to social and environmental caring. For this reason, I believe it is critical to help students become more aware of, and learn to work with, their stories. I also propose that to do this effectively they must receive guidance on how to tend to their mind-body states as they do this work. What is needed is an approach to narrative work, and learning in general, that specifically helps students remain calm and open so they can create narratives that help them feel less alienated and more connected.

In order to help them prepare for their education, transform their narratives, and increase their relationality, I suggest students need to learn how fearful, isolating emotions act on their brains and their stories and how they can work with their emotions to mitigate those effects. Fearful emotions activate our sympathetic nervous system and put our minds and bodies in a closed down stress state, which includes changing our brainwave state to a narrow focused and dualistic, us/them mentality inimical to our ability to see ourselves as one with the world (Fehmi & Robbins, 2007). If we ask students to look at their stories while they're in such a fearful emotional state, they may confirm a closed narrative rather than transform it with a more enlightened viewpoint. Therefore, if we want students to work on changing their stories to ones that are more open, they need to first learn how to work with the stressful emotions that inevitably come up around these stories.

We can also close down when we are exposed to stories that are frightening, divisive, and isolating. Both our own stories and someone else's can have the same impact on our brains, minds, and bodies as stress, in part because they cause fear to come up in us. When we are in a

closed state we are alienated from others, from nature, and from the rest of ourselves—the open and easeful part of ourselves—because it can be difficult to remember what we were like when we were not stressed. Presenting ways of teaching students how to work with their stories so as to transform their closed aspects is an important goal of this dissertation. Whether we close down because of stress and fearful emotions or because of being exposed to closed stories, a powerful cascade of changes takes place in our brains, our bodies, and our minds that affects all parts of our being.

In the writing classroom, I suggest that personal narrative assignments combined with mind-body state practices are a particularly well-suited vehicle for students to explore the nature of their stories and the origins of their beliefs and values. Specifically, they need to pay attention to those aspects of their stories that cause them to feel and be more open with the world. When students are taught how to allow their mind-body states to remain open, it is easier for them to remember that they do not exist in a vacuum. As a result, they are more likely to care about the world they live in and create stories that help them recognize that it is their world and that they are an interconnected part of it.

Although personal narrative work can bring about profound insights, changing students' core individualistic stories takes much more than can happen in one writing course or a few assignments; it may take a whole liberal arts education to do that. The goal of a liberal education, after all, is to "liberate" people from the closed stories they are caught in and allow them to take in new stories and more open versions of their old ones. It is my belief that students are already being offered knowledge and wisdom about social and environmental justice by hardworking and dedicated teachers. Although they are handed this "canteen" regularly, they may be unable to drink from it because many things work to close their minds and lock them in their stories,

preventing them from learning new ways of seeing the world. This is a tragedy for everyone involved and a waste of precious time, work, and resources. These teachers and students work hard, education is expensive, and the world desperately needs caring and educated people—all good reasons why we need the understanding and skills to help students get the canteen.

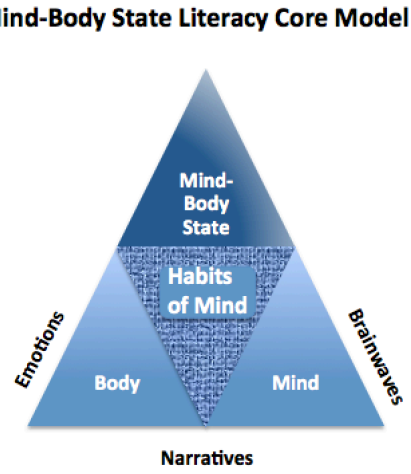
Mind-Body State Literacy

In this dissertation, I introduce an approach called Mind-Body State Literacy (MBSL) that I created to help students get that canteen. MBSL is particularly well suited to aid in teaching students to do deeply transformative personal narrative writing. However, an even larger purpose of MBSL is to better prepare students to receive the liberal education that will nurture their ability to be more inclusive, less judgmental, socially responsible citizens who feel equanimity with all living beings and the planet that sustains them.

The MBSL approach uses neuroscience (including neurofeedback research) and mindfulness teachings to help students and teachers learn how our brains process stories, what part emotion and attention play in that process, and how they can tend to those emotions and their brainwaves in a way that supports agency with their stories.

As briefly described in the preface, I offer a series of MBSL models in this dissertation that help explain the Mind-Body State Literacy pedagogical approach. These visual models aid in the understanding of Mind-Body State Literacy, but they do not represent the entirety of an MBSL approach, which encompasses more dimensions and nuances than is possible to include here. Below is the "core" model (see Figure 1.1), which highlights the very basic dimensions of the mind-body state.

Figure 1.1: *The Mind-Body State Literacy Core model is made up of three facets: emotions, narratives, and brainwaves.*



There are three basic and inextricable facets of the mind body state and its associated literacies:

- Emotional Literacy—gives an understanding of how emotion acts on our brains, our minds, and our bodies.
- Brainwave Literacy—gives an understanding of how our brainwaves affect our attention styles and how this interacts with emotions and stories.
- Narrative Literacy—gives an understanding of how narratives are processed in our minds and our bodies, including how changes in our mind-body state (a combination of emotions, brainwaves, thinking, and body state) affect how this process plays out.

The MBSL approach revolves around the process in our minds and bodies by which we shift from an open, relational state to a closed, non-relational one and vice versa. This state, the mind-body state, determines whether we will have the ability to let in new points of view or be stuck and unable to see past the confines of our own current perspective.

MBSL, then, gives students the understanding and the tools they need to calm their

emotions, open their brain state, and see their stories while in a more empathic and less prejudicial state of mind. Moreover, seeing their stories with more clarity gives them the ability to choose to create stories that reflect their true values rather than being stuck in reactive, limiting stories.

The Rhetoric and Writing classroom is a particularly good place for students to utilize an MBSL to work with the narratives they use to make sense of the world. Since an MBSL is intended to be an experiential approach, it should be especially effective when used in writing courses that utilize personal narrative writing. Such assignments allow students an opportunity to work with MBSL and apply it immediately to their own stories. In the Rhetoric and Writing classroom, students can also look at the meaning and importance of their cultural stories, which allows them to understand the context those larger narratives provide and gives them a better perspective on their own personal narratives. However, if students are to free themselves from their own frame of reference sufficiently to see this larger perspective, they have to know how to shift from a stressful, narrow focus brain state to one that is more open. They need a brain state capable of seeing a more holistic perspective.

MBSL aids in this by showing students how to work with their mental and emotional states to allow them and their stories to be more expansive. Having an understanding of how emotions affect their personal and social environments strengthens not only their ability to have more compassion, openness, and empathy, but also their ability to learn and be more creative. With this understanding and the associated skills they are better able to take responsibility for, and help to create, healthier internal and external environments in which to observe and work with their narratives. They can learn, for example, to listen openly and compassionately to all parts of themselves and all parts of their stories, and to their classmates as well. The idea that

taking care of our own inner world and emotional state is how we tend to the world around us is central to mindfulness practice (e.g., Nhat Hanh, 1975; Williams et al., 2007) and to this MBSL.

I have drawn on disciplinary and cross-disciplinary work to build the MBSL model. Inspired by social-cognitivists (e.g., Anson, 2008; Bracher, 2009; Cooper, 2011; Flower, 1994; Johnson et al. 2013) and Lennard J. Davis and David B. Morris's (2009) call for biocultural interdisciplinary research, my model incorporates scientific knowledge about the workings of the brain and the body, while also deliberately framing the body-mind as socially situated. I frame one's mind-body state as an ecological state, asking how one's inner environment impacts and is impacted by the outer environment. Supporting these connections, I draw on two practices that have gained recent attention in Rhetoric and Writing: mindfulness and nonviolent communication. Both of these practices frame the process of becoming aware of our body-minds and "inner rhetorics" (Mathieu, 2014) as inseparable from our ability to listen to others in socially conscious, socially responsible ways.

Mindfulness and the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Education

The task of preparing students for their education is so essential that the Council of Writing Program Administrators, The National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project have teamed up to develop guidelines to aid teachers in helping students achieve success in college. The *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (*FSPW*) lays out the skill sets that students need to develop what they call "habits of mind" (WPA et al., 2011, p. 1). One of the main goals of this dissertation is to provide an even more fundamental practice in support of the *FSPW*, one that teaches students how to prepare their minds and bodies to practice these skills.

I align myself with the approach presented in this document which "takes as a central

premise that teaching writing and learning to write are central to education and to the development of a literate citizenry" (WPA et al., 2011, p. 2). Furthermore, I stand in total support of the work outlined in this framework and agree that, "Students who come to college writing with these habits of mind and these experiences will be well positioned to meet the writing challenges in the full spectrum of academic courses and later in their careers" (2011, p. 2). These habits also correspond with the core essential tools that students need to update their personal narratives. Without them, narrative assignments would be an exercise in futility at best and, at worst, could provide a means for students to become even more immersed in their current perspectives and actually inhibit the educational value of those assignments (Sharma, 2015; Alexander, 2011).

Developing these habits of mind will serve students well as they learn to be more open thinkers and skilled communicators; however, to practice developing new habits of mind they need to be in a mind and body state that is able to work in a novel way. Our mind-body state varies from day to day and even from moment to moment, depending on what emotional state, brainwave state, or narrative we are in at the time. The FSPW framework is effective only when the students' mind-body states can receive it. There will be many times, however, when students have closed mind-body states, which literally prevent them from exercising new ways of seeing or thinking. The many pressures, stressors, and fears, including crises, traumas, mental health issues, and closed stories that students deal with on a daily basis are barriers to the open mind-body state necessary to practice these habits of mind.

I suggest that for students to adopt these habits in the way the FSPW offers it is necessary to tend to these barriers which, as I will show, are best handled with mindfulness. Mindfulness skills, then, are central to the MBSL approach. They are most effective when taught with an

understanding of how our brains process our thoughts, what causes this process to get stuck, and what we can do to open them up again. I contend that the habits of mind can then help these students maintain a fluid mind-body state that reopens more easily as they continue to practice both the MBSL and the FSPW.

The table below outlines how these mindfulness skills align with the habits of mind of the FSPW (see Table 1.1). The habits are listed in the left column, the FSPW description is in the center, and the right column lists the MBSL suggested mindfulness skills that can help students cultivate them.

Table 1.1: *How the MBSL model supports the habits of mind. The left column lists the different habits of mind, the middle one defines each, and the right one describes the relevant MBSL practices.*

Habits of Mind	**Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing defines these as:**	**Mind-Body State Literacy fosters these through mindfulness practices**
Curiosity	The desire to know more about the world.	Beginner's mind; The observer
Openness	The willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world.	Non-attachment; Empty cup
Engagement	A sense of investment and involvement in learning.	Right and thoughtful action.
Creativity	The ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating and representing ideas.	Letting go; Making space
Persistence	The ability to sustain interest in and attention to short and long term projects.	Begin again
Responsibility	The ability to take ownership of one's actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others.	Responsibility for the self is responsibility for the world, and vice versa.
Flexibility	The ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands.	Mental fluidity; Non-judgment

Table 1.1 (cont'd)

Metacognition	The ability to reflect on one's own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge	Self awareness of: the mind-body state (i.e., emotion, brainwaves, narratives)

The mind-body state and the habits of mind have a symbiotic relationship. The mind-body state is a present moment state, while the habits of mind are developed as a result of what we have been practicing most frequently in those moments. This means that our collective mind-body states are encoded in what become our more subconscious habits of mind. These habits are very important because they strongly influence the nature of our future mind-body states. Both our present mind-body state and our established habits are vital to successful narrative work and learning. Mindfulness skills support the development of the habits of mind by making us more conscious of the habits we're forming in the very present moment. Mindfulness, after all, is at its core a practice of becoming aware of the present moment, including the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that are tomorrow's habits.

Thich Nhat Hanh's Model of Mental Formations

Many Buddhist monks, who have kept the practice of directing our attention toward a more compassionate state alive for thousands of years, are now freely and actively sharing their wisdom with the world. One of the monks who has been sharing his knowledge about opening up and increasing our compassion and has had the greatest influence on the development of the MBSL is the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Martin Luther King nominated Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace prize in 1967 for his efforts to end the Vietnam War. In 2019 he was awarded the Luxembourg Peace Prize in the "Outstanding Inner Peace" category (Whitaker, 2019). The presenting committee said, "His key teaching is that, through mindfulness, we can learn to live

happily in the present moment—the only way to truly develop peace, both in one's self and in the world" (2019, par. 2).

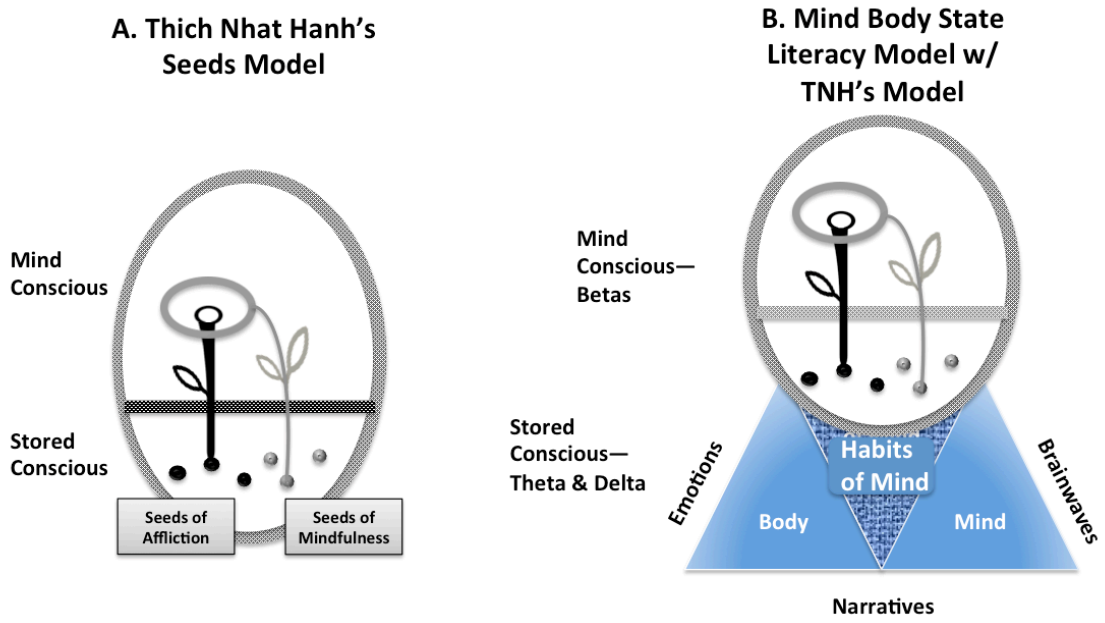
Perhaps one of the most amazing things about Nhat Hanh's teaching approach is the simplicity with which he explains what are amazingly complex issues and by so doing makes them accessible to many people. He is able to convey the power inherent in having the self-discipline necessary to achieve inner peace by his own example. Quite simply, he radiates peace—a peace that he carries with him as he travels the world teaching people how to "find peace and share it" (Miller, 1977). His teachings about mindfulness and interconnection are at the heart of much of the understanding involved in the MBSL. This is true most especially of the way in which he demonstrates the power of mindfulness to create an inner environment that nurtures our ability to transform mental formations.

Nhat Hanh uses a model of mental formations[10], a concept with Buddhist roots, to explain how mindfulness can be used to work with the internal environment of our minds/bodies (2001). He uses this model to illustrate what happens when we have emotions and thoughts—or, in terms of the MBSL, our narratives—come up in us that close us down (Nhat Hanh, 2001). The model also shows us how to tend to these stories with mindful awareness (2001). The diagram (see Figure 1.3) is of a circle, the upper two thirds of which is divided off and labeled "Mind Consciousness" while the lower third is labeled "Stored Consciousness." Embedded in the area that is our stored consciousness are the seeds of our "mental formations;" some are seeds of affliction, such as "anger, despair, jealousy, and delusion," (Nhat Hanh, 2001, p. 2) while others

[10] The concept of formations comes from the term saṃskāra, which "combines kāra, 'making,' with the prefix sa*ṃ*, 'together,' and thus has the literal sense of 'making together'" (Anālayo, 2017). Note that "According to the Vijñanavada School of Buddhism, altogether there are fifty-one kinds of mental formations, including feelings." (Nhat Hanh, 1999, p. 74). A thorough exploration of Nhat Hanh's model, in all of its complexity, is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In this dissertation I use a simplified version of his model as a jumping off point and a source of inspiration for the MBSL approach.

are seeds of mindfulness, such as equanimity, care, and compassion (Nhat Hanh, 1999). When we water the seeds of affliction they bloom up into our mind consciousness and can close us down (Nhat Hanh, 2002). However, if we water the seeds of mindfulness, they will bloom up alongside the mental formations of affliction and have the capacity to open us up. When this happens, the energy from the mindfulness bloom changes the environment around the afflicted mental formation by embracing its suffering and transforming it (Nhat Hanh, 2001). The simple act of bringing mindful awareness to it is enough to change it.

Figure 1.2: *A. My visualization of Thich Nhat Hanh's Seeds Model; the seeds of mindfulness come up in our mind consciousness to surround limited narratives/thoughts that also come up. B. Mind-Body State Literacy Model w/TNH's Model. The mind-body state replaces the mind consciousness in Nhat Hanh's model, and the lower three triangles below represent one's stored consciousness.*

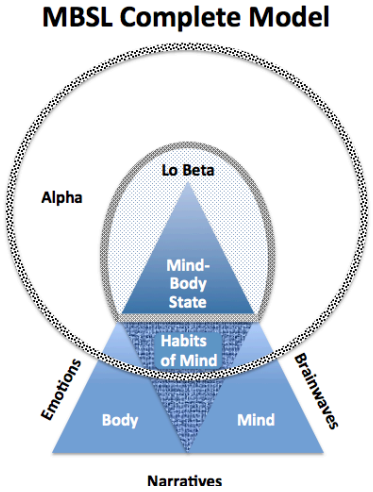


In developing the MBSL I have adapted Nhat Hahn's (2001) model as a starting point because it is a very useful way of presenting this information so that it can be understood quickly and easily. I then modified his mindfulness model by combining it with the MBSL Core Model to create a diagram that can also take into account information about brainwaves, emotions, and

narratives. Looking at Nhat Hahn's model alongside of the MBSL allows us to align the understanding used in mindfulness practice with the brainwave information I will share in Chapter 4. The completed MBSL model replaces the stored consciousness with the foundation of the pyramid that consists of the body and the mind, and is the storehouse for the habits of mind (see Figure 1.3). These habits are what Nhat Hanh (2001) calls the seeds, and the eight habits of mind named in the FSPW (WPA et al., 2011) I am identifying as some of the seeds of mindfulness. This is also where our afflictive seeds/habits are stored.

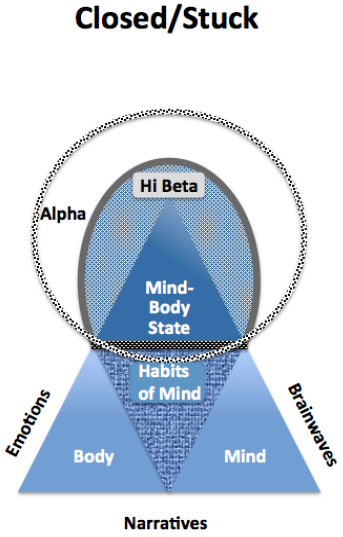
We have many kinds of mind habits; there are other seeds (besides the eight habits) that are mindful as well as many others which are neutral and simply serve to help us function. In this dissertation I am concerned mainly, like Nhat Hanh, with those that are mindful or afflictive, because they are the ones that which bloom from the seedbed of our subconscious and unconscious minds and affect the mind-body state in our conscious minds. These mindfulness seeds are important not only because they prepare us for success in education, but also, as I will show, because of their positive effect on the process of opening our mind-body state.

Figure 1.3: *The MBSL Complete model incorporates two brainwaves: our conscious mind (Lo Beta) and our open awareness (Alpha). The seeds from the model in Figure 1.3 are still part of the model, but not depicted here.*



The mind consciousness in the MBSL model is a dome much like Nhat Hanh's model. Inside that dome is the top of the pyramid representing the state of our mind-body in our conscious mind. The variations of this model that I will use later in the dissertation will show this mind-body area in varying shades of light to dark blue. This shading indicates the volume of brainwaves (Theta) coming up from the subconscious mind, i.e. the number and size of the seeds (i.e., narratives) that are blooming. How dark, thick, or solid the outline of the dome is shows how open or closed our conscious mind is. When this is closed, the area inside the conscious mind that is around and outside of the mind-body state starts to shade in because when we are closed our conscious mind is filled with the narrative we are stuck in and leaves no room for another perspective (see Fig. 1.5)

Figure 1.4: *Theta comes up into the mind-body state triangle. The more intense the theta (mental formation) is, the darker the blue. If fearful emotions close us down, the borderline of the beta dome becomes solid, cutting us off from external input.*



The final difference in the two models is that the MBSL model includes an outer ring that represents our awareness (the brainwave Alpha). Essential to the MBSL approach is our ability

to raise and direct our[11] awareness and use it as the primary way of shifting our mind-body state to open. Later in this work I will show alternate versions of the model which will help illustrate how awareness can be used in this way.

The MBSL model brings together the best of both brainwave research and mindfulness practice. While it helps us visualize the understanding behind the practice of mindfulness, it also makes the mindfulness information more tangible and concrete by showing what happens in our brains. Having the seeds of mindfulness in us depends on whether or not we have been taught about it or shown how it works. It is important that teachers and students learn about the mind-body state processes and have an opportunity to practice the corresponding mindfulness skills because we need to both plant the seeds and water them. Understanding how brainwaves work and how they process stories helps to remove much of the judgment that prevents us from being truly open and from having more compassion for ourselves and others. The model helps us visualize that when we, or others, are in emotional states or brainwave patterns that cause us to be narrow-minded, there is no room left in our minds to see things from a different perspective. We can become so stuck that we cannot find our way out or even have enough self-awareness to see that we need to get out. Most importantly, if we do not understand how our brains close down or how mindfulness can help, we will not have the seeds of mindfulness in us to water.

Research Questions

Now that I have provided a brief overview of the MBSL approach, I will describe the research questions that guided my development of this approach, followed by an overview of the remainder of the dissertation. The primary research question of this dissertation is: How do the facets of the mind-body state (i.e., brainwaves, emotions, and narratives) constellate to either

[11] Although this model can be applied in many spaces and contexts, here when I refer to "our" and "we" I am referring primarily to instructors and students in first-year college writing classrooms. As I argue, MBSL benefits and often requires that both engage in the practice together.

close students/instructors down or open them up in the learning/listening process? I will address this primary question through related questions throughout the chapters:

- What does a "closed" mind-body state constellation look like?
    - How does fear enable a closed mind-body state? [Chapters 3, 4, and 5]
    - What brainwave frequency configurations might enable a closed mind-body state? [Chapters 4 and 5]
    - What are exclusionary or anti-relational narratives, and how do they enable a closed mind-body state? [Chapters 3 and 4]
- What does an "open" mind-body state constellation look like? [Chapters 1 and 4]
    - What emotions support this state? [Chapter 5]
    - What brainwave frequency configurations support this state? [Chapter 4]
    - What are relational narratives, and how do they support this state? [Chapter 3]
- What mindfulness practices/literacies support open mind-body state constellations (i.e., the habits of mind that are critical for meaningful dialogic exchanges)? [Chapter 5]
    - How do inwardly directed mindfulness practices support a more open mind-body state? [Chapter 5]
    - How does mindful, compassionate communication support the creation of an open mind-body state? [Chapter 5]

Overview of the Dissertation

In Chapter 2, I provide a general theoretical and scholarly background for the dissertation. It places the MBSL with scholarship on narratives, listening, mindfulness, and the body. In doing so, I also clarify some of my scholarly values, such as neurodiversity, socially responsible views of emotion, and listening. I also go into further detail about the approach:

namely, the importance of body awareness, compassion, and developing regular formal and informal mindfulness practices.

In Chapter 3, I explore the narrative facet of the mind-body state. Specifically, I examine the characteristics of both exclusionary/isolating and inclusionary/relational narratives. I do so by examining cultural narratives from American history. In the process, I begin to explore the relationship between two facets in the MBSL model: emotions and narratives. I examine how these two dimensions interact and sometimes reinforce one another to solidify exclusionary cultural narratives. Placing this discussion within the context of conversations in cultural rhetorics about the material impact of stories, I look, for example, at the legacy of early American narratives. I trace these narratives from colonial times to the present, noting the pervasiveness of individualistic narratives that, among other things, place responsibility for racism on individuals rather than on society. Other narratives view the environment solely in terms of its usefulness to humans. I explore the pervasiveness of these narratives to provide both instructors and students important context for doing narrative work. The work of trying to foster more relational narratives, I suggest, happens within cultures (such as the United States) which contain many narratives that overtly resist the idea of relationality. I end this chapter by highlighting the affordances of various kinds of relational narratives and suggest that the MBSL, with its goal of openness in the narrative encounter, can support students' and instructors' ongoing development of more relational narratives.

Chapter 4 re-examines the relationship between exclusionary narratives and emotions, but adds a much richer exploration of how this relationship is further mediated by the type of attention with which we attend, i.e., our brainwaves. To do this, I draw on traditional neuroscientific research as well as research in neurotherapy and neurofeedback. Neurotherapy

and neurofeedback discourses provide the more holistic methodological approach to understanding brainwaves necessary to further clarify the MBSL approach. In neurofeedback, a client is hooked up with electrodes (much like those used for sleep studies) to EEG equipment. They then receive real-time feedback on their brainwave activity, which is translated to an animation on a computer monitor. A neurofeedback practitioner then tries to guide the client towards an "ideal" brainwave state, depending on the particular goals of the session. (Clients seek neurofeedback for a variety of purposes, including peak performance, therapy, and cognitive training for more optimal learning (Demos, 2005).)

Neurotherapy refers to situations in which neurofeedback is used in conjunction with therapy, including psychotherapy and/or narrative therapy (White & Richards, 2009). Scholars, researchers, and clinicians in neurofeedback and neurotherapy, unlike those who study brainwaves from a more positivistic perspective typical of mainstream neuroscience/cognitive/psychological scholarship, study brainwaves in relation to emotions and narratives. Thus, I draw on these bodies of scholarship because, like the core MBSL model, they examine the relationship between three facts: narratives, emotions, and brainwaves. This chapter draws on these discourses to explicate the MBSL model, describing the co-mediation of these three facets.

Chapter 5 synthesizes what has been covered so far, especially in Chapter 4, and provides conclusions about how these understandings inform the MBSL approach. I synthesize the discussion of exclusionary and relational narratives/emotions from Chapter 3, and the interaction of the three facets in Chapter 4, and ask, What mindfulness pedagogical practices, including nonviolent communication and invitational rhetoric, would support an open mind-body state conducive to the narrative encounter? In the process, I explore core aspects of mindfulness as a

formal and informal practice, that is, one that includes guided exercises such as sitting meditations and body scans as well as informal practices such as mindfulness of objects, eating, and activity. I also examine core concepts from non-neoliberal versions of mindfulness, such as beginner's mind and impermanence. Chapter 5 reemphasizes the idea that the mind-body state's inner environment is always interrelated with one's social and natural environments, and explores the importance of students and instructors co-constructing a safe, compassionate environment in which to engage in narrative encounters.

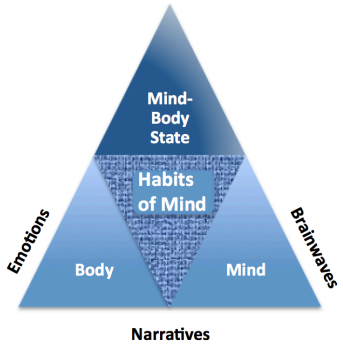
Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, begins by exploring the potential role that MBSL could play in responding to faculty emotional labor. I suggest that MBSL may similarly play a pivotal role in graduate student development, as graduate students are faced with a unique set of emotional challenges, such as learning how to teach in emotionally charged classrooms and beginning to situate their personal narratives in relation to academia. I then turn to the limitations of this dissertation, framing these limitations as potential opportunities for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical and Scholarly Background

Introduction: The Purpose of This Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to provide theoretical and scholarly background for the Mind-Body State Literacy model and approach, as well as the dissertation as a whole. The MBSL core model (see Figure 2.1) involves multiple complex components: narratives, emotions, brainwaves, the body-mind, and habits of mind. It is based on the practice of mindfulness, which brings with it its own discourses and values.

Figure 2.1: *The Core MBSL Model.*



I will begin this chapter by providing background terminology that I will use in this chapter and throughout the dissertation. Then, in "Learning is a Narrative/Social Process," I frame learning as a process of students and instructors updating their narrative worldviews by engaging in dialogues with others, highlighting the importance of listening. I touch briefly on the ways narratives can hamper the listening/narrative learning process. In "Narratives, Fears, and the Mind-Body State," I focus on describing the relationship between narratives and emotions, describing how fear and exclusionary narratives cause students and instructors to become immersed in a singular narrative perspective.

In "Mindfulness Discourses and the MBSL Approach," I explain which aspects of

mindfulness are core to the MBSL approach in responding to the problems introduced in the first half of the chapter, focusing on the importance of body awareness. Then, in "Acknowledging and Avoiding Neoliberal Views of Mindfulness and Emotion," I distinguish the mindfulness approaches I am suggesting from views of emotions, brains, and bodies that problematically value individualism. This segues into "An Important Note about Neurodiversity," where I clarify my own and the MBSL's valuing of mental fluidity and neurodiversity. In "MBSL and Habits of Mind," I underscore the importance of integrating mindfulness as a regular formal and informal practice. Then, in "Influence of Listening, Non-Violent Communication, and Invitational Pedagogies," I briefly situate the MBSL among other pedagogies that value compassion and non-violent communication. Finally, I conclude by previewing the content of Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

An Overview of Terminology: Exclusionary Narratives and Emotions

As illustrated in the MBSL model, a closed mind-body state is not caused by one's emotions, one's brainwaves, or one's narratives alone; it is a constellation of all three. Yet, each of these three aspects can have powerful qualities that exacerbate a closed mind-body state, locking a student or instructor into a singular narrative perspective. On the other hand, each of these facets has the capacity to help open us up. Each facet has a set of qualities that range on a spectrum from linear and non-relational to holistic and relational. These terms will be used and explained in far greater detail in the rest of the dissertation; this chapter is meant to serve only as an overview and guide that can be referred to at any point as one reads the dissertation.

Certain elements of our stories indicate whether they allow us to let in a diversity of perspectives. As a teacher in Rhetoric and Composition, I want students to be able to look at the stories that frame how they see their connection to the world and evaluate whether the lens that narrative provides is a narrow focused one that allows only their singular perspective, or whether

it is open and allows multiple viewpoints. If our stories can tolerate only a singular point of view, they will tend to close us down, so I will refer to these as exclusionary or closed stories. Conversely, when they can support multiple perspectives that not only allow us, but actually encourage us, to open up, I will call them inclusive or open stories (see Table 2.1).

We can also understand emotions in terms of relationality. Since stressful emotional energy can make us feel alienated from the very world we live in, it is important that students understand how that emotional energy, especially fear, closes down the way we see our stories, especially how we see ourselves in relation to others. At the same time, our wiring and the operation of our minds, our brains and our physiology change depending on the way we deal with that energy, how we pay attention in our lives, and the nature of our stories. Most important are the drastic ways emotion inhibits our ability to open up and update those stories. In turn, an inability to open our personal narratives hinders our ability to have a positive, responsible impact on broader cultural narratives. For this reason, emotions can be categorized as either exclusionary/isolating/isolated or relational/inclusionary/inclusive (see Table 2.1).

The neurological, psychophysiological, and psychological changes associated with exclusionary narratives are many, but in this dissertation I focus mainly on one neurological/psychological aspect: brainwaves. As mentioned very briefly in the preface, brainwaves can indicate a person's type of attention as well as their emotions, including fear (Ribas, Ribas, Nóbrega, da Nóbrega, de Andrade Espécie, Calafange, Calafange. & de Lima Margins, 2018). In this dissertation, I examine the known human brainwave frequency ranges in relation to students'/instructors' level of openness in the narrative encounter: Gamma, Hi Beta, Beta, Alpha, Theta, and Delta. Each brainwave plays a unique role in the narrative encounter. Table 2.1, below, sets out these terms.

Table 2.1: *Dissertation Terms and Definitions.*

Facet of MBSL Model	Term	Definition	Primary Chapter Discussed In
Narratives	Exclusionary/ exclusive/ alienated/ alienating/ isolated/ isolating narratives	Narratives that only allow for one singular, linear perspective. Perspectives that contradict this one are often resolved through violence or othering. Furthermore, these narratives are often sustained through the objectification of people and the natural environment. Narratives can also be isolated in nature; that is, we may see ourselves as separate from others because our narratives say that we are less-than.	Chapter 3
Narratives	Relational/ inclusionary/ inclusive	Relational narratives are those that see the wellbeing of the individual and the wellbeing of other people and the natural environment as one and the same.	Chapter 3
Emotions	Exclusionary/ isolating/ isolated emotions	When combined with exclusionary narratives, fearful emotions—stress, guilt, shame, and anger—can be exclusionary in nature, triggering physiological changes that lock us into a mode of perception incapable of letting in more than one perspective.	Chapter 3
Emotions	Relational/ inclusionary/ inclusive emotions	Compassion, empathetic, loving kindness, open hearted. These emotions have the power to transform emotions that may be exclusionary in nature.	Chapter 3
Brainwaves	Gamma	A brainwave brought about when we consciously direct our conscious state of mind. This brainwave can be used to direct our conscious attention towards a more self-aware, calm and open mind-body state.	Chapter 4

Table 2.1 (cont'd)

Brainwaves	Hi Beta	Hi Beta is a brainwave associated with narrow focused attention. It can be measured using EEG technology, and is distinct from separate brainwave frequencies associated with normal, conscious attention and calmed, relaxed attention. This brainwave, when paired with exclusionary narratives and emotions, helps fix us into a singular narrative perspective because it is narrow-focused in nature.	Chapter 4
Brainwaves	Lo Beta	A brainwave associated with calm, grounded conscious attention.	Chapter 4
Brainwaves	Alpha	A brainwave associated with calm, open, non-storied awareness of the present moment. It is also the bridge between our inner and outer worlds. Alpha is very powerful in being able to transform exclusionary narratives and emotions because it is able to dissolve the emotional evaluations we typically attach to exclusionary narratives.	Chapter 4
Brainwaves	Theta	A brainwave associated with autobiographical memories, one that influences the content of our narrative formations.	Chapter 4
Brainwaves	Delta	A brainwave related to the unconscious mind. This brainwave is associated with sleep. In Nhat Hanh's (2001) mental formations model, we might think of this as "stored consciousness."	Chapter 4
All 3 Facets (Narratives, Emotions, & Brainwaves)	Closing Down	Narratives, emotions, and brainwaves can each, in its own way, contribute to instructors'/students' inability to listen openly, to creatively bring one's own narratives into conversation with another person's, and/or to see the environment in a non-objectified way. Closing down is a move towards becoming increasingly dualistic and/or linear in one's thinking. I also associate this process with individualistic views of the self in relation to society and the environment; the self is viewed as independent from other people and the environment.	Chapters 2-5

Table 2.1 (cont'd)

All 3 Facets (Narratives, Emotions, & Brainwaves)	Opening Up	Narratives, emotions, and brainwaves can each, in its own way, support instructors'/students' ability to listen openly, to creatively bring one's own narratives into conversation with another person's, and/or to see the environment in a non-objectified way. Opening up is a move towards increasingly complex thinking. I also associate this process with the ability to recognize/remember one's interconnectedness with others and the environment.	Chapters 2-5
All 3 Facets (Narratives, Emotions, & Brainwaves)	Narrative Encounter	The narrative encounter, as introduced in the preface and this chapter, happens when an individual confronts new narratives. Goodson and Gill (2011) describe the encounter as dialogical in nature. In this dissertation, I am interested in the degree to which students can be open as they engage in narrative encounters in the Rhetoric and Writing classroom (and beyond).	Chapters 2-5
All 3 Facets (Narratives, Emotions, & Brainwaves)	Habits of Mind	The MBSL approach, and its associated practices, are designed to support the Habits of Mind explained in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (WPA et al., 2011). The habits are curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility and metacognition (2011).	Chapters 2-5

This table can be used as a quick reference throughout the dissertation. Next, I will provide a more detailed, but brief discussion of how I will use the terms "story" and "narrative" in this dissertation.

Defining Narratives/Stories

I will be using the terms *narrative* and *story*[12] interchangeably to refer to the (both spoken and unspoken) maps and the contexts from which humans operate on a daily basis (Jeong-Hui, 2015; Robillard & Combs, 2019). I also assume, however, that narratives or stories are interconnected with our "memories, myths, missions, dreams, stories, histories, beliefs, religions and faith traditions, values, concepts, images, practices, sexualities, politics, institutions, and interpretations and theories" (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 147).

As described in a later section of this chapter titled "Narrative, Fear, and the Mind-Body State," I argue for a definition of narrative that accounts for the way our narratives/stories are constantly changing in relation to our mind-body state, including (among other constantly changing dimensions) our brainwaves and emotions. I see this definition as similar to Paula Mathieu's (2014) discussion of inner rhetoric. While the author's description of inner rhetoric is largely confined to narratives that a person has about themselves, she recognizes that the content of our narratives is influenced both by our surrounding cultures and our internal fear. Both, she argues, can have a large impact on how immersed we are in our narratives/stories, and how firmly we adhere to them.

I also, as my introduction of the MBSL model has illustrated, view narratives/stories as mutually constituted. They are not constructed independently by isolated mind-bodies. Nor are people blank slates on which cultural narratives/stories are written. The MBSL model, as outlined in the preface, assumes that each facet—narratives, emotions, and brainwaves—is always engaged in a dialogical relationship with the surrounding social and natural environment. As the authors of "Our Story Begins Here" note, "To understand culture as a narrative formation

[12] I recognize that both of these terms carry histories and various meanings and are understood differently in different contexts (including disciplinary contexts). While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to delve deeply into those distinctions, I do want to acknowledge these distinctions here.

means that it cannot be regarded as an isolated, or isolatable entity. It must be understood as relational as well as distinctive, as a site of action and reaction" (2002, p. 3, as quoted in Powell et al., 2014, p. 14).

My use of Nhat Hanh's mental formations model (2001) further reflects this relational, contextual understanding of narratives/stories. A formation is a kind of coming together, a combination of different moving, fluid pieces. I will often examine the content of these narratives in relation to the emotions and the brainwaves that influence and are influenced by these narratives.

It is important to keep this in mind as I sometimes refer to an individual's set of narratives/stories as well as cultural narratives/stories, which I do especially in the next chapter. It would be inaccurate to say that any particular narrative/story is exclusively a cultural narrative, or that an individual's narratives/stories are completely their own. Our personal narratives are always connected, in some form, to the larger set of narratives that we come from and interact with on a daily basis. However, it's important to make some distinctions for two reasons.

First, cultural narratives/stories, sometimes called master narratives in Rhetoric and Writing Scholarship (Alexander, 2011), are recurring narratives woven into a culture. They take the form of movies, novels, paintings, manifestos, historical accounts, and tropes. These narratives reflect and embody cultural values, including those associated with privilege, power, and prejudice. Master narratives are often recurring because they are tied to pervasive systems of privilege, power, and prejudice. Therefore, it's important to recognize them as a distinct category.

Second, we must acknowledge the uniqueness of each individual's set of narratives/stories. These narratives/stories, while always interacting with the outside world, take

place in individual bodies with unique positionalities. Since each individual has a unique lived experience, even if that person appears to "adopt" a cultural narrative/story, their take on that narrative/story will be unique. In addition to these distinctions, I should note that I will also discuss the MBSL approach in relation to personal narrative writing, and refer to the versions of narratives that are constructed through writing or, in some cases, oral performances, recordings, etc. In such cases, I will use the term "personal narrative writing."

Learning is a Narrative/Social Process

One of the core premises of this approach is that learning requires incorporating new information into our narratives. The goal of the MBSL approach is to help both students and teachers be more open as they work with their stories. We must understand the narrative learning process as a social one. Scholars in Rhetoric and Writing as well as other disciplines argue that we transform our inner web of narratives through ongoing social interactions, and ideally, respectful dialogues anchored in listening (Goodson and Gill, 2011; Yam, 2018). The MBSL approach is designed to help instructors and students recognize when they are in a mind-body state that does not allow them to engage with other people, perspectives, and narratives freely; it helps them recognize and transform mind-body states that inhibit listening or arguably make it (temporarily, at least), impossible.

This concept of narrative learning as a social process is popular in Rhetoric and Writing (Lindquist and Halbritter, 2019; Robillard & Combs, 2019; Selfe & Ulman, 2019; Yam, 2018). I am most influenced, however, by Goodson and Gill's discussion of this process in their books, *Narrative Pedagogy: Life History and Learning* (2011) and *Critical Narrative as Pedagogy* (2014). Narratives take place within webs of narratives as well as "webs of interlocutions"

(Taylor, 1989 as cited in Goodson & Gill, 2014) just as ecological models[13] of writing recognize that writing takes place within "dynamic interlocking systems that structure the social activity of writing" (Cooper, 1986, p. 368).

Ongoing dialogues with others inform our narratives about who we are in relation to the world. Narrative work, then, is "an interplay of to-and-fro dialogic encounters" (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 88). Goodson and Gill conceptualize dialogues centered on meaningful narrative exchanges as "narrative fusions of horizons," building on philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's dialectical concept of "fusion of horizons" (2011, p. 77). They frame the horizon as including "the position of a person, his/her own past, and the history and tradition within which he/she lives and where the horizon stems from" (2011, p. 77). A person can never completely close off or remove themselves from their horizon (or what we often refer to in Rhetoric and Composition, their positionality). Individuals can, however, expand and open up their horizons by listening.

Through listening that is open in nature, students and instructors not only take in new information, they also let it transform their existing narratives. Goodson and Gill (2014) quote (p. 61) David E. Linge, who explains,

> It is precisely in confronting the otherness...that…(our) own prejudices…are thrown into relief and thus come to critical self-consciousness…Collision with the other's horizons makes us aware of assumptions so deep-seated that they would otherwise remain unnoticed. (Linge, 1997, p. xxi as quoted in Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 62).

One of the most powerful ways that listening can transform our existing narratives is by challenging and updating our pre-constructed views of others. Rhetoric and Writing scholars have long discussed the ways in which writers continually construct imagined others—often their

[13] Ecocomposition represents a diverse body of scholarship, and scholars have not reached a consensus about its origins (Dobrin & Weisser, 2002).

readers (Cooper, 1986; Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Long, 1980; Ong, 1975; Said, 1986). Marilyn Cooper (1986) wisely pointed out that though we construct who we think others are in our minds, we need to have these constructions consult reality. Her ecological model

> offers a salutary correction of vision on the question of audience. By focusing our attention on the real social context of writing, it enables us to see that writers not only analyze or invent audiences, they, more significantly, communicate with and know their audiences. (1986, p. 372).

She explains that "Students learn about how to deal with their readers not 'by internalizing and generalizing the reactions of a number of specific readers' and thereby developing a 'sense of audience' (Kroll, "Writing for Readers" 181), but by developing the habits and skills involved in finding readers and making use of their responses" (1986, p. 372).

Narratives of this exclusionary nature do not allow for a narrative fusion of horizons. When imbued with power, exclusionary narratives have the capacity to bring about incredible violence and oppression, largely because their linear nature is dependent on "othering logics" (King, 2003; Pannian, 2016; Powell, 2012; Riascos, 2007). Indeed, exclusionary narratives are the foundation for colonization (King, 2003). As Madhu Narayan says, "Stories have an effect. They are real. They matter" (Powell, 2012, p. 390). (Chapter 3 explores examples of exclusionary narratives in greater detail, examining their power, pervasiveness, and influence on instructors and students in the Rhetoric and Writing classroom.)

The MBSL model, as I will argue, helps students be more open as they work with their narratives. I am interested specifically in helping students develop habits of mind that ultimately support relational narratives. As my preface explains, I too believe that narratives are incredibly powerful because they reflect as well as shape our relationship with the world around us.

Narratives, Fear, and the Mind-Body State

One of the crucial ways that our narratives "take place" (Powell, 2012, p. 390) is in the body. The MBSL constellates narratives in relation to the body-mind, as well as brainwaves and emotions. In making this move, I am joining scholars who have argued that we cannot look at the meaning making process, including the formation of our narratives, as being constructed solely in the mind. We must dissolve the mind-body split.

It's important to note, in doing this, that such a split is largely still present in the United States (as well as other parts of the world) and in academia (including the Rhetoric and Writing classroom). Catherine Fox argues, "academia encourages, even expects a division between mind and body, cognition and affect" (2014, p. 338). Early feminists played a critical role in trying to dismantle the mind-body split (e.g., Banks, 2003; Butler, 1990/1999; Cixous et al., 1976; Finke, 1992; Fleckenstein, 1999; Rich, 1989; Stenberg, 2002). Modern feminist researchers of mindfulness, emotional literacies, and other embodied practices have continued this work by examining the relationship between how we make meaning and how we listen to our bodies (Cooper, 2011; Fox, 2014; Kirsch, 2008; Mathieu, 2014; Wenger, 2015; Winans, 2012).

These scholars not only argue that our bodies largely co-mediate how we construct our narratives of the world (Wenger, 2015; Winans, 2012); they provide embodied practices that help instructors and students experience and reflect on this co-mediation. Amy E. Winans (2012), for instance, has students practice mindful awareness of fearful emotions by asking them to observe what it is like to stand perfectly still on a busy college campus without being able to look at their phone. This activity is meant to call up feelings of fear and discomfort, as students feel self-conscious for standing still amongst their peers with no clear purpose for doing so. They observe the thoughts that arise when they are afraid, noticing how fear and the associated self-

consciousness affects this process (2012). Similarly, Fox (2014) has students practice mindfulness-based yoga in the Rhetoric and Writing classroom, and then reflect on how it changed their listening practices. As one student noted, "yoga helped me to slow down my mind and allowed me to listen and notice others more…" (par. 18). These Rhetoric and Writing scholars have also lobbied for the potential of mindfulness practices to support students' general openness to learning (Chaterdon, 2016; Wenger, 2015).

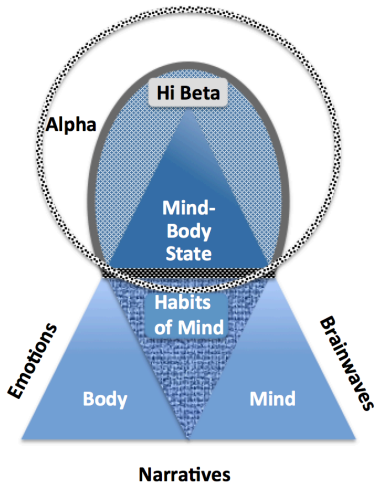
Our bodies[14] very much influence our experience of the world. They are not blank slates passively written on by external discourses; what's encoded on the body is largely impermanent (Fleckenstein, 1999). Our body-minds, as well as our memories, are far from static (Fox, 2014; Schaefer, 2018). For this reason, fear in the body-mind can quickly and powerfully lock us in to one particular narrative perspective. Our bodies spark physiological events, such as the release of fear hormones, even before we can consciously evaluate what has happened[15] (Williams et al., 2007). Our brainwaves shift into predominately hi-beta, which puts us into narrow focus and linear thinking (Fisher, 2009).

Mathieu (2014) describes the role that the energy of fear in our bodies has in changing our relationship to our "inner rhetoric—the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves" (p. 173). She explains how the fear generated by one negative teaching evaluation affected her inner rhetoric: "[It] changed me dramatically, from being someone who felt capable and enjoyed teaching to someone who was afraid of her students and undeserving of her position" (2014, p. 177). Mathieu's (2014) narration of this experience demonstrates the closing down process portrayed in Figure 2.2. The shaded, blue dome over the mind-body state represents a mind-conscious that is immersed in a narrative worldview, in Mathieu's experience, a worldview that

[14] Or, more accurately, our "body-minds."
[15] Sandra Perl describes this as "felt sense," or "the body's knowledge before it's articulated into words" (*Felt* 1)" (as quoted in Wenger, 2013, p. 28).

devalues her identity as a teacher. The dark line around it represents the ways that exclusionary, or in this case, isolated narratives, fueled by fear[16], prevent external input from coming in; our ability to listen in this moment is compromised. Furthermore, Mathieu explains that fear quickly locks us in a vicious cycle as it "brings teachers to a very unproductive place, which replicates more fear, doubt, and distance" (2014, p. 185). When immersed in our narratives (or again, what the author terms inner rhetoric), we begin to operate according to the narrative context (Mathieu, 2014).

Figure 2.2: *A closed mind-body state.*



Jill Swiencicki's "The Rhetoric of Awareness Narratives" (2006) similarly illustrates the power of (unacknowledged/untended) fear in the body to keep us locked into limiting narratives. Awareness narratives are those in which the author grapples with their encounters with, as well as their own participation in, racism and racists systems. This kind of narrative, if we stopped there, might be identified as relational, for they "can be an important rhetorical step in racial

[16] Will Banks describes the power of memories associated with the fear of violence, for "violence, once inscribed on the body, is difficult to erase and, as such, may control the readings we do of ourselves, our experiences, and others" (2003, p. 25).

change…" (2006, p. 339). The writers' emotional/embodied contexts in which these narratives are written, however, have the power to transform them into non-relational ones. As Swiencicki says, "the affects of shame and guilt are, in large part, a profound self-consciousness of how one's notion of self is contingent upon others in a power dynamics" (2006, p. 339). A well-intentioned narrative designed to be relational towards those who experience racism first-hand, loses its relationality when it is tied up with narrow focus, fear-driven shame, and the "spotlight" of self-consciousness (2006, p. 350).

In addition to the power of fear to lock us into a narrative, we must also deal with the strong feelings of emotional investment that we have in our personal narratives. In her highly influential *Rhetorical Listening* (2005), Krista Ratcliffe describes her own emotional attachment to her narrative of herself as anti-racist, and how this attachment hindered her ability to have self-awareness of moments when her behaviors did not align with this identity. Winans (2012) similarly emphasizes the power of emotional attachment in relation to narratives tied to identity. Like Ratcliffe, she explores how such strong emotional investments in our narratives end up hindering our ability to listen to others. In terms of Figure 2.2, emotional investments can encourage us to stay in and perhaps further defend/confirm our narrative perspective. In these moments, we have little motivation to give up the lovely world created inside our upside down bell jar.

Banks (2003), Mathieu (2014), Swiencicki (2006), and Winans (2012) highlight the difficulty of doing embodied narrative work. Embodied personal narrative work—and personal reflection, in general—is difficult because of the sticky nature of fear. As students strive to update their narratives about the world throughout their education, they do not simply incorporate, without resistance, new discourses, stories, and knowledge into their narrative

worlds (Lindquist, 2004). Though they are exposed to diverse perspectives as part of the educational process, the interaction between exclusionary narratives and fear-based emotion can prevent them from being able to learn from narrative encounters.

Mindfulness Discourses and the MBSL Approach

MBSL helps provide insight into this process by recognizing the different facets (i.e., emotional, brainwave, and narrative) that constellate to form a closed mind-body context in which personal narrative reflection takes place. The goal is to use the literacies associated with these facets to cultivate a mind-body state more conducive to observing, listening to, and sometimes transforming narratives. To do this, I draw primarily on mindfulness discourses and practices.

I do so, in part, because mindfulness supports the unification of the mind and body (e.g., Ahani et al., 2014; Nhat Hanh, 2016). Mindfulness practitioners experience this unification through formal and informal mindfulness exercises. In a formal sitting meditation, for instance, participants bring awareness to the body and to the breath. Nhat Hanh explains that the "Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Wherever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again" (1999, p. 15). Nhat Hanh (1999), considered a leader in mindfulness education, is making an absolutely critical point, and one that is core to the MBSL approach.

As seen in Figure 2.2, one of the first things that instructors and students need to practice in order to become more open is (using gamma) to direct their calm consciousness (lo-beta) and their more open awareness (Alpha), to their body. Such a move, I argue, is necessary to do before expanding one's awareness to include the narrative itself. As discussed in the previous section on getting immersed in a narrative (e.g., Mathieu, 2014; Swiencicki, 2006), fear and

isolating/exclusionary narratives create a vicious cycle. Fear, when attached to the narrative, continues to color our ongoing appraisals of our present moment experiences. What's worse, because we have been taught to ignore our bodies and the role that they play in our meaning making (Banks, 2003; Boler, 1999; Fox, 2019; Wenger, 2015), we are unaware of the body's enormous impact on our perceptual lens.

In contrast, mindfulness discourses recognize the enormous role that fear plays in shaping our perceptions. Foundational texts such as Danielle J. Seigel's (2007) *The Mindful Brain,* Kabat-Zinn's (1991) *Full-Catastrophe Living*, and Antonio Damasio's *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (2000) all stress the importance of tending to the emotion and the body first. The power of awareness, combined with the calming effects of mindfulness exercises, offers an opportunity to separate the emotion from the narrative. Kabat-Zinn's keystone *Full Catastrophe Living* makes this point clear in laying out the order of mindfulness exercises, which move progressively from "sitting with the breath," "sitting with the breath and body as a whole," "sitting with sound," and then, only after several minutes with each of these exercises, "sitting with thoughts and feelings." Notice that both thoughts and feelings (or in the case of MBSL, narratives and emotions) are left until the end. This is because of how strongly narratives and emotions remain attached. Narratives are often, as Chief Scientist of the EEG Institute Dr. Siegfried Othmer says, "state-stamped;" that is, they are stamped with the emotional state that often remains with the narrative for a very long time (2007, p. 28).

Once students have shifted their awareness to the body, removing the fuel from the narrative-emotion cycle (Mathieu, 2014), they are better prepared to do narrative work. At this point, they can engage in a version of mindfulness similar to what Pat Belanoff (2001) calls "being allowing, yet directive" (p. 55). She explains that

> As in mindfulness meditation, the goal of reflective writing is to both accept the self as fully adequate (perfect!), as its own best authority, and at the same time strive to deepen and further its grasp on its own insights and truths. (2001, p. 55)

Mindfulness, then, is far from a passive process of reflecting on and uncritically accepting our existing, sometimes, "limiting" or closed narratives (Goodson and Gill, 2011, p. 65).

Acknowledging and Avoiding Neoliberal Views of Mindfulness and Emotion

For Rhetoric and Writing teachers as well as those across many different disciplines, integrating mindfulness into the classroom, often goes hand-in-hand with brain literacy. To make a case for their integration of mindfulness and mindfulness-based practices such as yoga, Rhetoric and Writing scholars draw on scholarship from other disciplines that articulates the nuanced interrelationships between the body and mind (e.g., Fox, 2019; Chaterdon, 2016). This scholarship often includes the brain science behind mindfulness (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 1991; Seigel, 2007)[17]. Like educators in other disciplines who currently integrate mindfulness into their classrooms, Rhetoric and Writing scholars/teachers draw on interdisciplinary scholarship on the topic as well as popular literature written for the wider public (Mathieu, 2014).

In drawing on popular discourses that present scientific research around mindfulness for the general public, however, instructors risk integrating neoliberal conceptions of emotion, the body, the brain, and mindfulness itself. Discourses about mindfulness and its relationship to the brain have been permeating the education system for the past several decades (De Vos, 2015; Pitts-Taylor, 2010; Reveley, 2016). This movement is partly driven by what's become a billion dollar industry (Dampier, 2018; Rice, n.d.), one that persuades buyers that they need to have better brains as part of an individualistic push towards "a certain state of happiness, purity,

[17] Daniel P. Barbezat and Mirabai Bush's (2014) *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, for instance, describes how mindfulness changes brain activity as it introduces the topic to interdisciplinary educators.

wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Jack, 2010) p. 18). Books, textbooks, and guided meditations unfortunately capitalize on harmful versions of mindfulness that emphasize ignoring difficult emotions or trying to escape thoughts in the pursuit of individual happiness (Reveley, 2016). It is of critical importance that instructors acknowledge and convey to students the power of these discourses, as they inevitably influence our attitudes and create prejudices towards these topics.

Despite common misconceptions that mindfulness meditation is about quieting or stopping thinking, it is about bringing a different quality of awareness to this thinking so that it can change organically. Mindfulness is also not the practice of consciously conjuring up a particular narrative or thought to replace another one. It is the nature of one's relationship to thoughts, narratives, and emotions that makes mindfulness powerful in terms of learning. In their study of applying mindfulness skills as a way of reducing prejudice, Jason Lillis and Steven C. Hayes found that, "it appears that changing the *awareness of and relationship to* negative thoughts may be more important in some instances than addressing their content" (2007, p. 406 emphasis added).

Neoliberal views of mindfulness discourses intersect with Western attitudes towards emotions. The emotional rules in Western culture tend to encourage students to ignore, suppress, or override their emotions (Boler, 1999; Thein et al., 2015). The rugged individualistic Western hero is always able to overcome any sentiment that might cause him to appear weak. Western science, too, has a long history of turning its back on, and refusing to study, emotion because it could not be objectively validated or quantified. Emotion is still not considered a valid topic in some areas of academia for similar reasons (e.g., A. Banks, 2011; Fox, 2019; Lindquist, 2004; Stenberg, 2011).

Such versions of mindfulness and attitudes towards emotions are antithetical to the MSBL model I am offering here. The MBSL needs to be understood in a socially responsive, socially responsible way, particularly because it is about letting our narratives be informed by listening. I draw on secular[18] versions of mindfulness that support curiosity about the present moment. It is not about, as one popular source says, "positive vibes only" (n.d., Gunter, par. 4). Instead, it is about bringing, with "the curious eyes of a child," our awareness to whatever is "up" in the present moment.

In contrast to popular Western views, contemplative practices do not suppress or hide emotions; rather, we are told to allow them to come up to see what they are trying to tell us. Original Buddhist conceptions of mindfulness[19] view it as a practice of accepting—without becoming immersed in—difficult emotions as potential sources of the wisdom that can come from embracing complexity (Chödrön, 2003; Greenspan, 2003) rather than linearity. This approach asks us to calm fearful or stressful emotions by observing their effects on the body. The contemplative traditions have spent centuries studying the relationship between emotion, cognition, and narratives. The Dalai Llama initiated the movement that brought this ancient knowledge to the West, especially to Western science and academia. Many of the ideas in this dissertation are founded on the wisdom that comes from this work.

Western science is now seeing a burgeoning of research about emotion. For example, Richard Davidson, professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, has teamed up with the Dalai Llama to work with Buddhist monks to build on their

[18] I draw on secular versions of mindfulness, partly, because I work in a public university and thus am bound by the separation of Church and State. Fortunately, recognizing these same constrictions, those who are more firmly connected with mindfulness's Buddhist roots, such as Thich Nhat Hanh, have written numerous texts designed to support the integration of secular mindfulness into Western K-12 and higher education.

[19] Mindfulness has become popular in the United States, which includes (unfortunately) some adoptions of mindfulness that are neoliberal in nature (e.g., Revely, 2016). While distinguishing and separating myself from such harmful versions is not so simple—I acknowledge that my work will be read from within a culture that sustains these kinds of neoliberal associations around mindfulness—I conscientiously try to do so in this dissertation.

deep understanding of emotion and the mind (Davidson & Lutz, 2008; Koch, 2013). Many of these scientists have recognized the importance of having cognitive awareness of emotions. Neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio (2010/2012) are also making important discoveries about how emotion affects cognition. Much of academia has joined in this work; centers for the study of emotion, cognition, meditation, consciousness and the mind have opened in many of the top universities and medical centers in the country (Kabat-Zinn, 2007). The result of all this work is to further a significant shift away from the individualistic Western narratives about both emotion and mental health.

Similarly, many recent findings in neuroscience have challenged the traditional Western psychological model that sees the goal of human development to be creating strong, independent and resilient individuals. The influence of the individualistic paradigm is very evident in this traditional model, which defines healthy human development as moving from the dependence of infancy to the independence of maturity. Current research, however, validates a psychological and philosophical model called Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) that emerged in the 1970's and was developed as a feminist reaction against this male centered, individualistic viewpoint. According to Amy Banks, M.D., a psychiatrist and senior scholar at the Wellesley Centers for Women, the theory states, "growth happens through, and toward, relationships, not toward, increased separation and autonomy" (2011, p. 168). Recently, RCT has been validated by experiments using functional brain imaging which have discovered that social isolation activates the same neural pathway as physical pain, for the "human body and mind do not differentiate between physical pain and social rejection or isolation…." (2011, p. 170). Not only is lack of connection literally painful, it inhibits the growth of the neocortex, an area of which (the orbitofrontal cortex, or OBFC) is "most responsible for attachment behaviors" (2011, p. 172).

According to RCT, "empathy and mutuality [are] key components [of] healthy relationships" (A. Banks, 2011, p. 168). The type of caregiving that a person receives in infancy and early childhood is critical in determining whether they develop the capacity for attachments and relationships. Thus, abusive or unresponsive caregivers or a home/social environment that is chaotic or stressful negatively affects the development of the OBFC and makes it even less likely that the person will seek attachments or relationships. But, if caretakers are attentive and responsive, the OBFC "matures into a human connecting device" and "a healthy connection may quite literally revive the brain to yearn for more healthy connections" (2011, p. 175). Thus, contrary to the traditional American celebration of the autonomous individual, current neuroscience indicates that "those who are nurtured best, survive best" (Louis Cozolino, 2006 as quoted in Banks, 2011, p. 172)

My interest in teaching students to nurture empathy in themselves requires me to align my pedagogical approach with RCT[20] and challenge the notions set forth by the traditional psychological model. The dominant American narrative urges us to be competitive, judgmental, and narrowly focused on success. It rewards "winners." Therefore, it encourages left-brain supremacy at the expense of the right-brain cortex, which actually is dominant until about the age three. The right brain, however, remains at the center of connections; it is associated with "empathic cognition as well as the ability to perceive the emotional states of others" (A. Banks, 2011, p. 173). It is the "right cortex [that] sends the social signals necessary for the initiation of social interactions and affiliative behavior (Henry et al. 1984; Shapiro et al. 1997; Sutton and Davidson, 1997)" (2011, p. 173). Banks's work, then, underscores the reciprocal relationship between narratives that isolate and brain patterns that reinforce this isolation.

[20] Relational cultural theory essentially reconfirms what Indigenous groups (Riley-Mukavetz, 2014; Wilson, 2008) as well as Buddhist traditions (Nhat Hanh, 2001) have known for thousands of years, that our wellbeing is bound up with the wellbeing of others. I will explore this topic further in Chapter 3.

These findings indicate that people thrive when they live in a relational environment. On the other hand, our individualistic narratives make it difficult for us to be aware of, or care about, anything outside ourselves (the society as a whole, other people, or the natural world). As Banks points out, the individualistic narrative of the "self-made man" "is driving society into disconnection, despair, and even poor health" (2011, p. 168). The sense of separateness children who are raised in an individualistic culture experience can cause long-term harm to both their mental and physical wellbeing. As Banks says, "think of the biological uphill battle that exists when whole families, communities, and even nations are formed amidst interpersonal violence" (2011, p. 175). And, the effects are far-reaching and long lasting because "Disconnection can breed chronic disconnection" (A. Banks, 2011, p. 175). This disconnection and isolation will continue to be the legacy of individualism unless we are able to transform these narratives and open them up.

An Important Note about Neurodiversity

Given the discussion above about the prevalence of neoliberal discourses on mindfulness, emotions, and the brain, it is of even greater importance that I clarify my stance towards neurodiversity. I acknowledge that some of my discussions, including Chapter 4, which describes the affordances of different brainwaves, seem to imply that the "correct" brainwaves are key to listening and openness. Similarly, certain mindfulness practices, as they are described in popular mindfulness texts, such as Kabat-Zinn's (1991) *Full Catastrophe Living*, calls for activities, such as the sitting meditation, that may not be accessible for all bodies.

Given more time and space, I would discuss and respond to how mindfulness practices can be modified for diverse bodies and minds. This work is much needed, and may be the subject of a future publication. For now, however, I will say that I highly value neurodiverse approaches

to openness, listening, and relationality—the core goals of this dissertation. I would also point my reader to important texts that acknowledge these approaches, such as Remi Yergeau's (2011) argument that we should be mindful that neurodiverse individuals express empathy in unique ways often ignored in scholarship on the subject. Steffany Moonaz (2016) also offers an important discussion on the intersections of mindfulness practices and Dis/Ability.

Most importantly, however, MSBL, because it is a practice centered on mindful, curious and compassionate awareness, aims to foster habits of mind that encourage neurodiverse and neurotypical individuals to appreciate diversity without the need to make differences fit into pre-existing narratives. Furthermore, I have suggested that the goal of MBSL is not to avoid certain types of attention, such as narrow focus. Rather, I acknowledge and celebrate the affordances of different ways of attending; these are often useful in responding to the diverse rhetorical situations we encounter daily. I am suggesting only that we avoid staying stuck in such ways of attending when they are constellated with narratives that exclusionary and thus harmful to one's self and others. While I suggest that mental fluidity—the ability to move in and out of different mind states—is a healthy state, this fluidity may take different forms for different types of brains and bodies.

A Note About Generalizing and Complexity

In this dissertation, I often make generalizations about both students' and instructors' experiences of listening in the narrative encounter. In talking about the affordances of brainwaves and mindful awareness for listening, I am similarly making generalizations. As described in the preface, generalizations about the brainwaves are in some ways necessary; to delve into the complex constellations and nuances of each individual brain would render meaningful discussion or development of a pedagogical approach impossible. I remind my

readers, then, of the purpose behind some of these generalizations. At the core, I am interested in how our mind-body states co-mediate our ability to be open. At the core, I am interested in how to bring the qualities of compassionate awareness to one's self, to others, and to the surrounding environment.

Finally, I utilize understandings about the brain to lobby for practices that support the habits of mind that include engagement, openness, and curiosity. I specifically focus on mindfulness practices that encourage both instructors and students to examine themselves and the world around them in complex, nuanced ways. This is what beginner's mind is: coming to things as if you've never encountered them before and listening to others with an "I don't already know" mindset. It's important to understand that I describe relationships between brainwaves and stories, stories and emotions, and emotions and brainwaves, etc. to help students and instructors recognize that none of these facets is fixed, and that they interact with and co-mediate one another.

As I make generalizations, I am also under the assumption that no two mind-body states are alike. How could they be? Each person comes with a unique brainwave pattern. Each person comes with a unique body that has a unique set of DNA and unique stories encoded in it. Each mind-body state constellation is comprised of three highly volatile facets. I hope this dissertation, by exploring the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, of each of these facets, helps my readers feel in awe of the complexity of this mind-body state.

MBSL and Habits of Mind

The MBSL model, as outlined in Chapter 1, supports the FPSW habits of mind, including metacognition, engagement, openness, and curiosity. The FSPW (2011) offers a powerful argument about the power and necessity of developing certain habits of mind, but mindfulness

discourses demonstrate just how difficult it can be to get students to change their existing habits. Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal, and Kabat-Zinn[21], for instance, argue that those who practice mindfulness "need to develop a certain degree of *motivation* and a particular kind of *intentionality* so we are not perpetually at the mercy of the mind's ingrained habits of reactivity" (2007, p. 73).

Scholars and educators who have brought mindfulness into the classroom often frame it as a tool for interrupting our existing—often-limiting—habits. In framing the hard work of this process, Beth Berila draws on psychology professor Alan Fogel's (2009) metaphor of "wearing a path in a grassy field. The first couple of times, we have to work harder, but eventually the pathway will be worn and easy to follow" (2016, p. 48). MBSL incorporates mindfulness-based practices intended to be used in Rhetoric and Writing students' and instructors' everyday lives. Mindfulness pedagogies, as well as mindfulness discourses more broadly, generally assume that mindfulness is about consciously and deliberately developing open awareness as a habit. As Berila (2016) states, "The repetition of this process is crucial; mindfulness is not achieved in one activity but, rather, is cultivated over time" (p. 48). Students and instructors need to commit, even if for only a few minutes every day or most days of the week, to engaging in both formal practices (e.g., guided sitting meditations and body scans), and informal practices, such as mindfulness of eating, listening, walking/movement, and objects (Kabat-Zinn, 1991; Nhat Hanh, 1999).

Influence of Listening, Non-Violent Communication, and Invitational Pedagogies

This approach, importantly, must also account for the power of getting stuck. As Mathieu (2014) and Swiencicki's (2006) work illustrates, it is easy, once caught in an exclusionary or

[21] Kabat-Zinn has been one of the most instrumental leaders in bringing secular mindfulness into the medical and educational systems (Zajonc, 2014).

isolating narrative, to remain caught in a self-conscious, self-judging struggle. In such cases, the narrative and emotion come up so strongly that something is needed to remind us of our capacity to practice mindful awareness. Nothing provides this better than compassion.

It is of the utmost importance that mindfulness be understood as a compassionate practice and a compassionate quality of awareness. The very act of becoming aware of one's body can be an act of love. Nhat Hanh describes this act in his public talk, "How Do I Love Myself?" (Plum Village, 2014). In response to the title question, he says

> …the first act of love is to breathe in and to go home to your body. Breathing in…I know I have a body. Hello, body! I'm home! I'll take care of you. So to be aware of body, is...the beginning of love. (1:27-2:00)

Mindfulness also extends to our interactions with others. Mindfulness is thus in line with a relational view of the world that recognizes that our happiness is bound up with the happiness of others (Wilson, 2008; Riley-Mukavetz, 2014). Though mindfulness is at the core of the MBSL approach, there are several different compassion-based pedagogies in Rhetoric and Writing that complement it.

In lobbying for the MBSL approach, I draw on and support listening-based pedagogies (Ratcliffe, 2005; Yam, 2018). Rhetoric and Writing scholars have lobbied for models centered on listening as well as invitational rhetorics, rather than persuasion. Sonja Foss's and Cindy Griffin's "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric[22]" has served as an influential move towards this pedagogical shift (Yam, 2018). Invitational rhetoric is built around two primary rhetorical forms: 1) "offering perspectives" and 2) "the creation of external conditions that allow others to present their perspectives in an atmosphere of respect and equality" (1998, p. 7). This model, which has inspired my own personal teaching approaches, is

[22] I am similarly inspired by Jung's (2005) *Revisionary Rhetoric, Feminist Pedagogy, and Multigenre Texts*.

one that naturally aligns with many of the habits of mind from the FSPW (WPA et al., 2011), namely curiosity and openness, for invitational rhetoric "involves meeting another's position 'in its uniqueness, letting it have its impact" (1998, p. 7).

Nonviolent communication skills are also very helpful to instructors and students doing this work. Marshall Rosenberg, the founder of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), shows us that isolating emotions come up in us if our needs are not met (2003/2005). For example, the need to be seen is often not met for marginalized people. When our need for inclusion, acceptance, respect, belonging, and others are not recognized or tended to, this creates the emotions that often give rise to resentment, anger, or even violence (Rosenberg, 2003/2005). These are the emotions that activate the sympathetic nervous system and close us down (Robbins, 2000/2008; Swingle, 2008). Therefore, it is important to examine the relationship between unmet needs, stressful emotions, and the stories that generate and often sustain them. Rosenberg also notes that having our needs met nurtures relational emotions in us; therefore, learning to meet these needs is an essential part of this work.

Personal narrative assignments offer an invaluable opportunity for students to use the skills associated with an MBSL, i.e., mindfulness and NVC, as they work with their stories in a more compassionate and socially responsible way. An MBSL helps students gain a basic understanding of brain training and mindfulness techniques that they can use to practice calming the emotions that close down and distort the way they look at and tend to their stories. This also interrupts the vicious cycle created when isolating emotions interact with exclusionary stories. In addition, nonviolent communication skills allow them to observe the unmet needs that they and others may have that trigger closed emotions in the first place. An MBSL offers not only excellent skills for narrative work; it also offers the tools necessary to be socially responsible.

Using these techniques with personal narrative assignments increases students' awareness of themselves as social beings by asking them to practice working with their emotional energy and their stories in a way that is empathetic and compassionate to themselves and their classmates.

Preview of Chapters 3 and 4

While I have provided an example of an exclusionary narrative (Swiencicki, 2006) and isolating narratives (Mathieu, 2014) here, these do not provide an important context that is necessary for instructors, especially, to know before integrating the MBSL model into their classroom: the web of exclusionary narratives in Western culture, and how they influence students' (and instructors') narratives and narrative work. Chapter 3 provides this context. It does so by looking at examples of exclusionary narratives that have deep cultural roots in American history. Examining specific narratives allows for a much richer definition of what I've introduced here: the exclusionary/isolating/alienating narrative. Chapter 3 also examines the characteristics of some relational narratives. In this chapter, I do not look at narratives in isolation; I look at the effects they have had on those with marginalized identities, especially. Thus, is it also an exploration of the ways that "Stories have an effect" (Powell, 2012, p. 390).

Chapter 4 then examines how exclusionary narratives interact with fearful emotions in the brain. Though I have provided an overview of this process in this chapter's "Narratives, Fear, and the Mind-Body State" section, there was not adequate space to examine the characteristics of brainwaves, which significantly influence our relationship to our mind-body state. Different brainwave frequencies are associated with different types of attention, ranging from narrow focus, focused conscious attention, calm attention, and open awareness. In addition, there are brainwaves associated with autobiographical memories that are crucial to the narrative process.

Brainwaves represent an important point in the mind-body state constellation, and thus

need to be examined in greater detail. To do so, I will draw on traditional neurological/cognitive EEG studies as well neurotherapy and neurofeedback ones. I draw on neurotherapy and neurofeedback studies because they are more likely to look at brainwaves in relationship to the narrative process. Neurotherapy is often combined with narrative psychological work. Though the MBSL model is intentionally *not* designed to be therapeutic or related to the therapy process, these more holistic understandings of brainwaves help reveal their relationship to emotion—a core relationship in MBSL.

Chapter 3: Examining Exclusionary and Relational Cultural Narratives and Their Effects on Students

Introduction

In Chapter 4, I will examine how the isolating emotions of fear work in tandem with our brainwave state to close down our stories, interfering with students' ability to care. Then, in Chapter 5, I will lay out in greater detail the MSBL skills that can help students and teachers work with those emotions in order to create and retain narratives that are more open and caring.

In this chapter, however, I will examine how different types of narratives help produce and reinforce both isolating and relational emotions. I will begin by identifying the attributes of "open stories," drawing on examples of cultural narratives that are both inclusionary and relational. This can help us see how these types of narratives are more likely to nurture the relational emotions necessary for social and environmental care. I will then look at the attributes of "closed stories," by examining some cultural narratives that are exclusionary and even violent. Exploring such isolating cultural narratives is important because they are likely to have influenced the personal narratives that students may bring to (and produce in) the writing classroom. My discussion of relational narratives is intended to highlight their importance in the Rhetoric and Writing classroom. The development of relational narratives—an ongoing process that requires a willingness to listen—is one of the primary goals of the MBSL.

The Importance of Examining the Nature of Our Stories

As part of the process of getting an education, students are engaged in creating and updating the stories they will take into the world. These stories are the maps they use to guide every aspect of their lives. Indigenous scholar Thomas King goes so far as to say, "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (2003, p. 153). He cites Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri to

accentuate this point:

> In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early on or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives (2003, p. 153).

For students to recognize their interconnectedness with the social and natural worlds around them—to the point of caring about them because their well-being is bound up with their own—they have to have (or write, or tell, or revise, or listen to…) narratives that incorporate this truth on a personal level.

In order for them to integrate this viewpoint into their own narratives, however, students first need to become aware of the stories they bring to the table. They also have to recognize that their personal narratives are inextricable from the master narratives of the larger culture in which they live by exploring how their stories reflect or do not reflect their cultures' stories. Furthermore, helping students become mindful of the nature of these stories helps them to create or reinforce stories that heal, rather than hurt, that connect, rather than divide.

Students' ability to create relational, healing stories is especially important because personal and cultural narratives have a correlative relationship. Cultural stories heavily influence personal narratives but, at the same time, these students' stories are part of the very foundation of our larger cultural narratives. Therefore, if we are to create a more tolerant, compassionate, and just society, it is vital that students learn how to work with their emotional energy and their stories in a way that is empathetic and compassionate to themselves and their classmates.

Working with their emotions and stories in a mindful way will, I hope, help students experience care for their surrounding environment—social and natural—as self-care, and vice versa. Such work, I believe, can help transform the "chronic disconnection and isolation that afflicts many in this country [which] must be healed" (A. Banks, 2011, p. 169).

Personal Stories and Cultural Stories are Not Separate

> *"Well, maybe it's like Casy says. A fellow ain't got a soul of his own, just a little piece of a big soul, the one big soul that belongs to everybody."*
>
> — John Steinbeck*, The Grapes of Wrath*

Making students aware of the reciprocal relationship between their personal and their cultural stories helps them approach their personal narrative assignments with a more open perspective (Sharma, 2015). They may be less likely to set about writing their stories in a way that is self-absorbed and isolating. It would seem evident that, in teaching students how to begin transforming their narratives, the place to start is by helping them raise their self-awareness. Indeed, this is where it has to start (Schaefer, 2018). However, we cannot separate awareness of our own personal stories from those of the families, the communities and the society and the natural world in which we live. So, even though students need to work primarily on their own intrapersonal workings, they need to be simultaneously aware that they cannot exist outside of the interpersonal relations that sustain them. In other words, self-awareness and social-awareness are part of the same process.

Contrary to the traditional American individualistic belief that each of us is sui generis[23], i.e., shapes our own unique character and personality, we are indeed social beings. Our personal stories are affected by our interactions with parents, other relatives, friends and many others, in

[23] See, for instance, Michel Foucault's discussion of the "sovereignty of consciousness" and the "sovereignty of the subject" in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (p. 12).

various social settings. We have also been influenced indirectly by the people who interacted with these people, including their and our ancestors. Furthermore, all of these people are themselves carriers of the culture that have also shaped us. In turn we have influenced many of these people, whether we are aware of it or not. Thus, students need to recognize that they are products of a complex mix of people, genetically, socially, and culturally and that their culture is made up of a rich network of interrelating and overlapping narratives (Goodson & Gill, 2011; Robillard & Combs, 2019).

Inclusionary Narratives: Recognizing the Holistic Nature of the World

Culture greatly influences our perception of our relationship to a greater whole, whether it be the world, our country, or our local communities. In many cultures, past and present, humans have seen themselves a part of the larger natural world, and even subservient to it. As Carolyn P. Egri explains in her "Spiritual Connections with the Natural Environment," "Archaeological evidence of prehistory hunter-gatherer and agrarian societies depicts an era in which humans strove to live in harmony with nature that was all-powerful (Eisler, 1987; Merchant, 1980, 1992)" (1997, p. 408). Many cultures also have a tradition of a strong spiritual connection to the earth: "reverence of nature deities were/are present in the spiritual traditions of shamanism, pantheism, paganism, and Hinduism (Kellert & Wilson, 1993; Wall, 1994)" (Egri, 1997, p. 408).

Many Native American cultures have traditionally recognized the holistic, interdependent nature of the world. Indeed, relationality is a very old idea rooted in Indigenous cultures and practices, and one that continues to influence scholarly understandings of rhetoric, research, and writing (Powell, 2008; Riley-Mukavetz, 2014). It's important to note that, as Riley-Mukavetz points out, "Relationality and relational accountability are rooted in Indigenous worldviews and

theories. Like all Indigenous theories, relationality is not a new idea, but old" (2014, p. 112). It is based on the belief that we are all interconnected—with other human beings but also the natural world around us (Wilson, 2008; Riley-Mukavetz, 2014). This worldview thus hinges on relationships and relational accountability (Riley-Mukavetz, 2014). As Black Elk, an Oglala Lakota warrior and medicine man, said in an interview from the early 1930's:

> These four ribbons hanging here on the stem are the four quarters of the universe…But the four spirits are only one spirit after all, and this eagle feather here is for that One, which is like a father and the earth a mother, and are not all living things with feet or wings or roots their children? And this hide…is for the earth from whence we came and at whose breast we suck as babies all our lives, along with the animals and birds and trees and grasses. (Neihardt, 1988, p. 2)

Black Elk sees that humans are not separate from nature, but are wholly dependent on it. In fact, in many Indigenous cultures, there is not even a way to conceive of this kind of separation, as reflected in their language. For example, in 1590 Jesuit Father José de Acosta encountered the Aymaras and the Quechas of the Andes and Altiplano regions of South America, who had no word equivalent to the English word for "nature" (Mignolo, 2011). Instead, they had the concept of "Pachamama" – a goddess who represented a holistic relationship between themselves, culture, and the natural world (2011, p. 11).

Like the Aymaras and Quechas, North American Indigenous cultures see the self in a relational way, inseparable not only from the earth, but from the larger cosmos. Indigenous scholars, drawing from Indigenous cultural paradigms, also emphasize the importance of the relationships between people and between them and everything that surrounds them. According to Shawn Wilson,

> Every individual thing that you see around you is really just a huge knot - a point where thousands and millions of relationships come together. These relationships come to you from the past, from the present and from your future. This is what surrounds us, and what forms us, our world, our cosmos and our reality. We could not *be* without *being in relationships* with everything that surrounds us and is within us. Our reality, our ontology is the relationships. (2008, p. 76, emphasis in original)

In their article about Native constructions of community with "more than human" (MTH) life, Megan Bang et al. illustrate how Indigenous people give meaning to these relationships and how they differ from the Western worldview:

> At various times elders have emphasized the importance of acknowledging, demonstrating respect, and maintaining relations with MTH life as well as to what western folks call "non-living natural kinds" meaning water, rocks, wind, etc. In short, from the community design team's perspectives, "agents and relationships" are not restricted to humans. When children in Indigenous communities are taught that plants are our relatives, they are being apprenticed into conceptualizing plants as part of a cultural community and not simply an object in the domain of biology. This perspective is clearly distinct from the more typical western model where the concept of community is confined to human beings and usually does not centrally include plants, animals, and natural kinds. (2015, p. 306)

This leaves no doubt that, in this relational cultural paradigm, what is good for the individual is also good for the whole. More importantly, it exemplifies a degree of equanimity inherent in a truly relational perspective, not only towards other human life, but also towards all things.

This tendency toward equanimity in a relational culture is also evident in a study by

Norbert Ross et al. (2007) comparing how Native-American (Menominee) and European-American hunters in rural Wisconsin perceived their relationships with MTH life. The authors asked hunters from differing "epistemological frameworks" to rate the importance of different plants and animals to themselves and the forests in which they hunted (Ross, Medin, & Cox, 2007, p. 478). The contrast between the hunters' responses was striking:

> Menominee participants explicitly stated that every plant has a role or part to play and hence is important to the forest. Further, several Menominee hunters mentioned that if something is important to the forest, then it is important to them. No European-American hunter provided these kinds of justifications. They were more likely to report either that a plant had little use to the forest or that they could not think of any. (Ross, Medin, & Cox, 2007, p. 307)

The report also looked at whether participants were more likely to do activities that involved a direct relationship with nature, rather than ones in which nature served as a background in which their activities took place. Bang et al. (2015) summarize this part of the Ross et al. (2007) study:

> Rural and urban Native-American (specifically Menominee) parents and children reported engaging significantly more frequently in outdoor practices that foregrounded nature and some form of MTH life (e.g., fish, deer, etc.) was a primary contributor in the practice, while European-Americans engaged significantly more in practices that backgrounded [sic] nature and MTHs had no or very few primary interactive roles in the practice. (2007, p. 308-309)

This clearly shows the difference between people who have a narrative of belonging in or taking part in nature vs. people who see it merely as a stage on which they play out their lives and see other beings as objects in their drama. Some people may not even realize that they are

not really connected to nature because they see themselves as "outdoorspeople." At the same time, they make look with disdain at "tree huggers" who try to protect wilderness for its own sake.

Native scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that relationality is so central to Indigenous cultures that it should be "the interpretive and epistemic scaffolding shaping and supporting Indigenous social research…" (2017, p. 69). She further points out that whereas "patriarchal knowledge production claims to objectivity…requires being disconnected from the living earth….relationality…finds expression within [Indigenous methodologies] that are connected to the earth" (2017, p. 71).

Although I have used the holistic paradigms in which Indigenous cultures are grounded as examples of relationality, theirs are not the only voices supporting more inclusive narratives today. Many other people who live under the dominant narrative of individualism do not embrace it as their map of the world but instead seek a more relational worldview. For example, several contemporary feminists have challenged the individualistic, masculinist model of scholarship in favor of a more relational model (Moreton-Robinson, 2017), including cultural rhetorics scholars (e.g., Brownlee, 2020; Mohanty, 2003; Powell, 2012; Ramírez & Zecena, 2019; Riley-Mukavetz, 2014). Unfortunately, although their critique of traditional Western scholarship calls for greater social inclusivity, it remains human-centered, rather than earth-centered (Moreton-Robinson, 2017).

On the other hand, a group of educators and academics has called for a "so-called post-human turn in educational discourse" (Wals, 2017, p. 160). In "Towards a Posthumanist Education," for instance, a group of educators/academics reflects on the ways that the current education systems, shaped by Western colonialism, operate in humanistic ways (Snaza et al.,

2014). The authors call for a de-centering of humans, one that acknowledges our interdependence with the surrounding earth and all living beings. Though the idea of relationality and its cultural practice has Indigenous roots, our interdependence is simply reality, for "Things (human and nonhuman) only come into being through interdependence" (Eatman, 2020, p. 141). In other words, our ability to exist is quite literally dependent not only on other human beings, but on all living organisms. We do, after all, need oxygen from plants and trees, and water to survive. We are reliant upon the ecosystems in which we live.

As stated previously, I am interested in using personal narrative assignments to guide students towards a stance of relationality that recognizes that caring about others and the environment is really self-care. Many students, however, come to the classroom with stories that tell them they are not part of a greater whole, that demonstrate a lack of relationality. This is not surprising because Americans are immersed in master narratives that reinforce isolating and divisive worldviews (Hydén & Överlien, 2004, p. 259). They alienate us from each other and from the ecosystems upon which we depend, jeopardizing the wellbeing, and possibly the survival, of all.

Closed Narratives: Exclusionary, Isolating, and Alienating

Stories that do not reflect the reality of our interconnectedness may be termed exclusionary because, being linear and reductive, they can incorporate only one narrowly defined perspective. One of the most pervasive American master narratives, for example, embraces the belief that we can—and should—stand alone and independent: "he was a self-made man," "he pulled himself up by his own bootstraps," and "he stood on his own two feet" (A. Banks, 2011). These still popular Western master narratives celebrate our independence from one another. This narrative also assumes, of course, the moral superiority of the self-reliant individual and it is

understood that only men (probably white) are competent to achieve this. Such beliefs further assumes a level playing field—that all Americans have an equal chance at succeeding, regardless of race, gender, etc.[24]. Yet, there is no space for more than one type of hero in this narrow, exclusionary story, not even for one of a different gender. Whether it is nature, women, or people from marginalized groups, from a linear narrative perspective, they must either be made to fit a specific (inferior) mold or be eliminated.

It is in the process of formulating and substantiating exclusionary narratives that people and the natural world become marginalized because one of the main objectives of these stories is to define the positive attributes of those valued within the narrative and the negative characteristics who are not. In a strictly linear paradigm that celebrates progress, for example, this definition clarifies who can be successful, a winner to be admired, who climbs the ladder and is highly compensated with wealth and fame. More dualistic narratives are used to define both what is good and what is evil. Without clearly designating which people and what actions are considered sacred or sacrilegious, there would be chaos and the narrative would be weak or collapse. Feminist, queer, and anti-racist scholars in Rhetoric and Writing and other disciplines have long discussed the function of such othering. Edward Said, for instance, explores the purpose of othering in Palestine in his *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (1986). Prasad Pannian (2016) summarizes and quotes the author's discussion of othering:

> Primarily focusing on Palestinian lives, *Last Sky* explores the construction of their subjectivities, which is dependent on the logic of 'othering:' 'All cultures spin out of a dialectic of self and other,' maintains Said, 'the subject 'I' who is native, authentic, at home, and the object 'it' or 'you,' who is foreign perhaps threatening, different out there' (40). As Ashcroft and Ahluwalia observe, 'Identity is a matter of signification, a sign that

[24] The heroes of these narratives are also implicitly (and most often explicitly) white, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.

obtains meaning by its difference from other signs.' (2016, p. 76)

Exclusionary narratives/stories also tend to lock the holder of the narrative into the confines of that narrative/story, rendering them unable to be empathetic to the devalued or to see alternative perspectives. As noted in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, we often construct other people's identities in our minds (Cooper, 1986; Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Long, 1980; Ong, 1975; Said, 1986). For students who operate within closed stories, these constructions eclipse input from the real people or objects with whom we interact. Everyone and everything they see, interact with, or even think about, is merely an object, or an avatar, in their narrative/story. This is part of the reductive quality of exclusionary stories; they reduce animals, nature, and people to things. Such narratives/stories are especially likely to leave marginalized voices unheard because they are reduced or altered to fit within the narrative, or silenced altogether. This is as true for personal narratives as it is of cultural ones.

Students with exclusionary narratives/stories, then, are hindered from being more active social and environmental caretakers because they see themselves as separate from the world around them and because such stories objectify others. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have an authentic relationship with people if we see them only as they fit into our narrative/story[25]. When we communicate with them we actually author both sides of the conversation and our conclusions about them are based on our own stories. Unless we are able to truly listen to others, and tune into the natural world, we cannot hope to care about, or provide care, for people or the planet. Therefore, if we want students to heighten their sense of social and environmental

[25] As another example of the dynamics of closed stories, we can look to scholarship on the problematic ways that teachers and students do community engagement. In "Silent Partners, Developing a Critical Understanding of Community Partners in Technical Communication," for instance, the authors note "teacher characterizations of community partners often reflect our assumptions about partners rather than their own description of themselves" (Kimme Hea & Shah, 2016, p. 49). Such narratives then feed students' perception of community partners (Kimme Hea & Shah, 2016), sometimes exacerbating their already problematic stances that students often take on, such as the "hero" who helps a nonprofit (Mathews and Zimmerman, 1999, p. 395).

responsibility, we must help them recognize and transform their exclusionary stories.

In as much as environmental issues (e.g., global warming, widespread loss of wildlife habitat, increasing pollution from fossil fuel extraction, etc.) are of paramount importance today, it seems reasonable to examine the master narratives about nature that may influence our students. In contrast to the Indigenous narratives discussed earlier in this chapter, the dominant culture's narratives tend to be closed, exclusionary, and human-centered, rather than earth-centered. They gain their authority from their long history and their omnipresent use in marketing and popular culture.

Most of these human-centered views of nature were brought to America by the earliest colonists, especially those from England. For example, the New England Puritans, who saw themselves as God's chosen people, took seriously the bible's message that humans (i.e., Americans) should, "have dominion over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Merchant, 1980; White, 1973)" (Egri, 1997, p. 409). As Egri explains, "humankind's place in that universe was regarded as separate and above that of nature and all that was nonhuman (Cotgrove and Duff, 1981; Drengson, 1980; Merchant, 1992)" (1997, p. 409).

In the Puritan's view, nature was not only intended by God to serve man's needs; if left untamed, it was dangerous. The Puritan's image of the New England forest was much like well-known images in English/European folklore; it was home to predators, human and animal (bandits and wolves). It was also the home of the devil, and only "savages," witches, and other evil people were comfortable there. Civilized and "godly" people busied themselves with clearing the forest, planting crops, and building towns and farmsteads with tamed, safe gardens.

Thomas Cole's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1828) (see Figure 3.1) illustrates these two wildly opposite visions of nature beautifully. On the left, is a raw, frightening, and

inhospitable nature untouched by the hand of man. On the right, the Garden of Eden is a tamed garden, complete with manicured trees, flowers, swans, and sunlight.

Figure 3.1: *Thomas Cole's* Expulsion from the Garden of Eden *(1828) illustrates a Western narrative of nature.*

Early Virginia explorers and colonists, struck by the abundance of fish, game, and wild fruit, likened Virginia to the Garden of Eden. This depiction of America as a second Garden of Eden was to have a long life. Homesteaders were promised that the Midwest would become the "Garden of the World" (Lewis, 1955; Marx, 1972). Even the bleak and frigid plains were advertised in the late nineteenth century as a garden where "rain follows the plow" (Laskin, 2004). As David Laskin points out, "It was not a garden, and rain did not follow the plow" (2005). The US Government and the railroads used this narrative to lure thousands of immigrants and other settlers to lives of failure, hardship, and death. In the South, wild nature was soon

tamed and, largely with slave labor, transformed into pastoral fields and formal gardens which provided refuge and solitude for educated, "enlightened" 17th and 18th century ladies and gentlemen and the planters of the Antebellum South.

Cole's painting does not just show these contrary views of nature; it shows America's answer to the dichotomy of its stories about nature. Nature has to be altered to be acceptable in the American storyline. For this reason, it is the pastoral landscape that resolves these seemingly irreconcilable differences in American master narratives about nature. Paintings like Grant Wood's *Glimmerglass Surprise* (1930) (see Figure 3.2) and Thomas Hart Benton's *Cave Spring* (1963) and *Dawn on the Farm, Rice Harvest* (1945) (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4, respectively) celebrate the newly tamed land and the men who tamed it. In these works the farmer is the new Adam who has tamed the wilderness, and the finely manicured farms along picturesque country lanes are the new Eden. These are the heroes who have fulfilled America's Manifest Destiny of healing the rift between God and man and reuniting us with the natural world…as long as it is tamed (Marx, 1972; Lewis, 1955).

Figure 3.2: *Grant Wood's* Glimmerglass Surprise *(1930) depicts a tamed nature.*

Figure 3.3: *Thomas Hart Benton's* Cave Spring *(1963) celebrates the newly tamed land and those who tamed it.*

Figure 3.4: *Thomas Hart Benton's* Dawn on the Farm, Rice Harvest *(1945) celebrates the newly tamed land and those who tamed it.*

Today, this love of the pastoral and the sacredness of the family farm has been endlessly exploited by marketing strategists who claim that their products are "natural," produced on "family farms," by "contented cows," etc. Images of cows grazing in pastures, red barns, and families in front of old-fashioned farmhouses still evoke sentimental responses and sell products despite the realities of industrial agriculture, which they help to mask. Pastoral narrative, though gentler than industrial agriculture, nonetheless continues to reinforce the belief that nature is here to meet human needs.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Americans began to embrace wilderness, but only—again—to meet human needs. Artists sought to preserve wild landscapes on canvas as objects of national pride. We Americans may not have had the long history or the museums that Europe

had, but we did have vast and glorious wilderness. Paintings such as Albert Bierstadt's, *Valley of the Yosemite* (1864) (see Figure 3.5) portrayed this landscape as a place of sublime bliss with tiny stags standing amongst the grandeur, bathed in a celestial light. In another of his paintings, *Indian Canoe* (1886) (see Figure 3.6), the small stags are replaced with an equally tiny figure of a Native in his canoe. Both the stags and the Native American are there primarily to give scale to the real star of the painting, which is the landscape itself.

Figure 3.5: *Albert Bierstadt's* Valley of the Yosemite *(1864) an example of a painting that illustrates a Western narrative that celebrates the pristine quality of nature.*

Figure 3.6: *Albert Bierstadt's* Indian Canoe *(1886) another example of a painting that illustrates a Western narrative that celebrate nature as pristine.*

Even America's systems of national and state parks, national seashores, and other public lands, worthy though they may be, are intended to protect and defend wilderness primarily for the benefit of humans. The miles-long lines of cars and RVs making their way through Yosemite, Yellowstone, and the Black Hills make that clear. Even the Sierra Club, one of the premier organizations dedicated to preserving wilderness, argues that, "Public lands' highest purpose may be that they offer us opportunities to play, because in those open spaces we exercise that most idiosyncratic American right: the pursuit of happiness" (Mark, 2020, p. par. 28). This and many similar organizations represent the views of thousands of nature-loving Americans who support the preservation of wilderness for what it offers humans: beauty, refuge, and open-air zoos and playgrounds. This falls far short of the Indigenous belief that nature has as much right to exist on its own terms as humans do.

The anthropocentrism of western cultures is especially damaging to stories that seek to embody the kind of relationality to nature needed to encourage ecological concern. The

anthropocentric viewpoint assumes "that only human beings and their interests are ethically considerable" (Thompson, 2001).

> Fundamental to the industrial-materialist-scientific worldview has been the exorcism of a nature that is organic, living, and spiritual. Instead, nature is regarded and treated as a machine in the service of humankind. In this mechanistic hierarchical worldview, both persons and nonhuman nature are objectified and valued only in utilitarian instrumental terms (as inputs or consumers of production) rather than for any intrinsic or spiritual value (Cotgrove & Duff, 1981; Devall & Sessions, 1985; Drengson, 1980) (Egri, 1997, p. 410)

From this perspective, Indigenous scholar and Professor of Learning Sciences and Psychology Megan Bang explains, "humans are the only agentic actors in the natural world, a view commonsensically held in western perspectives of the natural world (see Latour, 2012)…and a learned cultural model, as opposed to a universal truth" (2015, p. 225). Egri (1997) warns that such beliefs are enmeshed in narratives that are "endangering the long-term survival of humans and other entities on this planet (Brown, 1991; Buchholz, 1993; Commoner, 1975; Daly & Cobb, 1994; Paehlke, 1989) " (p. 410).

These narratives are no longer sustainable because "Humankind can no longer ignore or deny its role in creating an ecological crisis that touches all aspects of the natural environment" (Egri, 1997, p. 410). In their place, we need to create sustainable narratives that acknowledge our true place within the natural world, rather than ones that objectify nature and thereby obscure it and its needs from us, while at the same time obscuring our need for nature.

Just as nature had to be altered to fit comfortably in the dominant group's stories, so too did the image of the people who had inhabited North America for thousands of years. With no

thought or care for the diversity of identities or the complexities of their many cultures, whites reduced them to objects that suited their narratives' needs. The dominant American culture has alternately portrayed nature as wild and threatening or as tamed, a Garden. In the same way, Native Americans have been stereotyped as either savages, equated with the wild beasts in an "uninhabited" wilderness, or as innocents who had not been expelled from the garden because they had not, in their "primitive state," been corrupted by knowledge or technology. In this way Indigenous people and nature were/are both used as props in the dominant society's narratives.

Importantly, these narratives were also used as justification for conquest, colonization and even genocide. Because it was their Manifest Destiny, White Americans felt not only free to, but actually entitled to, or even obligated to, take all of the land that they desired because of the stories that reduced Indigenous people to savage, wild beasts. It was the conquerors' right to have complete authority over the Native inhabitants of the Americas as they had over nature. As King argues, stories were critical to justify the colonization of Indigenous lands (2003). To advance their interests "Puritans set about creating the stories that were needed to carry the day," stories of the heroic and civilized white Americans who overcame the savage natives (2003, p. 75). These narratives prevent relationality through objectification and violence.

Ironically, the ecocentric worldview that many/most Indigenous people share reveals the type of relationality needed to tend to our narratives in order to heal our alienation and update our stories to the reality of the earth's ecosystems. However, the aspects of American stories that make them exclusionary, such as the belief that white Americans are perfect and can do no wrong, and that Native Americans are primitive and uncivilized, does not allow white Americans to let Indigenous narratives influence their own[26].

[26] Non-native Americans, particularly white Americans, should be mindful of the ways in which we have appropriated and fetishized Native American culture and spirituality. We should recognize, as Wilson (2008) and

These long standing stories support the idea that Americans, that is, white Americans, are different from other people because they hold a special place in the divine plan and the world. One such pervasive narrative celebrates individualism. The American frontier stands out as the ultimate place in which this drama played out. The hero, usually a white man, is the tough guy who rides or stands alone. He is likely to react to perceived threats with violence, but the violence is justified because it is done to protect the American way. Like the Lone Ranger[27] or Marshall Dillon[28], he single handedly defeats the bad guys and makes the world "safe for democracy." Donald Trump recently demonstrated that this is still a viable narrative. While trying to clean up lawless towns and protect good Americans from the bad guys (i.e., Black Lives Matter protesters) he announced, "When they start looting, we start shooting." The frontier of the "Marlboro Man[29]" was that of the rugged individualist who stands alone against the world. For generations he stood ready in his white hat to make America great, and today, he stands in his red hat ready to make America great again.

The history of the individualistic and dualistic stories that Americans have lived by is long and complicated and I have examined only a few of the core themes that run through them. Like most narratives, the original intent of many of them may indeed have been positive. In fact, they may still be the source of many good things for the world. The most important characteristics of these stories for the purpose of this dissertation, though, are the exclusionary ones, those that make them closed stories. For this reason, I am focusing on their negative,

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others have suggested, that ethical intercultural interactions need to be based on respect, context-sensitive listening, and relationships.

[27] The Lone Ranger was a highly popular TV show from 1949-1957. The character remains an iconic American character, one that was re-mixed with a Disney film in 2013, *The Lone Ranger*.

[28] Marshall Dillon is the protagonist (played by actor, James Arness) of the popular (and still aired as of 2020) TV series, "Gunsmoke," which originally aired for 20 seasons from 1955-1975.

[29] As Barry Vacker points out, the Marlboro man (a popular advertisement from 1954 to 1999 depicting a cowboy smoking) "is an egoistic ideal; a noble and conscious being, at home in his universe, master of his destiny. Thus, the Marlboro Man has come to symbolize individualism, independence and capitalism" (1992, p. 746).

undesirable aspects.

It is important to keep in mind when helping students work with their stories that, like everyone else, students are heavily invested in their stories and have their own adapted version of them. Although all white people benefit from systemic racism and the exclusionary cultural narratives that sustain it, not all are privileged in the same way or to the same degree; white students' relationship to these narratives are complicated and diverse (Ratcliffe, 2005). Many of them are also marginalized for various reasons, as well. Also, even if they are not marginalized, everyone enters the classroom with varying degrees of openness. Most importantly, everyone has a need to be seen and heard. If students feel that their stories are not treated with respect, they will feel threatened and are likely to close down more completely into their stories.

At the same time, if we are to nurture social concern and care for the planet, we need to address these core cultural narratives of individualism and humans at odds with nature. To do that, students must learn to recognize specifically what makes these stories exclusionary and alienating and learn how to update them. This is vital work because these stories have instigated, or been used to justify, horrific acts of violence and oppression. Stories can kill. They must be treated with respect, but also with honesty and courage.

People Who are Excluded from or Harmed by the Individualistic Paradigm

> *"Nonviolence is not the absence of violence, it is the presence of justice. It is the presence of bringing the dirt and the filth from under the rug, out of the corner, so we can deal with it. To help people who may be sitting on the sideline, who may be watching, see that this is the right thing to do."*
>
> — John Robert Lewis, "The Dos and Don'ts of a Nonviolent Movement"

"You're not supposed to be so blind with patriotism that you can't face reality. Wrong is wrong, no matter who says it."

— Malcolm X

In this section, I will examine cultural narratives that are exclusionary in nature, drawing on examples from American history that reflect an individualistic worldview. I will examine the narratives of groups which are not part of the dominant culture as a way of approaching how stories can conflict and oppress. The gap between the dominant culture's stories about marginalized people and the truth of who they are and how they feel about the difference can be a chasm that creates many isolating emotions. I will argue that these emotions often come up because of unmet needs, especially the need to be recognized and listened to. As we will see in more detail in the next chapter, the isolating emotions caused by stereotyping and oppression are an important reason why students may bring hurtful or closed narratives to the classroom, as well as a dimension that prevents closed narratives from transforming.

Those whose cultural narratives differ from the dominant American narratives often experience marginalization, as they are likely to fill a need in the dominant narrative/story for an opposing "other." Many Americans, such as, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, female/female-identified, and queer individuals, for example, have different cultural narratives than most white Anglo-Saxon men. Whether or not they identify with the dominant culture's stories about individualism, Manifest Destiny, or humans' subjugation of nature, all people living in America are influenced in some way by them. For many people, these terms trigger up feelings of national pride and patriotism, while at the same time millions of Black and other marginalized Americans protest that they have been left out of the American Dream and have never been allowed a place at the table. People who are excluded from, or oppressed within, the dominant narratives because

of their race, class, gender, sexual preference, religion, etc., or because they reject the dominant values as antithetical to their worldview, often feel this way. Far from being treated as though they were entitled and free, individuals with marginalized identities have been, often forcibly, denied freedom and equality. For them, patriotic celebrations such as the Independence Day, Columbus Day, or Thanksgiving, provoke feelings of resentment and even fear because of the injustices and violence that they represent.

Exclusionary narratives have resulted in traumatic and often deadly violence. American society has often used, and still uses, narratives of the "other" to unite their citizens and ally them against a common (supposed) enemy. As Megan Eatman (2020) suggests in her *Ecologies of Harm: Rhetorics of Violence in the United States*, "It is a commonplace that violence, especially when it is organized and widespread, requires an othering logic" (2020, p. 140). Othering justifies oppression, colonialism, and even "war without mercy," as both the United States and Japan did in their respective propaganda during WWII (Dower, 1986, p. 11). The "vicious racial stereotypes" of Japanese, which the United States portrayed in propagandistic movies, posters, etc., were the culmination of a long history of such Anti-Asian racism in the U.S. (Dower, 1986, p. 13). There is also a history of racist stereotypes about Blacks, Asians, and Indigenous people as being "apes, monkeys, savages," etc. that were used to justify colonization, enslavement, segregation, and the discrimination that is still very much alive in the 21st century.

Students with marginalized identities are constantly bombarded with media narratives that tell them that they are the others, and that they do not belong. Baker-Bell, Jones Stranbrough, and Everett, for instance, characterize the kinds of alienating narratives that harm Black youth: "We are…concerned with the wounds inflicted on them [Black youth] by the negative images and language that agents and forces with mainstream media used to project them

as *dangerous Others* (Mahiri, 2004)" (Baker-Bell, Stanbrough, & Everett, 2017, p. 132). These types of stories have in them the seeds of much oppression, divisiveness, violence, and suffering. If we are to have students work on personal narratives, it is absolutely essential that we are sensitive to the many varied stories and traditions that they bring to the classroom, including stories about what it is like to be cast as the "other."

Isolating Narratives in the Writing Classroom

Master narratives that cast people of color as alien and separate are often reinforced by students' experiences in the classroom. For example, bell hooks describes her educational experience in which "we were always having to counter white racist assumptions that we were genetically inferior, never as capable as white peers, even unable to learn" (*Teaching to Transgress*, p. 4). Carmen Kynard (2013) and others (i.e., Canagarajah, 2010; Nero, 2010; Logan, 2010; Richardson, 2010; Smitherman, 2004) argue that the voices and literacy practices of Black students have largely been unheard because they are seen from a limited, racist concept of literacy which privileges mastery of Standard English and views African American Language as inferior. Such racist definitions of literacy not only ask Black students to devalue their own language, but also encourages teachers to author inaccurate narratives about what these students want from education. In contradiction to narratives Kynard had learned from listening to her own Black students (including one who wanted to understand why the United States legal system ignored the murder of her brother), she discovered that many college instructors assume that Black students are in college to gain access to the white middle class (2013, p. 4). Consequently, these teachers design their pedagogies around faulty, racist narratives that leave little or no room for students' actual narratives.

A more covert kind of master narrative that is antithetical to relationality is the

narrative/story of the distanced, innocent white person who does not take part in or benefit from systemic racism. Swiencicki describes how this problematic kind of narrative often shows up in awareness narratives, "rhetorics in which those who identify as white confront and explore their racial privilege" (2006, p. 39). She describes several examples of white, anti-racist educators whose narratives serve a dual purpose: to fight racism but also to dissociate themselves (and sometimes whiteness) with racism. Such well-intentioned awareness narratives often end up becoming mostly about the authors' struggles to free themselves of the guilt they experience from acknowledging their place in a racist society.

Consider how narratives that obscure white people's interconnection with racism play out in the writing classroom. In her pedagogical piece, "Cultivating Critical Emotional Literacy," Winans (2012) demonstrates this point. She shares an awareness narrative with her students, Eula Biss's memoir, *No Man's Land*. In it the author adopts a self-aware stance that recognizes her desire to dissociate from whiteness and racism: "She [Biss] explains that given her experience growing up in a multiracial extended family, she 'ha[d] been taught […] to think of [her]self as distinctly different from those other white folks—more educated, more articulate, less crude.'" (2012, p. 158). Winans uses this narrative to teach students how it reflects back on the author's own and others' tendency to avoid thinking about their relationality:

> As Biss recognizes that she cannot assume a racially neutral position as observer and judge, she struggles to understand how her fate is bound up with others' in ways that are beyond her control. She reflects on the strategies, frequently emotional in nature, that white people develop to distract themselves from confronting how they are interconnected, how their identities are relational and interwoven. (2012, p. 158)

Unlike narratives that are overtly racist, sexist, violent, or belittling towards others, such

> narratives provide barriers to relationality—ironically—under the guise of care. They do this by focusing attention on the white teller and the teller's guilt, a stance antithetical to the curiosity and open listening necessary to do truly anti-racist work (Swiencicki, 2006). This more self-conscious stance is isolating for the teller and for people of color, whose perspectives are eclipsed and invalidated (2006).

Narratives that dismiss or evade white people's responsibility for taking part in and/or dismantling racist systems are a double-edged sword. Media narratives (among other forms of narrative) blame black people for the racist violence to which they are subjected, rather than the racist society that produces such violence. Baker-Bell, Stranbrough, and Everett explain that "systemic racist representations is evidenced by Fox News commentators, who blamed gangs, schools, and the welfare system for the Baltimore uprisings (Giroux, 2015) instead of examining the systemic racist violence against Black people who—like activist Fannie Lou Hamer—are 'sick and tired of being sick and tired' (Brooks & Houck, 2011, p. 62)" (2017, p. 132). Similar reactions have followed in response to the 2020 riots surrounding the police murder of George Floyd. In my own Facebook newsfeed, I observed a quote that represented an individualistic response to protesters calling for systemic change and police reform/defunding. The quote read, "We must reject the idea that every time a law's broken, society is guilty rather than the lawbreaker. It is time to restore the American precept that each individual is accountable for his actions." In the context of recent events, such a statement asks us to place the blame for George Floyd's murder solely on the individuals who committed the act, rather than the larger racist systems in which the events happened. Such narratives reinforce the assumption that the majority of "innocent" white people are somehow not part of and don't benefit from, racist social, cultural, political, and economic systems.

There are countless cultural narratives that harm those with marginalized identities, and these narratives interact with the racist (and sexist, classist, homophobic, xenophobic, etc.) systems of which they are a part. Students and other individuals with marginalized identities must deal with the epistemic violence that comes from encountering such narratives on a daily basis. The harm from these narratives and other forms of violence is cumulative. Eatman (2020) summarizes the long-term effects of this violence, and explain how these effects are enabled by isolating, individualistic paradigms:

> Recent scholarship on biopolitics and power provides tools for addressing harm that is not reducible to a single event. The cumulative effects of direct, structural, and cultural violence create debility, a liminal state of perpetual physical struggle. Jasbir Puar coins the term 'debility' to address 'injury and bodily exclusion that are endemic rather than epidemic or exceptional' (*The Right to Maim* xvii)….Debility's cultural violence manifests in the repeated insistence that people experiencing endemic injury do so as the result of personal weakness, rather than as the result of a structurally violent system. (2020, p. 12).

The harmful effects of anti-relational master narratives sometimes play out in the writing classroom when students draw on them in their personal narrative writing. Kara Poe Alexander (2011) performed an empirical study in which she examined the recurrence of master and little narratives in the writing of sixty students at a large Midwestern university. Among the most common recurring types of literacy narratives were those of the Success, the Literacy Winner, and the Hero. The hero "Equates literacy acquisition with success, liberation, development, progression, and upward mobility; emphasizes the *individual*, rather than *literacy*, perseverance, self-reliance, and determination; establishes self as hero of literacy story" (2011, p. 615,

emphasis in the original). As Alexander suggests, "Perhaps students perform the success narrative more than other cultural narratives because they know how much this narrative is valued in our culture" (2011, p. 617). Perhaps unsurprisingly, students who wrote individualistic master narratives lacked attention to positionality as well as complexity: "[students'] success narratives often contained broad, abstract claims about literacy…[30]" (2011, p. 616).

The recurrence of such master narratives is disturbing because it highlights the ways that students use the literacy narrative[31] and other kinds of personal narrative assignments to essentially celebrate and reinforce problematic cultural narratives (i.e., those that celebrate individualism and obscure our interconnectedness/interdependence). In response, scholars have raised concerns about their use, urging us to design these assignments carefully (Sharma, 2015; Smith, 2015). Ghanashyam Sharma, for instance, questions whether the literacy narrative assignment supports student agency by offering a chance to challenge master narratives, or whether these assignments "basically force students to buy into prevailing hegemony, essentially perpetuating the power structure of discourse and epistemology in the society…" (2015, p. 105).

Students with marginalized identities, however, have used personal narrative writing to resist, transform, and counter master narratives of isolation. In "The Stories They Tell," for instance, Baker-Bell, Jones Stranbrough, and Everett point out the ways Black people use social media to do this. They characterize Black Twitter as a "counterspace" in which Black users can control their images, produce counternarratives, express their opinions, voice their concerns, and locate more reliable news and information about the Black community" (2017, p. 137). The

[30] These kinds of master narratives contrast with little narratives, which "situate…experiences within specific ecological contexts, they highlight the range of factors that shape our literacy and the stories we tell about our literate histories (e.g., Self and Hawisher)" (Alexander, 2011, p. 612).

[31] Definitions of what constitutes a literacy narrative vary, as each person has a different idea of what literacy means. It can include learning to read, speak, write, or any of these activities in the digital world. Examining what a person considers literacy, alone, can be extremely revelatory; in writing their own literacy narratives in conjunction with students, teachers may learn that their understanding of literacy does not align with or support students' perception of what constitutes literacy (Walsch, 2000, p. 76).

Literary Narratives of Black Columbus project similarly created a space for Black community members to write narratives "that countered dominant cultural narratives and media representation of Black Columbus neighborhoods as sites characterized primarily by poverty and violence" (Selfe & Ulman, 2019, par. 11). Students can also transform harmful master narratives through critique, and Baker-Bell et al. and others call for pedagogies that help them learn critical media literacy in order to do just that. Perhaps the most important use of these platforms is to work on and share their own personal narratives, and by doing this, strengthen and give voice to their unique identities.

Conclusions

The Western individualistic value system (ironically) pressures us to believe that we all are, or should be, the same. Because of this pressure to conform to societal ideals, diversity is discouraged and devalued among all Americans regardless of race, class, gender, or sexual preference; however, personal narrative assignments, especially when shared, can help reveal this diversity and honor it. Personal narratives can be "a powerful way of meaning making in a community and an essential expression of being human and alongside with one another" (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 148). Members of the dominant group can also use narrative work to speak to the exclusionary aspects of an individualistic culture and encourage the celebration of diversity. If we are to value true equality and diversity, we need to encourage all students to use their personal narratives to critique American culture and work to make it more inclusive and just for everyone, especially marginalized people. A society that claims to believe in "liberty and justice for all" cannot tolerate bigoted, oppressive narratives that promote violence and hatred. Most importantly, all kinds of voices must be heard if we are to effect real and lasting change.

A major challenge in this work is getting people to see that these problems even exist,

much less to get them to look for, and enact, solutions. What is needed is a way to help people who are blind to the damaging effects of their culture to see why change is needed. However, white people quite often do not want to see; they do not want to be told about white responsibility or systemic racism. They find it difficult to acknowledge their responsibility and do want to acknowledge, much less give up their white privilege. They are closed down into linear and/or dualistic stories that tell them they have no connection with anything outside of themselves, and from this perspective, they can only see their own investment in protecting their supremacy and their power.

But, these challenges can be met, at least in part, if we can help people learn to be more open, or, even better, help them value openness in themselves and others. The Mind-Body State Literacy model that I offer here is designed to do this. Most importantly, helping people see things in a more relational way could even help students and instructors see the value of relinquishing at least some of their privilege. This may feel less threatening if they can realize that giving up some of their privilege does not mean that they can no longer feel patriotic; on the contrary, it means that we can be even prouder that democracy and freedom belong to all of us.

In this chapter, I have provided some examples of the kinds of cultural stories that may influence students' narratives. The isolating aspects of individualism heavily influence both students who identify with, and those who are excluded from, the dominant culture. The reductive nature of these stories can lead people to create a narrow definition of who belongs to, or is valued in, that narrative and who is considered the "other." As a result, people are reduced to stereotypes and objectified and the natural world is also treated as "other." At the same time, more relational cultural perspectives (e.g., those of Indigenous people) are also present in America. Unfortunately, these narratives are widely devalued or culturally appropriated because

many white Americans find it difficult to respectfully allow themselves to be influenced by the relational aspects of these cultures without usurping or appropriating their sacred traditions.

The cultural stories discussed in this chapter illustrate the many ways that non-relational narratives cause not only exclusion and divisiveness, but isolating emotions, as well. In the chapter that follows I will examine the relationship between these stories, emotion, and the cognitive processing of narratives. This discussion, I hope, will shed light on how non-relational, exclusionary narratives can stagnate through their embodiment in our brains and emotions.

Chapter 4: The Embodied Dimensions of Exclusionary Narratives

"The objective of Nonviolent Communication is not to change people and their behavior in order to get our way: it is to establish relationships based on honesty and empathy, which will eventually fulfill everyone's needs."

— Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg

In the previous chapter I looked at the kinds of master narratives that may influence students' (and instructors') personal narratives. Specifically, I concentrated on the aspects of these stories that may close students down and cause them to feel that the needs of the natural world or their fellow human beings are none of their concern. Students raised within these narratives may see them as an expression of an objective reality, fixed and unchangeable, which further solidifies for them that their paradigm is the only correct way to be in the world (Pronin, 2006). On the other hand, I also looked at the aspects of cultural narratives that exemplify openness and connection to the world. Understanding these relational narratives, and the differences between the two paradigms, can help students see that master narratives are subjectively created, historic and cultural constructs that are malleable, which can help them feel that they have agency in changing them.

In this chapter, I will focus on how narratives are processed in the brain and the effects of isolating emotions in this process. The problematic narratives described in Chapter 3 make it easy to see how they create these kinds of emotions and, more importantly, how the seeds of both the stories and the emotions are embodied in the students themselves. Whenever they feel stressed, uncertain, or threatened, these seeds may trigger up the personal narratives based on those closed cultural stories. As a result, these exclusionary narratives continue to influence the students' stories. Then, the isolating emotions that accompany those stories can further close

them down and keep them locked within those harmful narratives, creating a vicious cycle of narrative "stuckness" (Mathieu, 2014). This vicious cycle creates toxic internal and external environments in which students must work with their personal narratives and prevents them from developing stories rooted in relational care. In this chapter, I examine how this process is embodied in the brain, focusing especially on how narratives come up into our own personal brainwave environment, one highly shaped by fearful emotions.

Introduction

To be relational, students must continually update their stories through listening to and connecting with people and the environment outside themselves. Only then can their stories cannot help guide them towards empathy and care. As I have shown, recent studies by Western scientists validate Relational Cultural Theory by proving that the healthiest personal and cultural narratives are relational (A. Banks, 2011). If students' stories have stagnated, they will not be able to transform them from individualistic to others that are more collectivistic and relational. For students to keep their stories healthy, flexible, and fluid, they must have an open brain state as well as an open mind, which requires working with the stressful energy that can cause those stories to stagnate. Calming fearful emotions is central to this process. Furthermore, knowing how our brains and brainwaves update stories makes it easier to understand how to tend our own emotions and help students learn to tend theirs, as well.

Regardless of whether our stories are open or closed, to remain healthy, all stories continually need to be aligned with the present state of the world around us. Nothing in life stays the same—everything is impermanent (Nhat Hanh, 1999). Our brains respond to this truth by continually trying to update our stories. If they cannot update from outside us, they will update internally with information taken from within the current narrative/story. This creates a

homogenous and unhealthy cycle of self-validation. This closing-down cycle is the antithesis of learning because nothing new can come in to open our perspective. The longer students[32] remain stuck, the farther they get from reality because they become the products of their own thinking or imagination. Therefore, a narrative needs to be fluid; it "is not a product nor is it a set of tales about individuals and their communities. It is a process, a journey that leads to learning, agency and better understanding of oneself, others and one's purpose in the world" (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 102).

Rhetoric and Writing scholars, as well as narrative theorists, have recognized the importance of incorporating what is happening outside of us through the writing process—including, if not especially, in the personal narrative writing process. In her "Silence: Reflection, Literacy, Learning, and Teaching," Belanoff (2001) discusses the importance of maintaining fluidity between our inner and outer worlds as we write. She argues that we, as educators, must make space for students to reflect and meditate during the writing process, but emphasizes that reflection and meditation—despite connotations of being largely inwardly directed—require us to actively listen and interact. Belanoff (2001) notes that "metacognitive, meditative, contemplative, [and] reflective probings" allow students to listen more deeply to texts, recognizing how they interlace with their own thoughts and perspectives. She then connects this to the process of reflection, more generally, noting its importance in connecting us with others:

> There's a philosophical message here that I can relate to what I see as the relationship between reflection and activity, between drawing into the self and interacting with one's environment, between using language to define oneself and using language to communicate with others, between thoughts perceived internally and events as experienced externally, between those who value argument, and those who value

[32] These same processes hold true, of course, for instructors.

> narrative, between those who foreground discourses and those who foreground personal discourse. Each of those is a strand that interweaves with the others but is always present, even if not to the immediate sense….each of us reads and meditates, interacts and withdraws, talks to himself or herself and then to others, reflects and acts—or vice versa: withdraws and interacts, talks to others and then to himself or herself, acts and then reflects. Optimal learning occurs when reflection interlaces with socialization. (2001, p. 417)

Like Belanoff (2001), I believe that this in and out process is critical. Returning to the Chapter 2 discussion, students and instructors often rely on their constructed avatars of others and of the natural environment, without updating these characterizations through mindful listening. If stories do not update in this way, they become irrelevant and neurotic, and they no longer serve as a useful map of the world. The narrative learning process is one that requires openness and listening (Goodson & Gill, 2014; Yam, 2018). On the other hand, when we are more open our stories are free to come up and be influenced by the reality outside us; I say that these stories are "externally updated." When we are able to process the new experience that each day brings, we can externally update our stories. If we practice mindfulness we become more aware of the uniqueness of each new moment. This helps us let in more novelty and diversity because it helps us see the way things really are rather than respond to our memory of a similar event in the past. We can go days, weeks, or even years running on the power of our stories in our interactions with the world.

For example, when we go to the grocery store, do we see the unique human being who helps us or do we see only a cashier? When we see only a cashier, it is self-validating because we are confirming the narrative/story we already have, but if we see the human being who is helping

us, our narrative/story is externally updated. We're not only recognizing that the cashier exists beyond the current function that they're serving in our own narrative context of the moment (e.g., completing a financial transaction); we furthermore complicate our construction of who they are by letting them, the unknown, provide us new information. We seek to engage in the "dialogic encounter" described by Goodson and Gill (2011, p. 88). Without awareness, we typically run on autopilot, training our brains to confirm that the world is how we expect it to be. This is often our approach if we are trying to get things done and be efficient, and, it may be efficient until we make grave errors because we assume what someone else intends to do or say. This is a common way to go about life and it takes conscious intention to live differently in the present moment. In fact, being mindful is often most efficient in the long run; it most certainly is a kinder and more relational way to live. Which way of paying attention we practice changes what brainwaves we use and, over time, the physical size and shape of our brains, as well.

Neural plasticity is the brain's ability to adapt, remap, and grow through neurogenesis (Weffort de Oliveira, 2020). These changes are largely influenced by how we are paying attention to what we are doing or thinking (Siegel, 2007). An individualistic culture makes having fluid narratives and an open mind especially difficult and incredibly important. Individualistic narratives are more likely to stagnate because the less we connect with the people and things outside of us the more our stories must be self-validating. Seeing the world in this narrow way not only creates a different mind state than relational narratives, it actually creates a different brain state as well because we change our brains by how we pay attention. As Jim Robbins notes, "The brain is a dynamic and extremely plastic organ…. Simply guiding the way someone thinks can change the structure of tissue in the brain" (2000/2008, p. 52). Conversely, the size and shape of our brain tends to influence how we pay attention and, by extension, how

we tend to be in the world. This means that we can consciously choose how we want to be in, and with, the world.

The type of electrical activity in the brain is also highly influential in how we pay attention and process information. Les Fehmi, a highly respected neuropsychologist who has studied brainwaves for over forty years, points out that it "is not *what* we attend to; far more critical is *how* we attend, *how* we form our awareness, and *how* we adhere—rigidly or flexibly—to a chosen style of attention" (Fehmi & Robbins, 2007, p. 13, emphasis in original). The way we pay attention is critical to our well-being.

When we pay attention in a rigid, effortful, and thus stressed way, it is a drag on the entire mind-body system; we are more likely to overreact in ways that are more fearful, angry, effortful, rigid, and resistant. When we pay attention in a flexible way we are more accepting, comfortable, energetic, aware, healthy, productive, and in the flow. Full attention leads to creativity, spontaneity, acceptance, faith, empathy, integration, productivity, flexibility, efficiency, stress reduction, endurance, persistence, accuracy, perspective, and compassion (Fehmi & Robbins, 2007, p. 12-13)

Next, I will look at the role brainwaves play in processing narratives. The human brain is extremely complicated and the electrical currents that run through it are also very complex. What I share here is a very basic understanding of the different types (called frequencies) of electrical waves and how they share information. My definitions of these frequencies and their characteristics are based on both EEG studies in neuroscience and neuropsychology and the work of neurofeedback practitioners[33]. The neuroscience of brainwaves—and the embodied,

[33] I have written more in depth about the complications—and affordances—of neurofeedback discourses and studies in my 2018 article, "Open Listening: Using Neurofeedback and Mindfulness Pedagogies to Teach Open Listening." See also Brenninkmeijer's writings on the subject, such as her 2016 *Neurotechnologies of the Self: Mind, Brain, and Subjectivity*.

psychological, social, and cultural dimensions it intersects with—represents an enormous subject, and one inevitably shaped by my own subjectivity as an interdisciplinary scholar. I focus, in this chapter, on framing brainwaves according to their relevance to the Mind-Body State Literacy approach. I do not cover more complex dimensions of brainwaves such as coherence, synchrony, or which areas of the brain generate specific frequencies; they are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

What students and instructors in the Rhetoric and Writing classroom can gain from the fundamentals I present is an understanding of how and why people close down and are unable to take in anything outside their current perspective. The lack of this ability not only makes it impossible for students or instructors to conceive of the world in a relational way, it significantly impedes the kind of learning that helps them create the radical shift in their world view that we hope for in a liberal education. Our brainwaves (as well as our brains), alone, do not determine our ability to be open. They do, however, represent an important interrelated facet of the mind-body state, and one that interacts with fear and exclusionary narratives. Once triggered, as I will show, our brainwaves can literally make it impossible to see our narratives in a different light, let alone listen to another person's perspective.

I want to emphasize that teaching students how to train their brains by consciously directing their attention is meant to empower them rather than make them feel that they, or their thinking, is sick or defective. Asking them to train their brains "without reflecting on the other factors involved in this shift, encourages harmful conceptions of what Pitts-Taylor (2010) calls a neuronal self. In this case, a person's sense of self is reduced to a particular brainwave pattern" (Schaefer, 2018, p. 82). This could leave a student feeling that their brainwave pattern was a representation of *who* they are, rather than *where* they are—that is, within a temporary stress

state. These conceptions of self can be detrimental, particularly when certain brainwaves and associated characteristics are normalized while others are pathologized (Brenninkmeijer, 2015).

Mind-Body State Literacy in fact helps to remove the judgment that is often implicit in this work. It can be very difficult not to judge students who are rigidly defending highly prejudicial points of view rather than seeing them as people who are stuck in a closed and bigoted narrative. Once we judge the student, instead of the narrative, we diminish our ability as teachers to see their potential to learn and grow. This makes an extremely important and difficult job even harder. These teachers (and students) need support to make their work more fruitful and less traumatizing. It is my hope that classes which utilize the information that an MBSL offers will help students enter other classrooms better prepared to learn about justice and relationality.

Brainwaves: The Basics

The brain communicates through neurons (nerve cells). Brainwaves are produced through the synchronous firing of masses of neurons. Brainwaves shape and are shaped by the way we think and attend to our inner and outer environments (Brenninkmeijer, 2015). This activity can be measured by an electroencephalogram (EEG) and made visible on a graph. Brainwaves are categorized according to their speed, different frequency ranges divided into different bandwidths, each bandwidth serving a particular function (see Table 4.1). The ultra slow frequency waves, called Delta, are used by our unconscious mind and fire at 0-4hz. Theta, associated our subconscious mind, which we use to monitor information about our past, fires in the 4-8hz range. It is also associated with relaxation, daydreaming, creativity, coming into or out of sleep, and the consolidation of recent waking-life experiences (Eichenlaub et al., 2018). The middle range that monitors the reality of the present moment runs at 9-12hz and is called Alpha (Keune et al., 2011). The somewhat faster frequencies, called Beta waves, fire at 13-40hz. They

are what we think of as our conscious mind (the one reading this and contemplating it). Beta waves are broken into different ranges: low Beta are relaxed attention, mid Beta are a bit more focused and good for completing tasks, and high Beta are narrow, highly focused waves, often associated with anxiety. The fastest waves, at 40hz, are called Gamma waves; it's been proposed that these orchestrate the other brainwaves (Braboszcz et al. 2017; Lutz et al., 2004). These waves make it possible to control how we pay attention because, with practice, we are able to consciously control Gamma (Lutz et al., 2004).

Table 4.1: *Brainwave characteristics. This table is taken from "Using Neurofeedback and Mindfulness Pedagogies to Teach Open Listening" (Schaefer, 2018, p. 80).*

Brain Wave	Frequency Range	Associated Characteristics
Delta	<4 hz	• Dreamless sleep • Deep meditation • Unconscious

Theta	4–8 hz	• When active with eyes open:
		  ○ Drowsiness
		  ○ Day dreaming
		  ○ Fatigue
		• When active with eyes closed:
		  ○ Light sleep
		  ○ Consciousness upon waking/falling asleep
		  ○ Deep meditation/hypnosis
		  ○ Memories of experiences (especially autobiographical memories)
		  ○ Associated with the regulation of emotion
		• Consciousness upon waking/falling asleep
		• Roles in attention, learning, and memory (re)consolidation (Gruzelier, 2014a)

Alpha	8–13 hz	• Calm, open, and non-judgmental awareness (eyes closed) • Mindfulness meditation, higher amplitudes found especially in long-term meditators (Keune, Bostanov, Hautzinger, & Kotchoubey, 2011)
Low Beta	13–15 hz	• More relaxed, open conscious mind thinking (as open in nature as alpha)
Beta	15–20 hz	• Regular, conscious mind thinking
High Beta	20–40 hz	• Narrowly focused conscious mind thinking • Often associated with emotional reactivity, anxiety, and rumination.
Gamma	25–100 hz	• High levels of synchrony in long-term meditators (Braboszcz, Cahn, Lvy, Fernandez, & Delorme, 2017; Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson, 2004) • Associated with the direction of consciousness • Roles are still of great debate • Waves have "been linked to diverse cognitive functioning" (Braboszcz et al., 2017) and may be involved in the direction of consciousness • Also linked to mindfulness meditation (Lutz et al., 2004)

All of these frequencies are firing at different volumes in our head at all times, even when we are asleep. Different types of brainwaves have a typical volume range; on average, the slow waves usually have a volume of about 10-12, the Betas tend to run about 5-8, Gamma is often down around 2-4 and Alpha's volume goes up when our eyes are closed and down when we open them. There is some variation in these volumes depending on how we are paying attention and which area of the brain is doing most of the processing. For example, when we are awake, alert, and have our eyes open we are most aware of and utilizing our Beta waves because our conscious mind is more active and engaged with the external world. Since we do most of our conscious processing in the front of the brain, it is normal for Beta to be higher in this area. Alternately, slower waves usually do most of their processing in the right rear, or parietal region so they may be higher there (Demos, 2005). The centerline of the brain, between front and back, is where we would expect to find Lo Beta higher. It is easy to remember that the front of the heads is where we do most of our thinking and planning for the future, while the back of the heads is where we usually process things about our past.

How we pay attention determines our peak frequency, which is very important to narrative processing. The peak frequency is the frequency that is at the highest volume within its usual range. For example, whichever of the slow waves is higher—Theta or Delta—is the peak frequency (Demos, 2005). When it is Theta, we may be in a creative and meditative state but, if Delta comes up higher than Theta, we have probably drifted off to sleep. The same is true of the three Betas—Lo, Mid, or Hi—whichever of these is at the highest volume will be the peak, or dominant, frequency, even though it may still be lower than Theta or Delta which often run at higher volumes. How narrow our conscious focus is and how open we are able to be depends on which of the Betas is the peak frequency. As we shall see, this is very important in determining

our ability to listen, and whether or not we are able to update our stories externally. The brainwave that is at the highest volume of all the frequencies is called the "overall peak frequency."

To visualize how we process narratives, view relationships, store memories, and carry out daily activities, it is helpful to begin by separating the brainwave frequencies into two groups. The first group, our slow waves, are the frequencies between Delta and Alpha. These frequencies—especially Theta—are where we process our memories; it is the job of the subconscious and the unconscious minds to keep our stories ready for us, as we need them (White & Richards, 2009). These waves are slower and more open than Beta because the large amount of information (from our past) takes longer to process. They are also the waves we use to tend to our internal world (Eichenlaub et al., 2018; White & Richards, 2009). Although they are more prevalent at night or when our eyes are closed, they (especially Theta) can share information with other frequencies anytime.

The second group, our fast waves, are the frequencies from Alpha up to Gamma; they are where we process things about the future and things external to us, including handling tasks and planning. They are faster and have a narrower focus than slow waves; they help us concentrate on our planning and respond more quickly to external events. The different Beta frequencies—lo, mid, and high Beta—come up depending on our needs at the time. If we are doing general task work mid Beta will be most active. If we are under stress and our sympathetic nervous system has been activated, Hi Beta may be the peak Beta frequency and if we are doing highly focused work it can mimic this stress state with high Beta. The narrow focus quality of Hi Beta and the fact that it is often associated with stress give it a very "sticky" quality. When we are narrowly focused on something to the exclusion of everything else it is easy for it to maintain our

attention. The same is true when we are feeling afraid, as we may lock our focus onto whatever we have identified as the source of our fear. The stickiness of Hi Beta means it leads easily to getting stuck. For this reason, it is best if we limit the amount of time we spend in a narrow focus, high concentration state. These waves are usually most active during the day with our eyes open, but anyone who has spent a sleepless night with racing thoughts knows what it is like for them to be active at night.

Whereas Hi Beta is narrow focused and often associated with anxiety, Lo Beta is relaxed, alert attention that is not overly engaged. If we are at ease and not under pressure our Lo Beta (13-15Hz) may be our dominant frequency. Lo Beta waves are closer on the frequency spectrum to Alpha (9-12) and are much more open than Hi or even Mid Beta. In contrast to the "sticky" quality of Hi Beta, Lo Beta is free flowing and easeful and though it is not as unbiased as Alpha, it is as close as our conscious minds can come to it. In a sense, Lo Beta stands in for Alpha when our eyes are open and we are consciously attending to our lives. Two things influence which of our conscious mind Beta frequencies we are using—how deeply we are into our thinking narrative (narrow concentration) and how at ease or stressed we feel. Mindful breathing, non-judgmental body awareness, and simply taking breaks all help us raise Lo Beta.

Alpha, associated with mindfulness (Bing-Canar, Pizzuto, & Compton, 2016), is the unbiased awareness of the present moment and is shared by both the slow and the fast waves in the same way that the present moment is made up of both the past and the future. The present moment is where transformation happens, as the past becomes the future (Nhat Hanh, 1999). To allow for this change, Alpha has to have an open, non-structured, non-storied quality. The best way to describe this is to call it a moment of pure potential, a moment in which anything can happen. This is not to say that our stories of the past or our plans for the future do not influence

it; of course they do. But, in that one moment there has to be a space that is open enough to allow transformation to happen. It makes sense that our brains, which have developed the capacity to allow us to function in, and make sense of, the world we live in can recognize that the present moment is very different from the past and the future and have a frequency that mirrors that difference. In fact, one could make the case that only the present moment actually exists and the past and the future are only concepts—constructs of our minds.

Alpha is particularly noteworthy brainwave frequency for purposes of transforming our narratives (White & Richards, 2009). Those in neurotherapy have often sought to support clients' ability to raise Alpha because it is associated with the ability to more fully experience emotionally difficult events without reactivity (Taylor et al., 2011). Alpha plays many important roles in our brains, but it is especially important in updating our narratives because it is free of the bias of narrative. Neurotherapists Nancy E. White and Leonard M. Richard (2009), for instance, explain how the mindful, open nature of Alpha awareness has helped trauma survivors transform memories that were "state-bound;" that is, memories that always arose in an individual's mind consciousness with a difficult emotion, such as fear (2009, p. 149). In neurotherapy, individuals learned to essentially observe the memory with Alpha, which allowed them to experience the memory from a new, more neutral emotional state (2009). This work demonstrates the "malleability of memory" (2009, p. 153), or in the case of this dissertation, the malleability of narratives.

All of us are biased and prejudiced, but if we were never able step outside of our stories we would never be able to update them. We could not even take in new information; in other words, if we are to learn and grow we need Alpha. Being able to see a perspective from outside our narrative (if only briefly) allows us to see it as it really is rather than with the prejudice that is

inherent from within it. This is incredibly important because it is also from this perspective that we are able to listen to others with less prejudice. No one can, or should be in an Alpha-dominant state at all times; it would not be good for our cognitive processing. We need to be in our stories to advance them, to live in the world and take part in creating it. But the respite from our stories that Alpha allows gives us a way to help those stories reflect the reality outside us. Without that we would have no way of being relational or of connecting to the truth of an interconnected world.

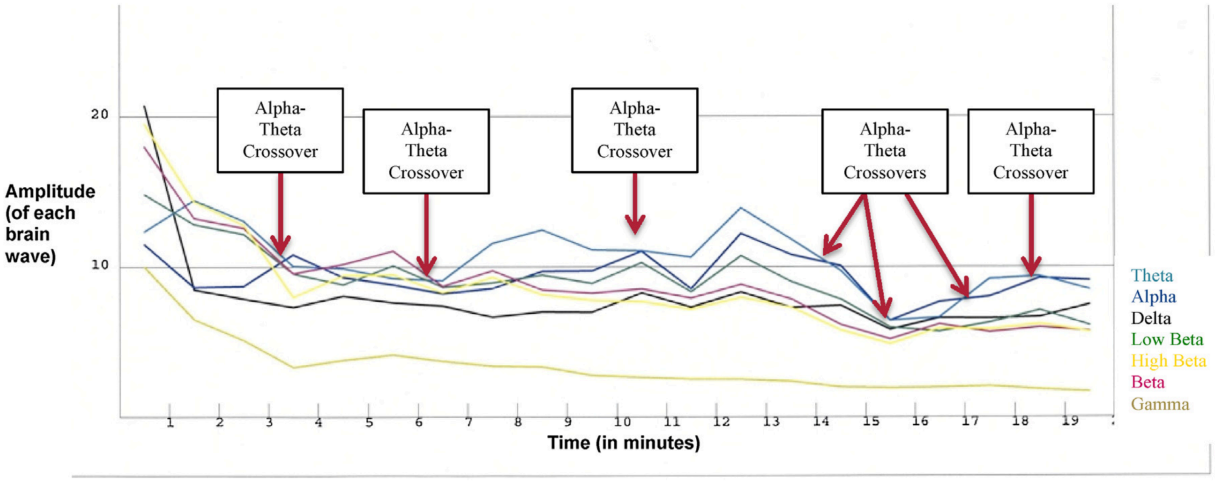
All our brainwave frequencies share information with each other as the brain and the mind process and update our stories. Scholars in neurotherapy have argued that brainwaves that are firing at approximately the same volume are most able to share information. These connections are called "crossovers" because when the lines (representing different frequencies) on the graph are at the same volume they interact and crossover each other (see Figure 4.1) (White & Richards, 2009). They may come together and stay together sharing information for a time, but, even if they touch only briefly, they can share much important information (see Figure 4.1). Though the exact way that brainwaves communicate with one another is more complicated than these graphs indicate[34], we can think of these brainwaves as paying attention to each other in a way that is similar to conversations[35] in that information can pass in either direction. This is how the processing of our stories takes place. These conversations are ultimately more critical to narrative work than how much (the volume) of any frequency we have at any time. For example, we may have a low volume of Alpha because it is down paying attention to the Betas. Peak

[34] How communication between brainwaves happens is still being debated. Scholars have proposed theories that suggest it involves the synchronization of neuronal oscillations (Bonnefond, Kastner, & Jensen, 2017; Palva & Palva, 2012; Luo & Guan, 2018).

[35] When freed from the confines of empirical studies that often focus on brainwaves in isolation from the complexities of individual's experiences of consciousness, we can quickly recognize from our own experiences of meditation that our different types of attention/awareness exchange information with brainwaves associated with autobiographical memories, for instance.

frequency, however, is also important because it helps determine which frequencies are having conversations, which affects the quality of the communication.

Figure 4.1: *Alpha-theta cross-overs (image taken from Schaefer, 2018, p. 80).*



The openness of Alpha makes it particularly important in these conversations. Alpha acts as a messenger between the Betas and Theta as we bring up memories to guide us in the present and send them back as updated stories to be stored for future use. When our eyes are open, Alpha usually remains with the Betas as our awareness, observing and recording as we go about our day (Demos, 2005). If we close our eyes, Alpha should come up; this raises our awareness and turns our attention inward (2005). When Theta comes up to be with Alpha, they are able to share information (White & Richards, 2009) (see Figure 4.1). In this capacity Alpha acts as the messenger[36] between our conscious, external mind (Betas) and our subconscious and unconscious internal mind (Theta and Delta) (White & Richards, 2009). Alpha also often remains as the observer even if Delta comes up above Theta and we fall asleep; in fact, if Alpha stays near Theta and Delta when we are asleep we will remember our dreams better (Marzano et al., 2011). This is a typical way for brainwaves to function, but these patterns can vary depending

[36] Alpha may also "be considered a bridge from the external world to the interal world, and vive versa" (White & Richards, 2009, p. 149).

on how we are using our mind and how it is communicating with itself.

Alpha also provides us the opportunity to have the non-judgmental self-awareness that is essential to narrative work. The openness of Alpha allows us to have true self-awareness rather than being self-conscious (Lau et al., 2006). Clinical psychologists have long discussed its role in promoting a healthy form of self-awareness as well as empathy (e.g., Ivanovski & Malhi, 2007; Lee et al., 2018; White & Richards, 2009). Alpha's relationship with Theta and the Betas is so strong that its amplitude rises whenever we close our eyes, even for a minute, in preparation for receiving information from Theta and then drops when we open them again to be near the Betas (Demos, 2005). When it is near Theta, it acts as our inner awareness, and when it is with the Betas, it can act as our self-awareness if we use it this way (Ivanovski & Malhi, 2007). On the other hand, if we use our thinking mind, especially Hi Beta, to pay attention to ourselves we become self–conscious rather than self-aware. As we go about our day, we pay attention primarily to things outside of ourselves, using our Beta waves. If we are stressed or have isolating emotions, Hi Beta may be the peak conscious frequency. Then, if something calls our attention to ourselves, such as someone noticing how we talk or what we are wearing, it can cause us to use these Hi Beta waves to focus on ourselves. As a result, we use narrowly focused waves to look at ourselves while simultaneously needing to continue tending to the conversation outside of us.

This can raise our anxiety partly because there are competing lines of thought happening simultaneously, internally and externally, and partly due to the judgmental nature of Hi Beta. Hi Beta waves are narrowly focused, which naturally makes them more judgmental; we constantly need to decide what to focus on, including what does, and does not, fit within our narrative at the time. Conflicting foci of attention also makes it easy to confuse what is about us and what is

outside of us. This confusion and the judgmental nature of Beta waves explain why, when we are self-conscious, we are more likely to take things that others say or do personally. Strengthening our connection to Alpha allows us to increase awareness of our internal world without losing our ability to tend to our external interactions because Alpha is open enough to take in both at the same time. We can do this if we use Alpha (or at least Lo Beta) as our source of self-awareness because Alpha is pure awareness as opposed to being a thinking wave like the Betas. Also, most importantly, because Alpha is non-judgmental it allows us to be less harsh with ourselves, which is the basis of compassion for others.

So far, we have seen that there are four basic aspects of brainwaves that are important to narrative processing. The first one is the frequency, the rate at which our neurons fire, because that tells us the characteristics of those waves (i.e., Hi Beta is narrow focus). The second is peak frequency or which wave is dominant within its frequency range or overall peak frequency. This also tells us about their attributes because we know how much of the frequency's characteristics we are utilizing. For example, we know that if Hi Beta is our peak Beta frequency we will be narrowly focused. The third is which brainwaves are communicating (who is having crossovers) with each other. We need to know if the frequencies we use to send and receive our thoughts are able to do so clearly and without distortion. The fourth aspect is the special quality of Alpha (and to some degree Lo Beta), which allows us to see ourselves, and others, without them being tainted by narrow focused attachment to our stories and emotions. It is also the only wave that can clearly see our past, present, and future as it shifts our awareness between our outer world (Betas) and our inner one (Theta and Delta). Importantly, it also allows us to have true self-awareness rather than being self-conscious. Next I will look at how these brainwaves go about updating our stories. This will include taking a closer look at the role that Hi Beta plays in

closing us down.

How Brainwaves Process Our Stories

One of the main goals of the Mind-Body State Literacy approach is to help students and instructors in the Rhetoric and Writing classroom learn how to be less reactive to emotions, especially fear based ones, so that we can be more open and be better listeners. Memories come up to help us in the present, but they are also being updated so that they remain an accurate guide for us in the future. This is the cognitive process of learning and updating our narratives. If we remain calm and have healthy stories, we have an efficient, fluid, and open cycle that allows us to function at peak performance. On the other hand, when aspects of stories—our own or those we are exposed to—raise fear in us, they can trigger us into a closing down cycle. If we are reactive with the emotion those stories bring up (i.e. fueling the fear rather than calming it) we increase its power to physiologically put us in narrow focus waves by activating our sympathetic nervous system and bringing on a stress state. This state causes our Hi Beta to become the dominant brainwave so that we are better able to focus externally on the perceived threat. Seeing our stories through this narrow focus lens then causes us to zoom in on what we are afraid of, which only confirms the closed aspects of the narrative/story rather than updating it to a more open perspective. As a result we get caught in the vicious cycle of a narrative/story that scares us and closes us down so that we confirm the story, which creates even more fear. This cycle causes the cognitive processing of narrative/stories to stagnate and we become stuck. In the next section I will further explain how this happens with our brainwaves and how we can interrupt this cycle.

Our brains are almost always doing what we require of them. As I have shown, there are many different ways of paying attention and the way that we attend is determined by which brainwave pattern is most active. Each pattern is more suited to specific types of tasks than

others. When we need to do our taxes we raise waves that are narrow focus and, hopefully, when we want to play with our kids we raise waves that are associated with inclusive activities. However, when we feel threatened, we activate our sympathetic nervous system, which sets off a cascade of physiological defense mechanisms. This stress response affects our brains by closing them down completely into narrow focus thinking, a brainwave pattern that is more conducive to us/them paranoid thinking. Fehmi and Robbins (2007) explains what happens in our bodies and minds in this state:

> Narrow-objective focus is an emergency mode of paying attention that quickly and substantially increases the frequency of the brain's electrical activity and raises other aspects of physiological arousal, such as heart and respiratory rates, which in turn directly affect our perception, emotions, and behavior. (Fehmi & Robbins, 2007, p. 16)

Even under these conditions, our brains are doing what is required of them; they are helping us survive. Throughout our evolution and in the present day, our bodies and minds often need to change in these ways to respond to things in our environment that pose a literal threat (Williams et al., 2007).

However, these extreme focus waves often cause, or are caused by, our exclusionary cultural narratives and isolating emotions. Narrow focus can be useful but it exacts a high emotional price and takes an enormous amount of energy to maintain. As Fehmi and Robbins point out, "There is nothing inherently wrong with it; in fact, one reason it is overused is precisely because it is so helpful and allows us in the short run, to accomplish so much" (2007, p. 16). This becomes a problem, however, if we are activating our stress response over things that are not truly a threat or, if we cannot calm, activate the parasympathetic nervous system, and return to a normal open state when an actual threat has passed. Neural plasticity helps our brain

to change shape to accommodate how we are using our minds. This means that the overuse of narrow-objective focus makes it more likely to become habitual, even for tasks it is not designed to handle. When we are done with our work and head home to our families we want brainwaves that are more relational; narrow focus is an excellent state for *doing* but not for *being with*.

Fehmi and Robbins argue, "we are culturally biased to stay locked in to limited modes of attention, to our great detriment" (2007, p.13). They believe that people in our culture have become "conditioned to narrow-focused attention" (2007, p. 17). We are addicted to this over-used way of paying attention in part because it is how an individualistic culture strives to be relational: "Our culture affirms personal relationships not by common experiences of oneness or union, but by sharing and reiteration of common objective experiences, whatever form they take, whether it's a sporting event, a thought or feeling, or a new purchase" (2007, p. 17). We can even be ostracized for not conforming to this model, for "There's a lot of pressure for us to adopt narrow-objective attention most of the time" (2007, p. 18). It is this cultural pressure that we attend to when we offer students an alternative to narrow focus thinking.

Listening to Theta

When things in the present remind us of something from our past, our mind calls up memories of similar experiences. Alternately, we may be resting or falling asleep when these memories come up seemingly at random. They come up in the form of stories packed with the emotions that we felt at the time we recorded them. Brought up by Theta waves, they are delivered via a "crossover" (Johnson et al. 2013; White & Richards, 2009) to one of our more conscious frequencies, as seen on an EEG readout (see Fig. 1). Which brain frequency the information is delivered to—Lo, Mid, or High Beta, or possibly Alpha—depends partly on whether our eyes are open or closed, but it also depends on what our brainwave profile is when

the memory comes up. This is important because which brainwaves Theta communicates with can determine how we work with our stories.

Just as there is a sender and a receiver in interpersonal communication, the same is true for the intrapersonal communication of brainwaves; how we receive the memory brought by the sender (usually Theta) can be strongly colored by how the receiver (Lo, Mid, or High Beta, or Alpha) interprets it as it comes in. The better the frequency is at listening the more accurately the message will be received. The best listening waves are Alpha and Lo Beta because they are more open and receptive than the faster waves. Which of these two frequencies is preferable depends on whether we are at rest with our eyes closed (Alpha) or engaged with our eyes open (Lo Beta) (Demos, 2005). We do not know when Theta will bring us information; therefore, in order to have good listening waves ready when it does, it is best to make a practice of cultivating both of these regularly. If we do, we will receive a host of positive benefits. Unfortunately, given the high stress and little sleep lifestyle of many college students, especially in our narrow focused culture, it is more likely that they will use their Beta or Hi Beta to listen to their Theta.

When Theta brings students a map from their stored consciousness during the day when their eyes are open, it is likely that it will be received by one of their Beta frequencies. When students are learning, their Theta is constantly coming up to guide them. If they have isolating emotions, exclusionary stories, are highly stressed, or deep in concentration, (all states that are common for many students) they will probably view their Theta memory through the narrow focus of Hi Beta. If this state causes them to be already engrossed in the context of a narrative/story when a memory surfaces, they may not even be aware that the memory has come up. The narrative/story that is triggered up is probably similar to their present situation (that is why Theta brought it up). As a result, it can easily be usurped by their current narrative, both in

content and, most especially, in context, including the emotion. The meaning ascribed to the memory that has come up and the narrative/story that they are already in blend into an amalgamation of the two stories. Many people have seen this happen or experienced this for themselves; it is commonly referred to as a "trigger."

If the student is in a stress state when they are triggered, or if the narrative/story that is triggered up contains the seeds of stressful emotions, this can create a vicious cycle that locks them into the narrative/story. Recall Mathieu's (2014) description of becoming caught in one's own inner rhetoric—essentially the current narrative framework we're immersed in under a fearful state. Mathieu's personal example was of her reading a negative student comment which immersed her in the narrative of being a bad teacher. Once in the narrative/story, as Mathieu points out, "we act and behave as if it is true" (p. 184). This, of course, provides further seemingly experiential evidence that reconfirms the narrative/story, making it even more difficult to see it in a new way or calm the fear that's largely fueling it[37].

These triggers cause students and instructors to receive classroom instruction and other learning experiences in a biased way and to self-validate their stories as they already exist. In short, they strongly inhibit learning. For example, in a course about social justice issues a student could have a memory that they, or their family were being judged as uneducated or ignorant. Even though the teacher is only trying to help enlighten them, they may see the instruction as humiliating and judgmental. If this gets triggered up, it will not matter that the teacher is not being judgmental because the student is responding to an emotion and narrative/story from another time and place. Moreover, because the narrative they are in is so similar to the old one that has come up, everything the teacher says fits into their narrative in a negative way. If the

[37] Of course, as Mathieu (2014) points out and as the discussion in Chapter 3 on exclusionary narratives would suggest, the vicious cycle of staying stuck in our narratives can be fueled by a culture that devalues those with marginalized identities.

teacher—understandably—becomes frustrated, the student will only see their emotion as judgment. This is a very difficult situation to be in and it is uncomfortable for everyone in the room because fear and triggers are contagious (Nhat Hanh, 2002).

Lo Beta waves can help students avoid being triggered by emotionally laden memories that can come up with Theta. As students calm their isolating emotions, they are able to open up and listen to Theta with Lo Beta rather than Hi Beta. This allows them to remain in an open state and makes it more likely that they can externally-update their stories rather than being triggered and self-validating them. Using Lo Beta to pay attention to Theta also means they are more likely to hear all of what their stored wisdom is trying to bring up clearly and correctly because it is more open focused than Hi Beta. This helps them work smarter and easier, which further reinforces an open cycle. They feel "in the zone" rather than stressed, foggy, or overwhelmed. The primary benefit of using Lo Beta to communicate with Theta is that it will update their stories more accurately and with less distortion from whatever narrative/story they were already in when Theta came up. However, it is perhaps equally important that the more open focus of Lo Beta allows a better opportunity for the student to have self-awareness within the narrative and of the emotion. Open focus gives them more agency in their narrative work because they cannot change a narrative/story if they cannot see it. It also gives students access to their true, easeful self, open and accessing all parts of their identity, rather than a narrow reactive version of themselves.

Lo Beta is an excellent frequency for students and teachers to learn to cultivate. It is called the sensorimotor rhythm (SMR) when it comes up over the sensory motor cortex, the part of the brain that maps and controls the body. The sensory motor cortex is located at the line that runs from ear to ear over the top of the head and divides the back and the front of the brain

(Robbins, 2000/2008). Maurice Sterman, once a professor of neurobiology and psychiatry at UCLA, discovered this rhythm while working with cats on operant conditioning (Robbins, 2000/2008, p. 33). He not only discovered the rhythm, he also proved they were able to control increasing the rhythm by getting them to do so for a reward. This frequency range is optimal for learning because, when students have it, they are able to engage in listening without presupposing what the teacher or another student is trying to say. In other words, instead of finishing other people's sentences based on their own assumptions, they are able to let others speak for themselves.

Lo Beta is great for listening and learning, but when it comes up as SMR it is also strongly associated with a calm body (Timmers, 2014). People (and cats) who are taught how to raise it sleep more soundly and wake up less (Robbins, 2000/2008). This means that they had to have improved cognitive processing and retain more of what they learn[38]. This is such an important indicator of health and well being that it actually saved the lives of the cats that were trained to raise it. Years after they were trained they were exposed to poisonous fumes that caused seizures and death in all of the cats except those that had been trained to raise SMR (Robbins, 2000/2008, p. 42).

This study demonstrates a clear connection between mind and physiology. Guiding a cat into a simple mental state to strengthen a cluster of neurons in the brain in turn prevented motor seizures. And there was more than just a change in the brain; there were physiological changes from the top to the bottom of the cats and monkeys Sterman had studied:

> In the brain, cell firing patterns changed and cells in the motor pathway reduced their rate of firing. Circuit patterns changed. And we found changes in the body. Respiration

[38] Later studies have confirmed that SMR support cognitive processing (e.g., Kober, Witte, Stangl, Väljamäe, Neuper, & Wood, 2015).

> stabilized. Heart rate went down. Muscle tone in antigravity muscles decreased. Reflexes diminished. (Sterman,1974, as quoted in Robbins, 2000/2008, p. 42).

When the body is at ease it encourages this SMR rhythm to come up, so the simple act of letting go, sitting still[39], or grounding yourself in your body and surroundings can enhance SMR.

When students are away from class, sleeping, meditating, or resting, they have a chance to let their Alpha receive the memories Theta brings up. If our eyes are closed, Alpha is the ideal recipient of our Theta memories because it is not biased by whatever narrative/story we are in at the time (Johnson et al. 2013; White & Richards, 2009). Moreover, it is just as important that Alpha "download" to Theta what it has observed throughout the day. When we process memories in this way they are called "Alpha-Theta" crossovers and they are vital to all healthy cognitive processing (Johnson, et al., 2013; Whites & Richards, 2009). They are most common when we are asleep, especially as we are falling asleep or as we are waking up, or when we have our eyes closed and are in a deeply relaxed state. Theta brings up memories that relate to what we have been thinking about (learning) during the day (Gruzelier, 2014). Alpha receives them and "gives" the new information we gathered during the day back to Theta to store in our subconscious mind and become part of our subconscious narrative library. Theta then gives us back the newly updated version as a map for us to use as we need it. For example, the updated map may come up the next day in class and be delivered to Lo Beta for writing, class discussion, or a test.

Our stories are always updating each other, even as we sleep. This is especially powerful because it also updates our emotional climate at the same time and can act as a seed for other stories in our library. This allows the healing transformation of a single narrative/story to spread

[39] I do not mean to suggest that raising SMR, a brainwave produced when the body is perfectly still, is necessary to practice mindfulness. There are, as discussed in Chapter 2, many different ways to be mindful (Hutton, 2020).

subconsciously and unconsciously, opening us up even further.

Even if our eyes are closed, we may not be able to use our Alpha waves to receive a Theta memory. Students need to have Alpha-Theta crossovers if they are to process what they have learned into their deeper memory. However, when Hi Beta intrudes on an Alpha-Theta conversation, learning is significantly impaired because Alpha cannot deliver what we have learned to the subconscious (Theta). Hi Beta is more likely to intrude on Alpha-Theta if we are not able to let go and shift out of, the narrow focus attention we practice during the day. It may be the one that pays attention to Theta in much the same way that it can when our eyes are open. If we are in a Hi Beta dominant state when Theta tries to communicate with Alpha, we will focus in on what has come up and because Hi Beta is sticky, it will attach to Theta and interrupt the crossover. When it does, it may stay attached to Theta, ruminate about it, and be emotionally reactive to it. This distorts the information that Alpha is trying to download to Theta or that Theta is bringing to Alpha. It does this by acting much like a radio station that is too close to the one you are trying to tune into and has a stronger signal; the quality of the transmission suffers greatly. This is absolutely critical because Alpha-Theta not only updates our learning; it is also the only way that we are truly able to update our closed, painful, and prejudicial stories.

Alpha-Theta crossovers are more likely to happen if students are calming and using Lo Beta during the day. It is common to sleep better after a relaxed day than a high stress one because Lo Beta makes it easier to fully let go and allow Alpha to take over at night. Teachers give sound advice when they recommend that students use the night before the big test to sleep instead of cramming in more data because it allows them to store what they have learned in their subconscious mind and to update related stories. Sleep is so important that, even if we fight it (falling asleep), in time we are bound to lose the battle. Also, if we continually reduce the

amount of time we give to sleep, it will show in our performance, our health and, most definitely our judgment. This impairment in our judgment is related to the distortion that is happening in our stories because Alpha-Theta crossovers are not adequately updating them.

If we are intentional about our thinking and our awareness, we can use our Gamma to change the profile of electrical activity that the brain produces. Alpha and Lo Beta can come up of their own accord when we are calm, not overly focused, and simply being aware, but we can consciously choose to bring it up through the practice of mindfulness. We have a brain frequency (Gamma) and an area of the brain (the frontal lobe) that are specifically designed to help us do just that. Gamma is our fastest waves and it is believed to be the ones that direct the rest of the electrical activity that determines how we pay attention (Braboszcz et al. 2017). When we close our eyes and direct our attention to the present moment without judgment or analysis, we are asking our Gamma to direct our Alpha waves. Alternately, when our eyes are open and we pause, let go of what we are concentrating on, take a breath, and then go back to what we are doing with more ease, we are asking Gamma to direct our Hi Beta to release and raise Lo Beta instead. If we have not done this before, it may seem difficult task. With discipline, practice, and in many cases the help of neuroplasticity, however, the brain will often adapt[40] and make it easier, just as it adapted to make the current way we see the world easier.

Conclusion

This condensed version of how our brainwaves process narratives is very much simplified. Such information is adequate for a writing classroom or for anyone who wants to keep an open mind state, but it would be inadequate preparation for neurofeedback training. For example, I may talk about raising Alpha, but since Alpha is an especially complicated frequency it would be more accurate to say that it is desirable to improve the quality of Alpha. In other

[40] Again, not everyone's brain is wired the same or has the same propensity for neural plasticity.

words, it is best when Alpha is aware of the present moment, to be aware of it in that exact moment and not delayed or ahead by seconds. Although this seemingly small difference can actually make a profound impact on the quality of our cognitive work, it is only one of the more detailed aspects of brainwave training that is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Nonetheless, there is enough information in this chapter to help students and teachers do the work of keeping their minds fluid so that they can update their worldview to be more relational and socially involved. In the next chapter we will explore ways to put this understanding to practical use in and out of the classroom. One of the main points that is important to carry into that chapter is that Hi Beta has a sticky quality and is brought up by the stress of being used (or overused) for narrow focus work. Another point is that Theta not only takes our memories to store for us but also brings them up as needed in the form of maps to guide us. These maps in which we store our narratives contain the seeds of emotion and the context of larger stories that can come to full bloom if they are watered. If the stories that come up are packed with the seeds of isolating emotions or they come up in us when we are already in isolating emotions, we can become triggered and stuck. Finally, the other important thing to remember is that two brain frequencies can free us if we are stuck and help us keep from getting there in the first place. One of those is Alpha if our eyes are closed and Lo Beta if our eyes are open. In Chapter 5 I will discuss some strategies that teachers and students can use to activate their Gamma waves to enhance the quality of their Alpha, increase their use of Lo Beta, and reduce their reliance on Hi Beta.

Chapter 5: The Application of the Mind-Body Literacy Approach

Introduction

The MBSL core model is comprised of three main facets: narratives, emotions, and brainwaves. Recall, however, that this model, along with the other models introduced in Chapter 1, fall under the larger umbrella of the MBSL *approach*. The MBSL (pedagogical) approach has three basic components: understanding, practice, and skills. Before outlining the practice or the skills, I want to start by synthesizing the ideas I have described in the previous chapters with the understanding needed to utilize the MBSL. Everything about the MBSL involves the processes that happen in our bodies, minds, and brains that act together to close us down or open us up. I introduced the idea in Chapter 1 that understanding this process is key to helping students become successful writers, communicators, and educated, socially and environmentally responsible citizens. By using the understanding of MBSL to more readily develop desirable habits of mind, students can learn about their own personal narratives and see how they relate to the cultural narratives discussed in Chapter 3. More importantly, it can help both students and instructors develop a sense of agency to work towards transforming closed narratives. Learning the basics of how brainwaves work in Chapter 4, then, helps us (both instructors and students) begin to see how we are able to use conscious intention to direct awareness to an open mind-body state that makes such transformations possible.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will integrate the understanding from the previous chapters with mindfulness practices and skills. I begin this chapter by introducing one of the core mindfulness practices: compassion. I frame compassion as an essential tool for transforming the inner and outer environments in which narrative encounters occur, drawing on Terry Dobson's narrative

called “A Kind Word Turneth Away Wrath” to illustrate this point. I briefly reflect on how Dobson embodies the open and close mind-body states presented in the MBSL model.

Then, I provide a more detailed explanation of the MBSL models introduced in Chapter 1 utilizing the understanding of brainwaves covered in Chapter 4. To illustrate this deeper understanding of the MBSL models, I revisit Dobson’s narratives, describing in more detail how one of the main characters (an old man that speaks compassionately to a violent drunk man) uses mindfulness practices and narrative/emotional literacies to open up not only his own mind-body state, but those of the drunk, the surrounding passengers, and Dobson.

Then, I turn to bringing MBSL to the Rhetoric and Writing Classroom, emphasizing the importance of working with the inner and outer (classroom) learning environments before we try to work directly with their narratives. Next, I explore specific mindfulness practices that help students work with their emotions and brainwaves in ways that will foster open environments for narrative encounters. I discuss the importance of a mindfulness-based practiced called Nonviolent Communication as a tool to support awareness of the mind-body state, particularly in interpersonal exchanges.

In the later part of the chapter I circle around to the argument I introduced in Chapter 1: that MBSL can support the development of social and environmental care. Then, I describe the importance of students and instructors embracing the discomfort of uncertainty and change. I pause to reflect on the ethical considerations around asking students to do personal narrative work in and further explore students and instructors roles in creating an open environment for narrative encounters/learning to occur. Finally, I conclude by noting the importance of recognizing that narrative work is an important social responsibility with very real material and social consequences.

Creating an Open Environment: The Importance of Compassion

If we (instructors) are to help them transform their narratives, our students' mind-body states, as well as their classroom learning environments are of primary importance. We cannot focus solely on the content of their stories; instead we must first look at the emotional energy that drives those stories and the brainwave states they are using to do this work. Stories are impermanent and alive; they are constantly driving, being driven by, and seeking to stay relevant to, a living world. For students to be successful in their educational pursuits their stories have to breathe and grow so they will not be stifled and stagnate. For this reason MBSL is much more focused, at least initially, on the environments in which narrative encounters take place than it is on the content of students' stories. This includes the students' internal environment, such as their emotional state and brainwaves, and their external environments, such as, the people around them, the classroom, the school, or even the community.

> *"Anytime we do the work of love, we are doing the work of ending domination. In a culture of domination, it's extremely hard to cultivate love or to be love. At this moment in our nation, there's so much disrespect afloat. Respect comes from a word meaning to look at. Right now, we are not looking at one another with loving-kindness, with compassion."*
>
> *— bell hooks*

> *"That's strength already. That's your innate dignity coming through. It enables you to look at how that person is 'shriveled up,' in bell's words. You can see the self-imposed prisons they live in, how the choices they've made have cut them off. Compassion can flow from that."*

— Sharon Salzburg (with bell hooks)

With this MBSL I suggest that compassion is the most powerful tool we have to create both the internal and external environments that nurture narrative transformation. I begin with a narrative example. It is a short story originally titled "A Kind Word Turneth Away Wrath[41]," written by Terry Dobson. Dobson was one of the first Westerners to be a resident student of the founder of aikido, a form of the martial arts that incorporates many of the principles of mindfulness[42] (Gelb, 2017). Dobson illustrates an alternative approach to interacting with people who are caught in a closed, even violent, story. His story suggests that, when done mindfully, it is possible to use an unrelated, open story to create an open environment that allows a violent story to transform. This is offered as a compassionate, non-judgmental alterative to trying to work with the closed person or their closed story directly or harshly. A single person practicing compassion in this manner has the power to transform both the internal and external environments of everyone involved.

Dobson recalls a highly memorable personal experience of compassion that he had as a young man in Tokyo, one that later influenced him to pursue conflict resolution. Dobson was riding in a subway car when the passengers' "quiet afternoon was shattered by a man bellowing at the top of his lungs, yelling, violent, obscene, incomprehensible curses" (Dobson, n.d., para. 2). Influenced by his three years of Aikido training, described by his teachers as "the art of reconciliation," Dobson had been trying to refrain from physical fights (para. 5). As he watched the drunken laborer with anger, however, he was "dying to be a hero" by intervening physically

[41] Dobson's short story was originally published "sometime in the 1970s," (Pranin, 2011, para. 1) but I could not find the original version through a typical search. Many different versions, some entitled "Aikido Surprise," have been reprinted on the web, suggesting that the story's/author's message still resonates widely.
[42] As Wendy Palmer, author of *Leadership Embodiment* explains, "Aikido is ultimately about learning a more enlightened way to connect with others, to have a more creative conversation when there's a disagreement or conflict" (as quoted in Gelb, 2017, p. 197).

with him (para. 6). Thinking of the danger to his fellow passengers and the man's violent behavior, Dobson resolved that the only responsible course of action was physical intervention. Taking a fighting stance, the laborer turned his rage on Dobson, announcing his intention to teach him "A LESSON IN JAPANESE MANNERS," (para. 8)when they were interrupted by a loud "HEY!" from another passenger (para. 10). Dobson and the laborer looked toward an old man who invited the laborer to come talk with him.

The old man asked the man "lightly" what he had been drinking (Dobson, n.d., para. 12). The laborer said, angrily, that he had been drinking sake. The old man, not shaken by the drunk's violent response, continued:

> Oh that's wonderful"...."You see, I love sake too. Every night, me and my wife (she's 76, you know), we warm up a little bottle of sake and take it out into the garden, and we sit in the olden wooden bench that my grandfather's student made for him. We watch the sun go down, and we look to see how our persimmon tree is doing. My grandfather planted that tree, you know, and we worry about whether it will recover from those ice-storms we had last winter. Persimmons do not do well after ice-storms, although I must say that ours has done rather better than expected, especially when you consider the poor quality of the soil. Still, it is most gratifying to watch when we take our sake and go out to enjoy the evening—even when it rains!" He looked up at the laborer, eyes twinkling, happy to share this delightful information. (n.d., para. 13)

Dobson then describes the transformation of the drunk's stance from one of antagonistic violence to one of sadness:

> As he struggled to follow the intricacies of the old man's conversation, the drunk's face began to soften. His fists slowly unclenched. "Yeah," he said slowly, "I love persimmons,

> too… His voice trailed off. "Yes," said the old man, smiling, "and I'm sure you have a wonderful wife." "No," replied the laborer, "My wife died." He hung his head. Very gently, swaying with the motion of the train, the big man began to sob. "I don't got no wife, I don't got no home, I don't got no job, I don't got no money, I don't got nowhere to go. I'm so ashamed of myself." Tears rolled down his cheeks, a spasm of pure despair rippled through his body. Above the baggage rack a four-color ad trumpeted the virtues of suburban luxury living. (n.d., paras. 14-15)

Dobson, who had been ready to use physical violence to stop drunken man, felt humbled and even ashamed. He writes, "As the train pulled away, I sat down on a bench. What I had wanted to do with muscle and meanness had been accomplished with a few kind words" (n.d., para. 19).

In the context of the personal narrative writing assignment, Dobson's "A Kind Word Turneth Away Wrath" story illustrates the power of compassion to affect how we share and listen to stories, and thus how we understand others and ourselves. The old man recognized an opportunity for compassion, and used storytelling to help embody it. Sharing his story in a kind, invitational manner defused the drunk's anger, and furthermore helped him to be self-aware of what was really troubling him. Dobson shows us how offering a compassionate story alongside one filled with suffering allows us to see how the energy of open emotions has the power to transform in a way that may not otherwise be possible.

Dobson's response was understandable and even heroic; he was not totally closed down or looking for a fight. This is what makes this story especially powerful. It shows us that even when we have an open narrative/story and a seemingly open mind, we still need to be mindful of the other person's perspective. We need to recognize that, even if someone is violent and divisive, the most important thing to remember is that what is often hidden under all the

harshness we see is suffering.

It can be helpful to remember this when we have the difficult job of dealing with the drunk from the Tokyo subway who is disrupting our classroom. Teachers in this position need strong support because the students they are having difficulty with, unlike the drunk on the subway who is out of work and homeless, may well be students of privilege arguing against stories that are meant to alleviate inequality and injustice. One of the challenges for an MBSL is to help teachers to remain mindful and compassionate in such trying circumstances. Following the example of the old man in the story, an MBSL meets this challenge by focusing on tending to the environments directly before working with the narrative/story.

Applying "A Kind Word Turneth Away Wrath" to the MBSL Models

The subway story is powerful because it allows us to see how mindfulness awareness of the mind-body state can transform a closed environment, starting with one's inner environment. The old man skillfully shows us how to water the seeds of mindfulness within the mind-body and use them for transformation. First, however, it's important to note that the mindful actions of the old man in Dobson's story likely required many years of mindfulness practice—many years of watering the seeds of mindfulness. Dobson, too, had to have been watering these seeds through the practice of mindfulness for some time in order to mindfully observe the situation. The student of aikido had been practicing mindfulness for three years but had not reached this deeper insight until he saw the master at work. However, he would not even have recognized how amazing what the old man had done was if he had not planted the seeds of mindfulness in himself through his practice. As a result, when the old man watered the seeds within himself, he simultaneously watered them in the drunk and in Dobson. For this reason, it is important to remember that in practicing a MBSL approach with students, we may be planting seeds that may only bloom later

in their college career or even later in their lives.

Because of his use of mindfulness techniques, we can assume that the old man was probably in a Lo Beta state (calm, conscious awareness) when he first observed what was happening. As a result, he was open enough to hear his Theta wisdom[43] clearly and be guided by it. He would have had nonjudgmental self-awareness of his body from closing his eyes and using his Gamma waves to direct his Alpha to monitor his inner environment. He then tended that inner environment by calming the emotion that came his way from the drunk. Meanwhile, Dobson was not practiced enough to do this and was instead triggered into a defensive fighting mode that turned his attention/awareness completely away from his own inner environment. Finally, eyes open, and being guided by the mindfulness wisdom brought up by Theta, the old man was able to share a kind story with the drunk that brought up Theta to him too. The story about persimmon trees and sake is an example of a relational narrative. Unlike a closed narrative/story, which further closes us down, this kind acts as a foothold that enables us to climb out of where we are stuck.

Different Mind-Body States: Integrating An Understanding of Brainwaves to the MBSL Models

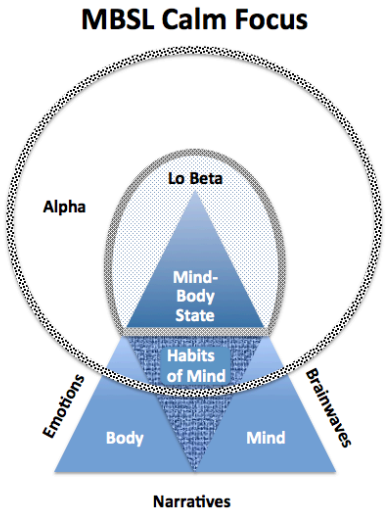
The information provided in Chapter 4 about how our brainwaves process narratives is the basis for understanding the process that is central to the MBSL approach. I would like to begin this section by bringing this understanding together with the MBSL models I introduced in Chapter 1. I will do this by showing variations of this model to illustrate the different brainwave

[43] I am a firm believer in narratives—including the narratives that arise from our stored consciousness—as carriers of wisdom. Narratives indeed can convey the wisdom from past experiences—our own and our others (Nash, 2004). Many times, I have been struck by the power of sharing stories to create connection, as well as the intelligence of our minds to call up just the right story to make someone else (or myself), feel less alone. For a rich discussion on the healing process of stories, see Goodson and Gill's (2014) chapter, "The Healing Power of Narrative—Learning from Listening and Telling Our Stories," in their *Critical Narrative as Pedagogy.*

patterns we have discussed and the process by which they shift to close down or open up.

I start by showing the brain state that is ideal for students who are in class or studying outside of class. I call this a calm focus state (see Figure 5.1). The easiest thing to notice about this model is the position and size of Alpha and what is included within its sphere of awareness. This is purposeful because Alpha is such a key player in determining and shifting the mind-body state. In this calm but focused state the Alpha circle is somewhat open and including in its awareness a bit of the things outside of the conscious thinking mind dome, while maintaining some awareness of the subconscious mind, including some awareness of the body and possibly even the brainwave state.

Figure 5.1: *Calm focus state. The mind-body state triangle represents what is "up" in our mind consciousness. The inner circle represents our calm conscious attention, our Lo Beta attention. The larger circle, Alpha, represents our more open awareness afforded by the Alpha.*



The second thing to look for is the state of our conscious mind, in particular, the darkness and the opacity of the rim around the outside. In this model we see that this line is a lighter grey and not a solid line. As a result of this and the fact that Alpha is not really closed, the area within the dome that is not in the mind-body state (MBS) triangle is light and lucid. This lighter area

and the light grey line around the dome show us that this is not a closed state. The lucid open area in the dome is the space that is available to take in other stories or perspectives. This is the result of a conscious mind that is primarily using Lo Beta for eyes open attention and processing. The other thing we can see is that the MBS triangle is also not very dark or filled in solidly. This indicates that there is not an overabundance of Theta and isolating emotions (blooming seeds) up at this time.

These three things: somewhat open Alpha, Lo Beta in the conscious mind, and calmed thinking and emotion allows someone with this mind-body state to be open to what they are studying and to practice planting mindful seeds of habit energy. It is important to point out that if a student has this mind state because they understand how to nurture it and have practiced the skills to achieve it, they have already planted these seeds and are developing the habits of mind. It is very possible to have this state simply because things are going well and they are having a stress free day, but when it is achieved consciously and intentionally it promotes an incredibly powerful sense of agency in their lives. Having this ability means that they can access this state even in times of high stress or even crisis. These are the times when it is most critical to be thinking clearly. But for some people who have extra stress or anxiety, this can mean the difference between being able to function or not.

To illustrate the process by which they can consciously choose to open up their MBS I will look at the MBSL Focused model (see Figure 5.2). This model variation is of a more narrowly focused mind state. Think of someone doing his or her taxes or writing a dissertation. Again, the first thing you are likely to notice is the Alpha circle. This time it is much narrower in its scope but it is still not closed and neither is the rim of the conscious mind dome. As a result, the area within the dome is still fairly light—there is still space for things to come in and learning

to take place. There is hope for the Ph.D. candidate after all—that is, as long as they do not stay in this state too long. Because of neural plasticity if we stay in any state long enough or go there often enough we are training our brain to seek out this state even when we have no need for it. This is like the physical brain's form of habit energy. It shows us how the things that we practice become easier for us to return to both through the seeds of stories and emotions they plant in our subconscious and in our physical brains that are also seeking to adapt to however we ask them to function.

Our brain's ability to adapt is very helpful in many ways; we can become very efficient and adept at things that require a great amount of skill. The downside is that we also adapt to less functional habits. Being narrowly focused too often causes us to develop a propensity for a brainwave pattern very similar to being closed down and, as a result, makes students and people in highly focused professions particularly vulnerable to things like stress and anxiety. The model of the focused brain along with the closed state model helps illustrate this concept (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3). The difference between these two states really helps us understand what happens to cause a brain to close down. The same three factors that created the calm focus in Figure 5.1 are in play here, but now there is much less Alpha with a small sphere of awareness and Beta or even Hi Beta doing the conscious processing. The last factors are the exclusionary emotions and the stories. If either of these seeds is watered either internally or by something external they are likely to close down.

Figure 5.2: *A more neutral, focused state of mind; there is not exclusionary narrative or energy of fear locking us into it.*

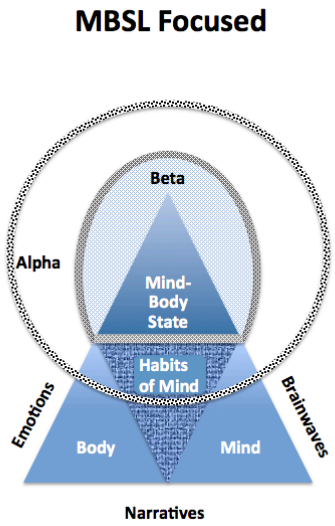
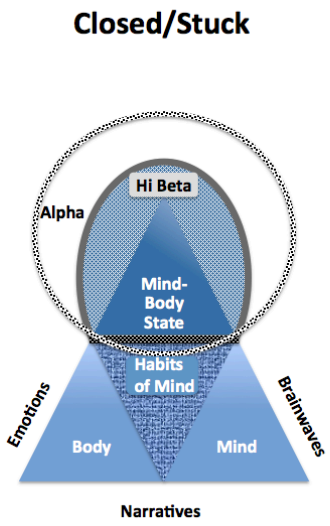


Figure 5.3: *A closed mind-body state; we are narrowly focused with hi beta, and we are immersed in an exclusionary narrative alongside fearful emotions.*



Mindfulness Seeds, Habits of Mind, and Opening the Mind-Body State

As I said earlier, understanding this process should also help remove the judgment of someone in a closed state. They are in need of compassion—not judgment. This compassion can come from anyone who understands how to water the seeds of mindfulness in someone who is

caught there. When we are guided by the example of the old man in the Dobson's story, we can do this work for others or ourselves. It is not especially difficult and can be a lot less difficult and time consuming then trying to go about our lives in this state or to work with students who are there. However, it is essential that we are able to call to mind things like the old man using the story of the persimmon trees to water the seeds of mindfulness in the drunken man. He most certainly knew about mindfulness seeds, and just knowing this was an important seed that he could water in himself. Anybody who hears and understands this story now has that seed planted in them.

Before I show the process of opening up in terms of the MBSL models, I would like to revisit the habits of mind table I presented in Chapter 1 (see Table 5.1). As Dobson points out in his personal narrative, the old man in the subway was an expert at mindfulness practices, and I would add that he had most likely perfected the habits of mind as well. By watering a mindful narrative inside himself and sharing it, he was able to bring up a similar story in the man who was suffering. First, however, he had to call upon mindfulness practices to get to non-judgment of the man's looks and actions. Instead of harsh judgment, the old man understood that the drunk was suffering and used compassion and right action to help him.

Table 5.1: *How the MBSL model supports habits of mind. The left column lists the different habits of mind, the next one defines each one, and then the right describes the relevant MBSL practices.*

Habits of Mind	**Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing defines these as:**	**Mind-Body State Literacy fosters these through mindfulness practices**
Curiosity	The desire to know more about the world.	Beginner's mind; The observer
Openness	The willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world.	Non-attachment; Empty cup
Engagement	A sense of investment and involvement in learning.	Right and thoughtful action.

Table 5.1 (cont'd)

Creativity	The ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating and representing ideas.	Letting go; Making space
Persistence	The ability to sustain interest in and attention to short and long term projects.	Begin again
Responsibility	The ability to take ownership of one's actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others.	Responsibility for the self is responsibility for the world, and vice versa.
Flexibility	The ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands.	Mental fluidity; Non-judgment
Metacognition	The ability to reflect on one's own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge	Self awareness of: the mind-body state (i.e., emotion, brainwaves, narratives)

This story exemplifies the steps necessary to change our brainwaves and open our mind-body state. We can see that the old man enacts all the practices on the chart as he helps the closed down man. He had to begin with "metacognition" in order to tend to his own emotional state and remain "open." This was the ultimate act of "responsibility" for self and the world. He also had to use "engagement" to interact with the man and he had to do it with "curiosity" in order to understand how the drunk felt and where he was stuck. Then he had to use "flexibility" to go where the man was rather than trying to bring him to where he thought he should be. And, of course, he needed "persistence" to stick with it and wait for the man to come around in his own time.

It is helpful to keep these practices and skills in mind as we look at the models that show how we can encourage our minds to open up. At the same time it is important to recognize that the most important habits to develop are those of compassion and non-judgment, most especially

towards oneself. If our own needs are not met we will water the seeds of affliction in ourselves and not have much to offer others. This is a very kind practice that allows anyone to be where they are at any given time. It is this acceptance that allows us to do the most difficult part of getting unstuck, which is letting go. For the same reason, it does not matter what particular challenges anyone brings to this practice; we are all in different places all the time. It is not about who we are; it is about where we are and that is always impermanent.

We begin by letting go. Let go of thoughts and let go of trying to let go of thoughts. In letting go we are making space for something other than what we are clinging to. Even when we are in the classroom and are there to "think," we let go of our conscious thinking periodically to make space in our conscious mind for information from Alpha or Theta inside us and for the information and perspectives we are receiving from outside. This means that part of letting go is that we try to let go of all expectations for things to turn out as we hope. This kind of striving can keep us stuck by clinging to expectations, which Buddhists call "conditions for happiness." So the compassion that is always here in this practice is that you start where you are, wherever that is. Put forth right effort but let go of the outcome. And, in every new present moment we continue to let go of trying, let go of frustration and simply begin again.

The closed model in Figure 5.3 shows a much smaller Alpha and a closed dome around the Hi Beta conscious mind. Both the mind-body state and the domed area around it are like a full cup with no space left (see Figure 5.4). The model entitled "Opening—Mindfulness" (see Figure 5.5) shows that we can use our Gamma waves to help us with the metacognition/meta-awareness necessary to observe that we are tense, triggered, closed, stressed, or simply uncomfortable. Then those same Gamma waves can direct our Alpha to shift our awareness to our breath and our body. This is not the same as "thinking" about our body; it is simply bringing

our awareness to it—noticing it. Because this is about working with our Alpha, this is best accomplished with our eyes closed. Setting the intention to be aware of our body causes several things to happen at once. First, it necessitates letting go of whatever intention we had in relation to what we were stuck in. Second, it shifts our consciousness from our Beta waves to the Alpha waves that are more narrative/story neutral. Third, it causes us to bring our awareness to our body, which has the effect of calming the body and helping us let go. Finally, it encourages the Alpha waves to "crossover" with our Theta waves.

Figure 5.4: *Gamma (the brainwave that directs our attention) shifts our calm, open Alpha awareness to the body, an important part of opening up.*

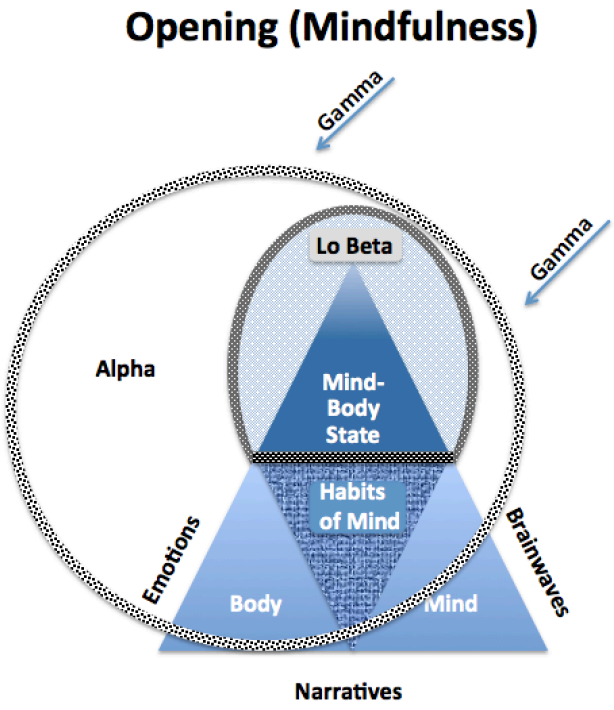
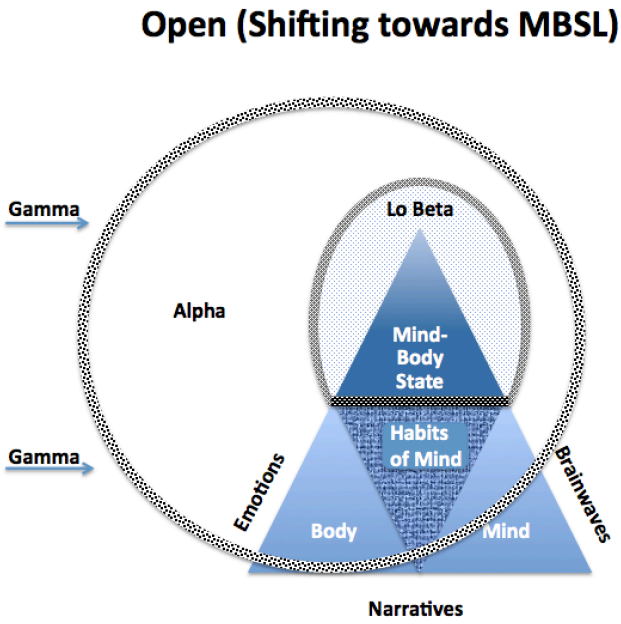


Figure 5.5: *Our awareness opens up further to incorporate a meta awareness of our brainwave state; we begin to bring our awareness to the activities of the mind.*



As Alpha shifts, its sphere grows and the conscious mind starts to clear slightly. After this shift begins to loosen our grip on what we are clinging to, we can begin to become aware of our subconscious mind and even have some awareness of our brainwave state (see Figure 5.5). It is helpful to settle and loosen before seeking awareness of the mind-state to avoid getting stuck on attractive mental formations before completely letting go.

After a meditator reaches this stage it will look more like the MBSL Open model (see Figure 5.6). Instructors and students who shift to this place will likely notice a great deal of the ease, contentment, and well being associated with an open Alpha state. If practiced somewhat regularly, even briefly, during the day, instructors/students may experience shifts into the Very Open State model that is optimal for narrative work, learning, creativity, and relationships (see Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.6: *An open mind-body state.*

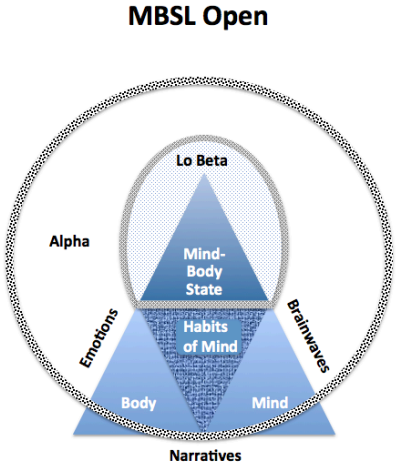
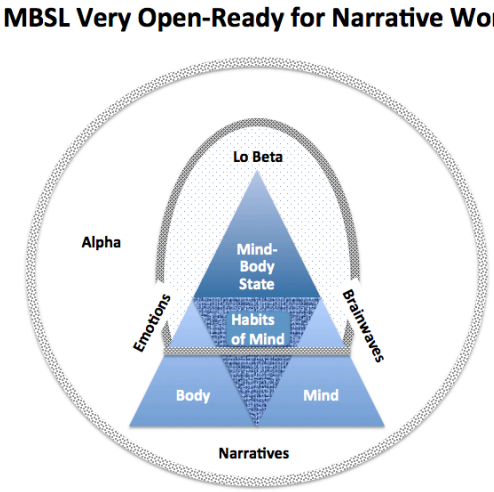


Figure 5.7: *A very open mind-body state developed through regular practice. Its awareness has expanded to include emotions, brainwaves, and narratives.*



Bringing MBSL to the Rhetoric and Writing Classroom: A Holistic Approach

The purpose of an MBSL, and this dissertation, is to assist teachers and students in the practice of opening their mind-body states. This open state is necessary for them feel more connected to other people and nature and to update their narratives to reflect that relationality. One of the important lessons from the subway story is that the old man never addresses the drunk's story directly. Instead, he creates an environment in which the drunk can relax enough to

feel the sadness that lay underneath his anger. This gave him the release he needed to share his story. This approach aligns with an MBSL: guide students to create this kind of space within themselves, then ask them to work together to create that space within the classroom. Knowing how to calm and open themselves gives them the confidence that can put them even more at ease. It is in this environment that they will be able to allow their stories to come up, be observed, and be transformed.

There are three facets of the students' inner learning environment that can combine to close students down. The first things are the exclusionary stories that they already have enmeshed in their narrative library. These are the stories that provide the context for all new information and experiences. The second things are the emotions and the energy that come up in the students. The seeds of these emotions are attached to the students' stories; they trigger up those stories and are triggered up by them. The energy can come from their stories, but it is also already there in their environment, state of mind, the stress of their lives, the people and the stories around them, media, and even in how they take care of themselves. The critical third component that determines whether students are relational or exclusionary is their brainwave state. These three things—their stories, their emotional energy, and their brainwave state—combine to determine whether students are able to be aware of, and work to transform, their narratives.

Our stories, emotional energy, and brainwave state combine to create the state of our mind-body. I assert that it is the state of mind-body that determines whether we are relational or exclusionary, not only our narrative/story or our emotions. Moreover, it is our state of mind that determines whether we are locked into the state and narrative/story that has come up or whether we are able to experience what we are exposed to in the present moment on its own merits and

with beginners' mind. Being relational is a mind state—an open mind-body state that is most fully realized when all three aspects of that state are open. And since all three are interrelated, we can approach the problem of being more relational through all three aspects. The relationship between our emotional energy and our brainwaves is particularly symbiotic; the two together create the environment that our stories come up in. It is this combination that determines how we respond to our stories. However, stories and emotion, while highly interrelated and co-mediating, are never permanently bound to one another (White & Richards, 2009). For this reason, we should not assume that our role as educators or writing instructors is to help students adopt relational stories or even to update their non-relational ones; students need to become aware of and transform the embodied states that allow this process to happen. The practice of an MBSL teaches us to tend to our emotions and our brainwave pattern before beginning work on our stories.

Working with Emotions and Brainwaves: Mindfulness Practices

Fearful emotions, brought up by exclusionary stories, often determine how we perceive and interact with the world by influencing our brainwave patterns and shaping our brains. Feeling afraid or alienated has an enormous impact on our minds and our brains. If something has activated our sympathetic nervous system and puts us in a stress state, it brings up narrow brainwaves that cause our attention to focus externally, looking for signs of danger or a threat. As a result, we have little or no self-awareness and, without emotional awareness, we have no understanding about how to tend to the fearful emotion. In fact, if someone were to ask, chances are we will not even admit to having the emotion and, because we are looking outside ourselves, a more likely response is, "I'm not afraid—you are scary." This is why looking for a scapegoat is such a common, unfortunate, and dysfunctional strategy for dealing with our pain. We try to get

rid of our pain by giving it to others rather than tending and transforming it. When we transform our pain it opens us up; but giving it to others closes us down. Processing our pain in this way not only does not work, it creates a relentless, isolating cycle that feeds on itself and can be very difficult to get free of if we do not know how.

These isolating cycles make it difficult for students who wish to work on their narratives to strengthen their ability to see beyond their own current perspective. If they cannot be open enough to make room for someone else's perspective, they also cannot step outside and observe their own. As I have shown, it is primarily their inner environment that locks them in their current way of seeing. They need tools to free themselves because if they cannot loosen the grip of their current narrative's/story's context, they cannot have enough self-awareness to see their own narrative story.

Another consequence of isolating cycles is that when people become very closed down they totally identify with their narrative. They are their narrative and are likely to see anyone who "attacks" their narrative as attacking them (Drake, 2007; Lee, 2004; Mayo, 2001; Schiff, 2006). As many scholars in Rhetoric and Writing and the humanities have argued, fear makes it impossible to recognize or acknowledge the complexity of identity, our own or others (Trainor, 2008; Stevenson, 2014). Scholars from multiple brain science disciplines have confirmed that the brain under fear is literally incapable of such a task (Robbins, 2000/2008; Siegel, 2007). Mindfulness can be used—indeed is already being used—to support the kind of cognitive and emotional flexibility conducive to recognizing the fluidity of identity.

MBSL teaches students mindfulness skills to work with their emotional and brainwave environment. The first thing we are asked to do in mindfulness practice is to breathe consciously and become aware of the fact that we are breathing. This is a very simple activity that can have

profound effects. Directing our awareness is an excellent exercise of our mind's ability to direct our own attention. At the same time that we are doing this, our brains are also using fast frequency brainwaves (Gamma) to direct shifts in the volume of other frequencies. Of course, bringing our attention to our breath and our breathing body necessitates (if only briefly) that we let go of whatever conscious storyline we had previously been attending. This also helps change the volume of our conscious Beta wave frequencies. These shifts in frequency, under our own direction, can bring about a new brainwave pattern and a new brain state. All of this from the simple act of letting go of our thinking and paying attention to our breath.

Mindfulness meditations, such as those described by Kabat-Zinn (1991) ask instructors and students to find a posture that is conducive to calm and stillness, let go of thoughts, and bring their awareness to their breath and their body. They guide them to things such as, how to allow yourself to calm rather than trying to make anything happen. In following these simple meditations students are led step by step through the process of exercising their ability to raise their self-awareness, calm their emotional and mental state, increase their ability to strengthen their use of Gamma to direct their attention and their brainwaves, raise Alpha or Lo Beta, reduce their reactivity to emotions and bodily sensations that arise, and to observe, but not attach, to Theta.

Instructors who wish to provide alternative meditations should direct students to those that foster Lo Beta. A quick search on the Internet or YouTube for meditations quickly reveals the diversity of meditations available. Many, however, are not geared to fostering lo beta awareness. In fact, some are geared to fostering Theta and Delta waves, enticing users to tap the power of their subconscious minds as a path to spiritual enlightenment. Students should learn to distinguish mindfulness meditations geared to grounded, conscious awareness from these other

forms of meditation.

To make sense of the vast number of guided meditations out there, instructors need to develop a basic literacy of mindfulness meditations. They can learn, for instance, the difference between open monitoring and focused attention meditation (Uusberb et al., 2016). They can also learn what I have presented here: a basic definition of the different brainwave characteristics, so that when they preview a guided meditation, they can tell what kinds of brainwave patterns it is likely to cultivate. Instructors can also learn about the effects of mindfulness meditations by reading the philosophies behind them. People such as Nhat Hanh (1999), Sharon Salzberg (2020), Pema Chödrön (2003), and many others offer free video meditations through YouTube and other sites, and have written numerous books outlining the philosophy and goals of these meditations. These readings, such as Nhat Hanh's *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1975), show that these meditations are likely to cultivate the kind of mind state conducive to relationality. As described in the "Acknowledging and Avoiding Neoliberal Views of Mindfulness and Emotion" section of Chapter 2, instructors should be mindful to both acknowledge and avoid integrating neoliberal versions of mindfulness into the classroom.

Nonviolent Communication Skills and MBSL

Nonviolent Communication (NVC), a mindfulness-based approach to intra- and interpersonal communication, and one that is core the creating open environments for meaningful narrative encounters to occur. This approach includes practices that help both students and instructors become mindful of their mind-body states. Rosenberg (2003/2005) shows us that isolating emotions come up in us if our needs are not met (2003/2005). For example, the need to be seen is not met for marginalized people. When our need for inclusion, acceptance, respect, belonging, and others are not recognized or tended to, this creates the kind

of emotions that often give rise to resentment, anger, or even violence (Rosenberg, 2003/2005). These are the emotions that activate the sympathetic nervous system and close us down (Robbins, 2000/2008; Swingle, 2008). Therefore, it is important to examine the relationship between unmet needs, stressful emotions, and the stories that generate, and often sustain them. Rosenberg also notes that having our needs met nurtures relational emotions in us; therefore, learning to meet these needs is an essential part of this work.

Nonviolent Communication offers an understanding of our inner environment that complements mindfulness skills. Rosenberg explains that becoming a peaceful, relational person requires us to practice compassionate self-awareness, acknowledge and tend to our emotions by finding and asking for what we need in an effective way. Rosenberg (2003/2005) suggests we need to "[create] peace by connecting to life at three levels:"

> First, within ourselves, how we can connect to the life within ourselves so we can learn from our limitations without blaming or punishing ourselves…If we can't do that I'm not too optimistic how we're going to relate peacefully out in the world. Second, how to create life-enriching connections with other people that allows compassionate giving to take place naturally. Third, how to transform the structures we've created—corporate, judicial, governmental, and others—that don't support peaceful, life-enriching connections between us. (2005, p. 171-172)

Rosenberg (2003/2005) recognizes, then, the importance of practicing self-awareness, first, before we can help others. He also values the important social justice work that is part of this process, pointing to our need to change harmful, complex systems that oppress.

One of the most powerful aspects of Nonviolent Communication is that it helps participants separate the emotion from the narrative, thus interrupting the vicious cycle that

occurs between exclusionary stories and exclusionary emotions (described in Chapter 4). Rosenberg's *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (2003/2005) offers language and exercises useful for this. He makes an important distinction between identifying emotions and identifying judgments which arise from our storied interpretations of these emotions. He writes, "it is helpful to differentiate between words that describe what we think others are doing around us, and words that describe actual feelings" (2003/2005, p. 42). He goes on to provide an example of a statement that confuses an emotion with an interpretation. "[In the statement,] 'I feel unimportant to the people with whom I work.' The word "*unimportant"* describes how I think others are evaluating me, rather than an actual feeling, which in this situation might be 'I feel *sad*' or 'I feel *discouraged*'" (2003/2005, p. 42).

I have argued in this dissertation that emotions, especially fear, tend to fuel our immersion in non-relational stories, cutting us off from the brainwave frequencies capable of listening to, connecting with, and caring about other people and the environment. Nonviolent Communication urges students to learn to become self-aware of their fear rather than self-conscious about their fearful narratives[44]. Rosenberg offers an expansive vocabulary for identifying feelings that can fuel non-relational stories. Among those listed in his "Vocabulary for Feelings," are "afraid," "apprehensive," "hesitant," "overwhelmed," "skeptical," "uneasy," and "indifferent" (2003, pp. 45-46). Students are seldom, if ever, taught this specific vocabulary for expressing how they feel, separate from their evaluations.

Separating the emotion from one's narrative, however, does not neglect or invalidate one's evaluations. In fact, the list of difficult emotions described above is framed as, "How we

[44] This practice, I believe, helps respond to the problematic ways that white people become absorbed in shame and guilt, to the point where the "spotlight" of attention is fully on them (Swiencicki, 2006, p. 350). Nonviolent Communication may offer a way to, as Swiencicki says, dim the spotlight and let the house lights come up, that is, become aware of the needs of others (paraphrased from 2006, p. 350).

are likely to feel when our needs 'are not' being met" (Rosenberg, 2003/2005, p. 45). Students of non-violent communication are encouraged to listen to themselves and others in a compassionate manner.

> Instead of being habitual, automatic reactions, our words become conscious responses based firmly on an awareness of what we are perceiving, feeling, and wanting. We are led to express ourselves with honesty and clarity, while simultaneously paying others a respectful and empathic attention. In any exchange, we come to hear our own deeper needs and those of others. NVC trains us to observe carefully, and to be able to specify behaviors and conditions that are affecting us. We learn to identify and clearly articulate what we are concretely wanting in a given situation. The form is simple, yet powerfully transformative. (2003/2005, p. 3)

Furthermore, Nonviolent Communication is built on the assumption that we, as humans, are relational. Among Rosenberg's list of feelings are some that reflect our lack of relationality. Included are the following: "detached," "lonely," and "withdrawn" (2003/2005, pp. 45-46). In his list of "Some Basic Needs We All Have," he includes interdependence—the largest category—which includes "Acceptance," "Closeness," "Community," "Empathy," and "Understanding" (2003/2005, pp. 54-55).

Applying MBSL to Personal Narrative Assignments to Teach Relationality and Social Responsibility

Once students have learned how to tend their inner environments, personal narratives assignments are a powerful tool that can help them increase their self-awareness the relationality they feel with others and the natural world. When students work in these ways with the narratives that cause them to not feel connected to a larger group, whether a classroom or their

community, they begin the process of transforming their individualistic stories into ones that are more collectivistic, such as stories in which they feel a part of, and care about, the greater good. If they are taught the proper skills, this work can help them gain more empathy for, and tolerance of, the stories and emotional climates of others. It can make their attitudes and their actions, more caring and empathetic and, as a result, the people with whom they interact with are more likely to respond to them more positively. Ideally, students can come to see that working on their own stories is a powerful way to bring about change, not only for themselves, but also for the people and the world around them. As Goodson and Gill point out, narratives are

> a powerful way of meaning-making in a community and an essential expression of being human and alongside with one another. Bringing groups together to share narratives honors the humanity within each of us as it engages people in encounters and openness through relationships and true listening. As we pointed out, ultimately, it is through the [narrative] encounter that people are connected and a community takes shape" (2011, p. 148).

Using narrative assignments in the classroom is an excellent platform for teaching students about the nature of stories and their importance. They can be shown the difference between open, inclusionary stories and closed, exclusionary ones. Because exclusionary stories usually contain the seeds of isolating emotions, they are likely to put us in a closed mind state that reinforces the closed aspects of the narrative/story. Inclusionary stories, on the other hand, most often carry seeds of relational emotions that help bring up a more accepting attitude that nurtures the relational characteristics of the narrative. It is essential that students learn that any narrative/story can have its closed nature transformed and be allowed to open up. It is also helpful if they are reminded that they are more than their story and, as the author of their

narrative/story, they have the power to tend it. It does not diminish who they are to work on their narrative—if anything, doing so makes them a better person. It is also important that they be reassured that they do not have to let go of all they believe in; they can learn to identify the closed aspects of their stories and try to transform those.

Impermanence

To do the work of transformation it is imperative that both teachers and students maintain their belief that change can happen. Things always do and always will keep changing in spite of our desperate attempts to stop the process. Buddhists refer to this inevitability of change as impermanence. Nobody wants to get old, to get sick, to die, or to lose loved ones, but that is the nature of things (Nhat Hanh, 1999). We are more in touch with this reality if we practice mindfulness. As I discussed in Chapter 4, Alpha is the brainwave frequency we use to observe the present moment. The open, non-storied quality of Alpha allows us to observe the constant state of transformation that is impermanence in action in the present moment. This quality of Alpha is the most powerful aspect of our cognitive processing, in part because we cannot learn or grow without it. However, Alpha is only the energy in our brains that allows us to observe the larger reality of impermanence in the world. This truth is at the very core of many Eastern teachings; it is central to the practice of mindfulness and to an emotional literacy of narratives. The model for an MBSL can also be seen as a model for how we perceive and process change and, in fact, how we actually create this change.

When we no longer believe that things can change or grow, this is a clue that we are currently closed to some extent. We all experience this at times and the degree to which we believe it varies, depending on our brainwave pattern at the time. One of the best things about our brainwaves is that they have the capacity to change almost instantly. Since they are electrical

impulses, they change as quickly as we can turn on or off a light switch. This is especially true in relation to Alpha because of its openness to change. On the other hand, the farther on the frequency scale we go away from Alpha, the less we view the world in terms of change and transformation. For example, when we are in Hi Beta (the farthest from Alpha of the Betas), and especially when it is accompanied by anxiety, we often lose our ability to believe that things can change. Scholars in narrative psychology, who regularly work with and study the relationships between emotion (including fear) and narratives, liken this situation to being so close to a (narrative) lens that the person does not even know it is a lens (Drake, 2007; Fulford, 1999). It is simply their reality. In such cases, how can they access the diversity afforded by stepping back from this lens?

In a scary or despondent narrative/story, immersion can cause severe anxiety or even despair because we have lost hope that things can change and we can be freed from it. The narrow focus of Hi Beta locks in on what scares us and also narrowly focuses in terms of time, as well. We become stuck in the present moment, with no memory of the past or possibility of things being different in the future. The same is true as we move away from Alpha into the slower frequencies. Memories can come up from the slower frequency range of Theta and, especially if we observe them with Hi Beta, we may believe that we are locked in the narrative/story from the past. When Theta is very slow, around 3-4Hz. it can cause us to be totally locked into a flashback. Although this is the most extreme case, it happens to us to some degree all the time.

Students are not the only ones who are stressed and lock into narrow focus. Teachers also need to practice calming, letting go and using Lo Beta if they are to remain open. If the teacher can see only their own perspective, even when that perspective is correct, they can no longer see

the barriers a student may have to learning. When this happens, they will not be able to help the student overcome these obstacles, open up and begin the work of transformation. If the teacher, or other students, becomes frustrated, they may resort to using shame or guilt to try to get the student to let go of their perspective and see their own. This only makes things worse because it fuels their isolating emotions and further locks them in their closed narrative. At this point everyone can get caught in the vicious cycle because the teacher and other students will only get more frustrated or give up and start believing that the student is hopeless and cannot change. When they get to this place they are probably in closed brainwaves as well, solidifying for them that the problem is *who* the student is rather than *where they are* in that moment or what they believe at that time.

Remembering impermanence can help avoid this situation in the first place. If the teacher can remember that the student is closed down and that being in closed brainwaves makes it impossible for them to see things differently, they can avoid shaming and discourage this in the other students. They can be more like the old man in the subway story. They can also be prepared for these situations with strategies for calming and taking time out for themselves and their class. When isolating emotions come up in a group they spread in the forms of shared emotional energy. Even people who have open stories and good intentions can close down from this emotion. Having a pleasant distraction is a great way to interrupt this cycle and it is even better if they can let go of the topic at hand and move on to something else for the time being. Handling things in this way not only keeps things calmer and more in control, it provides a sense of stability for everyone involved. It is based on the core belief that tolerance and respect are the most important things to cultivate in a classroom. If respect is what we are trying to teach, then modeling it and asking students to practice it as well, is the best approach. Making respect the

priority creates a neutral environment that feels safe enough for students to trust being open and makes teachers feel safe, as well.

Some Thoughts on Safety

The power of narrative work can also be overwhelmingly negative if not done in a careful, thoughtful and respectful manor. The stories that students bring to the classroom are varied, and so is the accompanying emotional baggage. The diversity amongst the student body can be a wonderful way for students to gain new perspectives on their narratives, but that same diversity can mean that their stories can be met with hostile judgment. Some stories are too personal, with raw and potentially traumatizing emotions to share. Teachers need to be clear that not all stories should be dealt with in a classroom setting and certainly not all should be shared with classmates who may not yet have learned how to be open and empathetic. It is much safer to begin by working with stories that have less emotional currency.

Teachers can speak to their students about stories that may not be safe to work with in class, but students may not heed the warning and proceed in spite of it. They may not realize how much it affects them until it is too late. It may be impossible to tell how emotionally laden the narrative is or how prepared a particular student is to handle it. Even if a student is emotionally mature enough, other students may not be equally prepared. For this reason, teaching the emotional literacy of narratives alongside personal narrative assignments is so important. Having students work on stories that can even traumatize, or re-traumatize, them if brought up without an understanding of how emotionally powerful they can be, is not ethical. Further, having them work on, and possibly even share, them in a classroom environment where other students are also not emotionally literate can be even more damaging. However, when appropriate stories are chosen, students have the opportunity to not only practice sharing and listening to stories but,

more importantly, create a better learning environment for themselves.

A key aspect of safety is that people in the classroom (including the teacher) feel respected and heard. The social and emotional climate that students learn in not only makes it safer for them to explore stories that are potentially emotionally charged; it also has a profound effect on their ability to learn. From infancy on, human learning and development is more robust when there are strong and healthy emotional ties between caregivers and children, or teachers and students. For example,

> Young babies learn faster within caring families than at any other time, during those nurturing, one-to-one relationships, where one-to-one time, love and opportunities for constant verbal and non-verbal interaction feed learning and create 'joint involvement episodes' (Anning and Edwards, 1999, p. 66) or intensive interaction (Hewitt and Nind, 1998)" (Cooper, 2016, p. 270)

It is these kinds of healthy emotional human connections that are the basis of a safe nurturing environment where students and learning thrive.

On the other hand, when students feel alienated, learning declines. We need the conversations and the interplay between people to help open our minds and our brains to new information and novel ways of thinking. Education experts know the value of an emotionally positive and supportive place for students to learn in[45]. When the school or classroom is dominated by a feeling of stress, students are more likely to be afraid to take part in discussions and thus may feel less invested in the course content. Neuroscientists suggest that "each interaction changes us in an ongoing dynamic narrative" (Cooper, 2016, p. 270) Without those

[45] Although I am lobbying for the creation of a low-stress environment, I also value pedagogies of discomfort that challenge students' narratives, described by Winans (2012), Belanoff (2001), Shari Stenberg (2011). The tools I offer here, in fact, support a move towards these pedagogies because they equip students with tools to respond to this discomfort in productive, non-violent ways.

dynamics, students close down. “If the interaction is positive, humans are motivated to interact more, if not they withdraw to a more defensive and less exploratory mode” (Cooper, 2016, p. 270).

Whether students prosper or decline is heavily dependent on the emotional characteristics of the social climate. “The support of learning therefore requires the creation of positive, interactive environments” (Cooper, 2016, p. 270). Goodson and Gill (2011) similarly note that

> While accepting that learning takes place from within, at the same time we are convinced that it is crucial for learning to be embedded in the relationships and deeper encounters where it also takes place. Pedagogic intention is important, and creating a trusting and safe space is the key to an open atmosphere where individuals feel comfortable to share their lived experiences in narratives. This is where we encounter each other as human beings on many levels: cognitive, discursive, emotional and spiritual” (xiii).

A Compassionate Classroom Culture

Every day students and teachers bring all kinds of baggage into the classroom: stress, emotions, and stories. Students tend to live a high stress lifestyle (Harding, 2020). This stress can change their brains in a way that causes them to feel a sense of separateness from their culture, the school, and their classmates. All of these play an enormous role in how open they are to taking in new information, formulating creative ideas, and having open, genuine discussion. A low stress environment is especially important to them if we are trying to help them come to see their interconnection with others in the classroom and, by extension, in the community. If they do not experience relationality in the classroom, it is difficult to believe they can come to integrate it in their narratives. Without this relationality they cannot increase their social concern and redefine altruism as self care. On the other hand, if the classroom provides a safe

environment, it can transform the stressors that can be barriers to learning, into opportunities for significant growth and academic success. When students feel safe they are more likely to see their personal stories as part of the larger social narrative and to be active participants in the culture and the classroom, as well. Similarly, when students see themselves as interconnected members of a social whole (the classroom), they should understand that they themselves will benefit from being part of that compassionate cultural environment.

Having a place where students do not feel intimidated to work on, and share, their stories is essential; but it is also very important that they share the responsibility for making the classroom environment a safe space. When students learn to calm and practice self-discipline about their emotional reactivity they are already practicing creating the safe environment that they, and their classmates, need in which to learn. This gives these students the experience of having a sense of agency in their social environment, by controlling themselves more than controlling others. Further, asking students to share in creating a compassionate classroom environment lets them practice sharing their stories in a thoughtful way and truly listening to the stories of others. It gives them the kind of real world experience they need to become considerate and responsible members of society. Requiring them to take some responsibility for creating such a classroom will also make this a lived, embodied experience, rather than mere theory. As such it is much more likely to become part of their long-term worldview and thus more sustainable.

Most importantly, it is the inseparability of the self from their social environments that requires students to be responsible for helping make these environments more compassionate. Using personal narrative writing to teach social responsibility helps students situate themselves in the world when they're doing it, so that they aren't looking at their own narrative/story in a

vacuum. When students are asked to share responsibility for creating a safe classroom they have the opportunity to simultaneously experience social awareness and self-awareness. They can feel empowered, not only for their own personal growth, but also to engage with and change the social climate around them as they attempt to articulate who they are in relation to others.

Mindfulness skills are very helpful in creating a classroom environment that is caring, compassionate, empathetic, non-judgmental, and mutually respectful. A large part of what makes a space feel safe is acceptance and understanding. Once we have judged something our capacity for understanding is greatly diminished. Mindfulness not only calms us and allows us to be more open; it also exercises our capacity to let go of analytical thinking and of our propensity for judgment. The practice of mindfulness is to bring non-judgmental, moment-to-moment awareness to our bodies, our minds, and the world around us. This is a perfect way of nurturing acceptance, which then affords us the opportunity for understanding.

Creating such an environment is likely to be most successful if both teacher and students have some degree of emotional intelligence, for one of the most important aspects of such an environment is the emotional one. Emotion is an important factor in how positive and safe we feel and it is this sense of safety that is key to helping students be more receptive to learning.

Emotional literacy skills, especially empathic listening, are central to helping students increase awareness of their need to care for society and the planet. When doing personal narrative assignments they need the knowledge of how emotions affect us, both in working on their own narratives, and in how they listen to those of their classmates. To do the latter, they will need to practice using empathic listening. Empathic listening, also referred to as open listening, happens when someone is able to have a deeper understanding of someone else's narrative/story from their perspective, and, by extension, is more aware of the emotions that they

are feeling, as well.

Open listening happens when people are able to open up their own perspective enough to allow room for another point of view. A person's brain state is crucial to achieving such openness. If someone is under stress and has activated their sympathetic nervous system, they are in a narrow focus state that is unable to see anything but their own perspective (Fehmi & Robbins, 2007; Siegel, 2007). Through calming and inducing a relaxation response that activates the parasympathetic nervous system, listeners enter brain states far more capable of taking in the complexity of another person's viewpoint (Chödrön, 2003; Fehmi & Robbins, 2007; Gunnlaugson et al., 2014; Siegel, 2007; Uusberg et al. 2016).

Empathic listening is a skill that is the first and most important step for anyone seeking to be helpful. In Buddhist cultures there are many statues of Bodhisattvas (enlightened, compassionate beings); they have many arms and the hand at the end of each arm holds an eye. The arms represent the many ways there are of helping, but the eye is in the hand because we must first see what the person needs before we can help. The other person has to have a voice, and be the author of his or her own needs. Trying to help without seeing may not be helpful at all, and could actually cause harm.

An MBSL prepares students to begin a lifelong practice of narrative, mental, and emotional fluidity. It is an approach that emphasizes self-aware, self-reflective listening in order to recognize our inter-being. When both the personal stories and the cultural stories are inclusive, there is an increase of shared information that nurtures growth and creativity, a kind of common ground. This creates an environment that fosters relational emotions. In short, healthy, open narratives make healthy, open people and cultures.

Social Responsibility and Narratives

Emotion plays a large role in how much we consider ourselves a part of other people, as well as the world. Rhetoric and composition scholars on empathy have recognized the need for the emotional dimension of social connection. We are more invested with others when we are motivated by feelings of care and attachment. In psychology, feminist and social activist author Jean Baker Miller coined the term zest

> to describe the energy one feels in a growth-fostering relationship (Miller and Stiver, 1997) (Banks 170). Out of this emotional experience, "four other 'good things' flow—clarity, an increase in the ability to act, an increase in self worth, and the desire for more connection (Miller and Stiver 1997). (A. Banks, 2011, p. 170)

Zest basically describes an emotional state in which we freely connect with others in an invested manner. Zest, like other emotions, is interrelated to our experiences, stories, and cultures. Social responsibility largely requires a similar kind of emotional investment. It is largely the emotional engagement that makes social connection and social responsibility organic and personally meaningful, rather than something that is produced artificially.

For students and instructors to change their narratives, they need to know that they embody both the stories and the emotions of many other people; they have to understand their interconnectedness with the narratives that they come from and live within. They cannot know them all, but they can learn that they are not separate from these emotionally volatile stories that have stirred generations of their families and friends to both patriotism and rebellion. The emotion and the stories are in the anger in the hands of the police officers that murdered George Floyd and others, and in the rage, the fear, and the hurt in the hearts that are marching in protest of those murders. And, they are embodied in the sentient beings with whom we share this planet

and in the planet itself; they too, are encoded with narratives that have guided our relationships with them. They are embodied in the elephants…and the animals for testing…and the sacred mountains…because our stories say we have dominion over them and that they are here to use for our purposes.

Students and instructors can be taught how to work on transforming the emotions and the stories that are embodied in them; then, they can be invited to change the cultural stories that their personal ones support. In this way, they can experience for themselves that tending their emotions and their stories can be a powerful tool for social change.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

Implications for the Discipline of Rhetoric and Writing

I have argued in this dissertation that we need to consider the narrative encounter as something that doesn't occur only in the body or in the mind, but in a mind-body state. I have framed this state as a fluid constellation composed of three facets (emotions, narratives, and brainwaves)—each one an entry point for shifting students' and instructors' openness in the narrative learning process, a reflective listening process.

In doing so, I have argued, as I did in Schaefer (2018), that we consider brainwaves an important dimension of the body. This dissertation urges others in Rhetoric and Writing to do the same. This topic should be of interest to social cognitivists in the discipline, along with other scholars who have discussed the importance of embodiment in relation to personal narrative writing, as well as learning in general.

Furthermore, my work has implications for scholarly discussions on critical discourse in both Rhetoric and Writing and related disciplines. Throughout the dissertation I have presented MBSL as a tool for dealing with student and instructor prejudices in ways that don't result in the problematic cycles of self-conscious reflection described so clearly by Swiencicki (2006). Mindfulness, compassion, and invitational rhetorics are certainly not new to Rhetoric and Writing, but my earlier discussion of the effects of stress, along with recent scholarship on the crisis surrounding faculty burnout[46], underlines the our *need* to integrate such practices into our teaching.

MBSL also offers an alternative to pedagogies of exhortation (Berthoff, 1981) (e.g., "Be

[46] In her, "Burning Out" and "Faculty Pandemic Stress is Now Chronic," *Inside Higher Ed* reporter Colleen Flaherty (2020a) describes this crisis. She quotes June Gruber, associate professor of psychology and neuroscience at the University of Colorado at Boulder: "Faculty burnout…poses real and serious risk[s] for mental health challenges of unprecedented scope" (2020a, par. 4).

curious!" "Practice compassion!") that instructors may adopt in their desire to teach students the habits of mind put forth by the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (WPA et al., 2011). It is an approach that begins with understanding how the different facets of the mind-body state work, and then offers mindfulness practices which support the literacies which lead to the habits of mind. This work, by fostering these habits of mind in both students and instructors, enhances students' ability to be open enough to receive their liberal education, and, furthermore, to engage in lifelong learning through ongoing narrative encounters.

Next, I will discuss the possibility of integrating MBSL into Rhetoric and Writing departments and faculty professional development in response to issues around emotional literacy. I then ask how MBSL might be especially well suited for graduate students, given their unique needs and positionality. I end by discussing the limitations of this dissertation, followed by consideration of areas for future research.

Mind-Body State Literacy as a Response to Emotional Labor

MBSL, as I've argued, needs to be practiced by both instructors and students if it is to be effective. Furthermore, instructors need to learn how to act as leaders in the literacies associated with this approach (narrative, emotion, and brainwave) because their students will look to them as role models for the open listening necessary in dialogic narrative encounters. They will also benefit from instructors who have achieved the mental fluidity necessary to cultivate healthy, relational narratives. They must demonstrate for students not only the content of relational stories, but also how to continually update their narratives to be more relational. In other words, the success of MBSL is largely dependent on instructors' willingness to put both time and energy into learning and developing these skills. MBSL emphasizes mindfulness both as a formal and informal practice, which requires learners (i.e., instructors) to incorporate it into their daily lives.

Unfortunately, the physical, mental, and emotional demands on instructors are high, especially now. I am feeling many of these difficulties myself as I balance teaching in a new job with finishing my dissertation in the middle of a global pandemic and a highly polarized, violent political climate. In her recent article, "Beyond COVID-Style Teaching," Christine I. McClure describes the difficulty of finding any sort of balance given the current demands of being an instructor:

> I have found that balance has been my biggest issue. How do I balance COVID fatigue, students' needs, course and university goals and expectations, kids, doctoral commitments, and my own mental and physical health? In the last year, I have taught 12 communication courses with 266 students, written and designed 28 newly fully online modules, recorded more than 30 videos, developed hundreds of quiz questions, passed three competency exams for my doctoral program, written and defended my prospectus for my dissertation, kept my four children alive, and not gotten COVID. I am winning, but I'm struggling. (2020, par. 8).

McClure describes the common feeling of instructors: overwhelmed. In response to her question in the Pandemic Pedagogy Facebook group, "Anyone else drowning in student work and module development?" she received 1,048 likes/emojis and "250…comments echoing [her] feelings" (2020, par. 3). Similarly, in her "Faculty Pandemic Stress is Now Chronic," Colleen Flaherty (2020b) describes the dismal effect that COVID-19 has had on faculty burnout and mental health. Among other things, faculty are dealing with the secondary trauma that comes from responding to the "emotional and mental health needs of students, who are also struggling" (2020b, par. 16).

What this article does not highlight, however, is how much tougher this time is for

instructors (and graduate students) who also have marginalized identities. I know from listening to my friends, colleagues, and community members across the globe that the challenges of teaching are compounded by the ongoing emotional labor that instructors with marginalized identities do. These instructors are commonly coping with the traumatic media displays of racial violence (as just one example) while also teaching students who exhibit or defend the same prejudices that produce such violence. Former president of the American Sociological Association, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, notes in a presidential address that "in survey after survey, faculty of color report having to deal with micro-aggressions at alarmingly high rates (Pittman 2012; Zambrana et al. 2017)" (2018, p. 18).

Julie Lindquist (2004), in her "Class Affect, Classroom Affectations: Working Through the Paradoxes of Strategic Empathy," calls our attention to the complex, difficult emotional lives of instructors:

> The professional literature is becoming deeply saturated with 'wet' narratives, teaching stories that struggle to make sense of their authors' vexing emotional encounters with students with whom they find it difficult to empathize (see, for example, the essays of Joseph F. Trimmer's recent collection, *Narration as Knowledge: Tales of the Teaching Life*). Teachers don't always sympathize with their students or even *like* them any more than fieldworkers, as empathetic as they strive to appear to their informants, always approve of the things they see and hear in the field. (2004, p. 201)

Lindquist recalls one of her own experiences with these kinds of dynamics, and how it "made [her] nervous…emotionally drained, exhausted[47]" (p. 204). The author points out that faculty must at once cope with their own difficult emotions when encountering students' prejudices,

[47] Such emotionally challenging dynamics for faculty are exacerbated by the rhetorical constraints in the classroom; faculty experience their emotions—typically relegated to the private realm in many cultures—in front of a whole room full of students.

while simultaneously "being the kind of listeners who can productively attend to students' affective needs" (p. 199).

Given the heavy emotional load that instructors—perhaps especially those with marginalized identities—carry, it might seem inappropriate and even unethical to suggest that they take on the additional labor of learning the Mind-Body State Literacy. I suggest, however, that MBSL offers the understanding and practices that can help respond to and even alleviate some of the emotional labor that instructors are already dealing with. As I will argue, MBSL may provide a sustainable practice for instructors to do on their own, as well as a practice that can create much needed inter-faculty community support.

Mindfulness and compassionate communication, the core practices of MBSL, do require time and energy to learn at first. Once faculty become familiar with the basics, however, these practices require little extra time or even effort. In fact, studies suggest that in some cases, mindfulness meditation helps reduce rumination (Greeson et al., 2018) and improves sleep quality (Barrett et al., 2020; Ong et al., 2014). While MBSL does require that instructors incorporate its practices outside of the classroom, informal mindfulness practices can be applied to everyday activities that instructors already do. Williams et al. (2007) offer examples:

> To cultivate mindfulness in your daily life—what we have been calling 'informal practice'—you might try bringing moment-to-moment awareness to routine activities such as brushing your teeth, showering, drying your body, getting dressed, eating, driving, or taking out the garbage. The list of possibilities is endless, but the point is simply to zero-in on *knowing what you are doing as you are actually doing it* and on what you are thinking and feeling from moment to moment as well. (2007, p. 232).

I suggest that instructors in Rhetoric and Writing (and in other disciplines) would receive a large

return on their investment by learning MBSL. Not only would they be able to share a practice that supports the habits of mind so critical for students' learning (and their own!), they would acquire a lifelong practice that can be done in almost any moment of their lives. Formal practices do require "extra" time, but I would encourage instructors, as I do with students, to be creative in how they might integrate one or two 5-10 minute practices into their day. Many people spend at least this much time on their phones checking social media, for instance. Perhaps every other day instructors could devote their social media time to meditation, instead. Similarly, time set aside for quality family time might be a useful place to integrate short mindfulness meditations that families could do together. (This is a great way to sustain the practice.)

MBSL and its associated mindfulness practices, I argue, is an approach that encourages instructors to bring compassionate awareness[48] to the emotional difficulties of teaching, including those that may come with being an instructor with a marginalized identity. As my discussion of Dobson's "A Kind Word" in Chapter 5 suggests, compassion must be applied inwardly first. Having self-compassion as an internal resource to draw on, I believe, is especially critical for instructors with marginalized identities. I know from my own experience that there are times and situations where instructors are isolated from those who care about them and recognize the complexity of who they are. The constant emotional stress of teaching about racism, alone, can create "'racial battle fatigue' (Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007), leading many to withdraw from their teaching and/or colleagues to maintain their sanity and well-being (Feagin and McKinney 2003)," (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 18). In these situations, when instructors

[48] Self-compassion as well as compassionate listening, I believe, are useful forms of one kind of support in response to the emotionally difficult work of anti-racism and other social justice work. It's important to recognize, however, that issues around emotional labor call for larger systemic changes brought about by actions such as protest, policy, and curricula changes. I do not, therefore, propose MBSL as a cure-all, by any means, to this highly complex problem, only as a useful supplementary approach based on listening, compassion, and relationality—all of which may complement a variety of systemic efforts to address emotional labor. A future study would allow for a richer discussion of these possibilities.

cannot—for whatever reason—connect with others, self-compassion is available.

Care from the community, of course, is important. Instructors—particularly those with marginalized identities—need community support. As I've argued in this dissertation, what is best for the individual is best for the community, and vice versa. I have been reflecting on the complex needs of instructors with marginalized identities throughout my doctoral program at Michigan State University. Early in my program (2016), I attended a department-hosted workshop entitled "Teaching at Predominantly-White Institutions." In it, graduate instructors and faculty in our department (Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures), as well as faculty from other departments, discussed community support as a core tool for sustaining the difficult emotional labor of instructors with marginalized identities, especially. This support, however, should not come only from those who have marginalized identities. It should come from everybody. MBSL, then, might provide an approach that would complement faculty in the creation of such community spaces.

Many Rhetoric and Writing departments already devote resources and time to respond to some dimensions of instructors' heavy emotional labor. For example, instructors are often encouraged to attend professional development workshops, wellness units or other university structures. These workshops cover topics such as work-life balance, exercise, healthy sleep habits, time management, conflict management, emotional intelligence, and mindfulness for stress management. Such workshops can and do provide useful knowledge and practices that can help alleviate some of the burden that comes with being an instructor. These might, however, inadvertently draw on popular versions of emotional intelligence and mindfulness that reinforce it as a practice designed merely to reduce stress and worse, avoid or transform difficult emotions. In short, they may teach students neoliberal versions of mindfulness and self-care. However, if

departments incorporate MBSL-based workshops or courses into their programs, they can make sure that self-care and mindfulness are framed as inseparable from care for others and care for the environment. MBSL has the additional benefit of supporting instructors while at the same time teaching them a pedagogical tool they can use in the classroom.

Though MBSL emphasizes the importance of instructors practicing compassionate communication with their students and with others, its incorporation of Nonviolent Communication helps address some of the problematic dimensions of asking instructors with marginalized identities to practice empathy. Dennis A. Lynch summarizes Rhetoric and Writing's concern about pedagogical approaches that "locate the obstacles to empathy—to listening and being heard—solely in the minds and habits of individual participants, and so obscures or ignores the political and economic and bodily dimensions of social struggles (1998, p. 6). MBSL, drawing on Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication, can support faculty by teaching them a method that attends to their own needs as well as students' and, again, prioritizes self-awareness. Nonviolent Communication also prompts individuals to become aware of and express their own universal needs, such as the need for respect.

Professional Development for Graduate Students: An Entry Point

MBSL would be an ideal fit for graduate school experiences in Rhetoric and Writing. Since graduate school offers a space for emerging writers, scholars, and instructors to develop professionally. Many Rhetoric and Writing programs offer more than an introduction to the scholarly landscape of the discipline; they teach students self-management skills, how to respond to emotionally charged situations in the classroom, and even how to respond to conflict among peers. Each of these aspects of graduate student education requires attention to mind-body states (and the emotional labor that accompanies professional development).

Many graduate faculty are likely familiar with the emotional labor it takes to mentor graduate students through the emotional challenges of bring in graduate school. I suggest that coursework and supplemental workshops (for instance) based on the MBSL approach could take some of this emotional labor off the shoulders of mentors by teaching graduate students a set of practices they can practice by themselves. With its focus on mindful communication and its goal of relationality, I also believe that MBSL might proactively help prepare—at least on some level—students to respond to the emotionally charged experiences they will inevitably have. Departments could invite both faculty/instructors and graduate students to MBSL workshops. This would frame the task of responding to the often unequally distributed emotional labor as something that everyone can take part in together, allowing folks to share in creating a more caring culture.

MBSL might also support graduate students as they grapple with the often-difficult task of situating their work within academia. One of the first assignments that I received in my own graduate education at the doctoral level was to create an intellectual autobiography. Our instructor prompted us to use our personal narratives to essentially write ourselves into the discipline. Like many of my peers, my pursuit of graduate school was very much intertwined with and motivated by my experiences of being marginalized. Such an opportunity offered us a chance to proclaim our unique stories and identities as, not only legitimate in the academy, but also as highly valuable. This was undoubtedly one of the most important and helpful assignments of my long graduate school career. As someone who has experienced prejudicial violence, however, calling up and reflecting on the painful aspects of my personal narrative often felt both scary and isolating. During these times, I leaned heavily on my (developing) emotional and brainwave literacies, along with the empathetic support of my family and friends.

Graduate faculty might include MBSL prior to or alongside such personal narrative assignments to help their students transform the isolating emotions associated with this kind of personal reflection. MBSL's focus on empathetic listening and nonviolent communication could invite graduate students' peers to recognize—or even seek out—the underlying needs they have in sharing these personal narratives with one another. Implementing these assignments gives graduate students an opportunity to *experience* their voices being truly listened to. For graduate students, many of whom come to academia with marginalized and undervalued perspectives, it is of the utmost importance that their peers' (and instructors') reception of these narratives communicates compassion and care[49]. MBSL offers skills and practices that would support this kind of transformative listening.

MBSL's Place in the University: An Interdepartmental, Interdisciplinary Effort

Given the prevalence of faculty and student's emotional struggles, highlighted and exacerbated by COVID-19, stakeholders across the university should be interested in incorporating MBSL as a form of professional development as well as a pedagogical tool. MBSL involves a broad range of literacies and practices that span the disciplines, including psychology, education, Rhetoric and Writing, and nursing[50], and mindfulness has already been adopted in many disciplines in higher education (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). Therefore, these stakeholders could work together to integrate MBSL into the core curriculum. The approach could, for instance, become part of a first-year seminar, or it could be offered as one class or as a series of courses to be taken consecutively. I imagine that the development of this curriculum and the establishment of curriculum objectives could be interdisciplinary, as those in psychology, social

[49]In her "Supporting Graduate Students in the Summer Session," Leslie Ellen Blood (2020) describes graduate students' increasing need for contact, connection, and community during the current global pandemic, which has been very isolating for both students and instructors.

[50] My nursing students, when responding to mindfulness-related assignments, are often already familiar with mindfulness as a critical resource to prevent burnout in a care-based profession.

psychology, education, Rhetoric and Writing, and neuroscience—among others—would probably recognize the value of this approach.

MBSL would also be useful in interdisciplinary professional learning communities designed to support instructors with marginalized identities and/or those teaching in predominately white institutions. I had an opportunity to be involved with one such community, called Collaborating for Change, which was started and led by graduate students in Michigan State University's Curriculum, Instruction and Teacher education program. The purpose of this learning community was, in part, to provide support for the emotional labor of teaching about race and/or simply teaching in a predominately white institution. It was designed to provide support for graduate student instructors with marginalized identities, while also working to create larger institutional changes (for example, to help stop racism). The learning community hosted graduate student-led workshops on how to engage in anti-racists pedagogies, as well as how to sustain this work.

What struck me about this professional learning community was how the very experience of connecting with other instructors with marginalized identities not just from my own department, but also across the university, felt therapeutic. It felt as if the parts of the world in which I could belong became larger. I was also struck by the common need of graduate instructors across the disciplines for community support, listening, and storytelling. During my last year of residence in my PhD program, I helped lobby for institutional support for Collaborating for Change through my leadership[51] role in the Graduate Employee Union. This experience showed me that we often need to lobby to create spaces and resources to ensure that this kind of professional development is valued and implemented.

[51] I was chair of our union's Pedagogy Committee, in charge of assessing the needs of graduate students. Our committee collaborated with Collaborating for Change because it aligned with our goal to meet the needs of graduate students.

During this same time, I also served as a mediator between Collaborating for Change participants and an emerging campus-wide initiative called iTeach MSU Commons Project, a project devoted to professional development of all MSU instructors and employees. The purpose of this project is to allow instructors from different disciplines to share pedagogical resources with one another. The development of MBSL, as I've suggested, could and perhaps should be an interdisciplinary effort. An online collaborative like iTeach could provide a platform for this kind of work.

Limitations

Learning and teaching anything to do with emotional literacy, as scholars in Rhetoric and Writing have pointed out, often has to take place within cultures (e.g., the United States) that seek to confine emotions to the private realm. Furthermore, faculty and students have learned, from a young age, "emotional rules" (Boler, 1999; Thein et al., 2015) that are not easily unlearned. For this reason, I think it would be useful to teach MBSL to faculty, as well as students, as something that should go hand-in-hand with more systemic and cultural changes about the ways that we understand and respond to emotion. Thus, I join the call of other scholars on emotional literacy (e.g., Boler, 1999; Stenberg, 2002; Lindquist, 2004; Winans, 2012) for us to work collectively towards more productive understandings of emotion.

I am limited, ironically, by the breadth of my topic in this dissertation. In offering a pedagogical approach that incorporates facets as complex as narratives, emotions, and brainwaves, while also incorporating different disciplinary perspectives, I have touched on many issues that need further study. While this is a limitation of my dissertation, I also see it as offering many areas for future research.

Areas for Future Study

One of the questions I received during my defense was, how do you assess students' implementation of habits of mind? This is an important question, and one that scholars in Rhetoric and Writing have been grappling with (e.g., Johnson, 2013). Developing a means of assessment would be an important step, too, toward trying out the MBSL in a classroom study.

Another area for future study would be to bring the MBSL into conversation with current models that involve narrative encounter, listening, and mindfulness. Julie Lindquist and Bump Halbritter (2019), for instance, offer a scaffolded approach to "inquiry and discovery" about literacy narratives. Similarly, Cynthia L. Selfe and H. Lewis Ulman's (2019) "Black Narratives Matter," which draws on the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives, suggests interesting questions about how MBSL might support (or be informed by) efforts to create spaces for narratives that counter the exclusionary narratives which dominate the media. These are just two examples of studies that could find out, for instance, how these approaches might complement one another.

The other area of research that I introduced, but did not delve into in great detail, is that of emotional literacy. Emotional literacy, and emotions in general, encompass many topics, including emotional labor. I have offered some claims here about MBSL as a potential support for emotional labor, but this idea needs further research. Mindfulness and compassion are loaded terms in many communities, quite understandably given their use in neoliberal discourses. A study could focus on mindfulness's successful—and failed—applications in social justice work and as a tool with which to respond to the issues of emotional labor. Another dimension related to this topic is exploring MBSL in the context of different cultural attitudes towards emotions. As Laura R. Micciche (2016) points out, "emotion studies…operates from an often unquestioned

presumption of Westernness" (par.10).

Finally, given my proposal of using MBSL as a tool for students to engage in narrative encounters which foster the development of relational narratives—ones that support social and environmental care—I am interested in pedagogical activities that support this work. I have mentioned in this conclusion that we need spaces for community building to take place (e.g., professional learning communities for graduate students and professional development opportunities for faculty). The MBSL may be most effective when it is paired with experiential learning activities such as community engaged learning in the Rhetoric and Writing classroom. Future studies might ask how MBSL could be applied in these contexts. Specifically, I am interested in community-engaged activities that would provide opportunities for connections between students and their surrounding communities as well as their surrounding environments. I might explore, for instance, how the MBSL could be used in a community engaged project involving a national park's sustainability initiative designed to connect local community members with nature.

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