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Rhetorics of Reflection: Revisiting Listening Rhetoric through Mindfulness, Empathy, and Nonviolent Communication

Renea Frey

Wayne Booth described “Listening Rhetoric” as a rhetorical stance based in ethics, connection, and understanding—which he termed *rhetorology*—and he saw it as an imperative in a world filled with potential global conflict and crisis. Krista Ratcliffe, too, has called for developing deeper listening skills as a means of generating understanding across lines of race and gender, and she describes rhetorical listening “as a trope for interpretive invention...[which]... signifies a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture” (17). Despite these calls from both Booth and Ratcliffe, deep listening remains a forgotten or overlooked aspect of invention in most discussions of writing pedagogy. Ratcliffe explains that this reticence to incorporate listening as part of rhetorical invention may arise from cultural biases that privilege written discourse over oral (with which listening is often associated) as well as gender, race, and visual biases that privilege invention methods other than listening (19). Additionally, in the conventional Western approach, invention is seen as an act of the intellectual mind rather than the product of embodied awareness, with a focus on critical thinking, analysis, and “finding and creating arguments to support a claim” (Lunsford and Ruskiewicz 510). This *cognocentric* approach to rhetoric and invention may be an outdated model, situated in the paradigms of the past, which need to change to meet the demands of our increasingly interdependent world.

For the discipline of rhetoric to adequately address current social, political, and environmental dangers that potentially affect us all, rhetors must develop greater understanding, empathy, and the ability to hear other positions from a stance of receptivity, rather than from a desire for mastery (Ratcliffe 29). This article explores the ways that we might move beyond traditional Western approaches that privilege the mind over the body, or arguing one’s own claim over listening across difference, in order to address the ways that rhetoric might serve the greater good, rather than being merely self-serving. By linking deep listening and empathy to practices that encourage conscious, embodied awareness, we can support students in inventing more ethical, effective arguments that address the exigencies we face in our interconnected, but precariously endangered, world.

Feminist scholars have challenged the epistemic basis of knowledge as mind-centered, but until recently, notions of embodiment did not directly incorporate methods such as mindfulness, intentional movement, or contemplative practices. However, as Christie Wenger notes in her work with yoga and the ethos of presence, bringing the body into the rhetorical work of the classroom has the potential to inspire deeper connection across gaps in understanding, as “recognizing our commonality with others by virtue of our shared materiality and existence allows us to respect difference without reifying it” (247). Additionally, the act of listening itself involves the body in ways that passive reading does not.

Building upon the work of Walter Ong and his discussion of the impact of sound upon the body, Vincent Casaregola points out that when one listens in the traditional sense, “waves of sound... are not only heard by the ear but felt by the body” (382). This leads to the experience of presence, “the immediacy of interpersonal interaction that is experienced through this comprehensive sensory and psychological event” (Casaregola 383). Further, as Ratcliffe explains, a difference exists between typical reading practices and those associated with “rhetorical listening [which] differs from reading in that it proceeds via different body organs, different disciplinary and cultural assumptions, different figures of speech, and most importantly different stances” (24). By reconnecting listening and invention to the body via both oral and written communication, I argue that students can learn to understand difference in deeper, more nuanced ways than through traditional invention activities, leading toward the ethically grounded rhetoric suggested by Booth and Ratcliffe.

Actionable Applications in the Classroom

To develop skills of deep listening and understanding, students need access to concrete practices, as well as explicit explanations for how these exercises support their rhetorical skills and agency. Booth urges us to “pursue the truths behind... differences” (46) so that misunderstandings could be mended and oppositions might find common ground. His call resonates with ideas found in Nonviolent Communication (NVC), which posits the commonality of universal human needs as a meeting place for empathy and understanding across difference. Rogerian argumentation offers a way to implement common-ground approaches to conflict, and NVC seeks to extend this notion to find solutions that are not rooted in compromise, but rather “win/win” resolutions that meet the needs of all parties. To find these common needs, however, requires deep listening skills and empathy, expertise with which students do not come automatically equipped. As Alexandria Peary observes, difficulties teaching Rogerian argument often arise in students, precisely because of “the challenges of teaching empathy and conscious listening that are inherent to both Rogers’ therapy and argument” (64). Engaging students in true understanding of different viewpoints is often a challenging endeavor in the classroom, especially when doing so requires them to listen deeply across great divides of worldview, opinion, or experience.

One way of helping students learn to be more present and aware in preparation for listening deeply is by utilizing mindfulness practices in the classroom. Mindfulness is often defined as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally,” a stance that can support students’ ability to be more attentive and focused (Kabat-Zinn 8). Mindfulness can be practiced via many methods, but “begins with the simple act of paying attention with care and respect” (Barbezat and Bush 95). Given the challenges that students encounter engaging deeply with viewpoints beyond their own, they can discover that mindfulness offers a way to encourage awareness of thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and habits of mind, while providing a non-judgmental space in which to enact this engagement. As Daniel P. Barbezat and Mirabai Bush describe in their work on contemplative classroom practices in higher education, they point out that “mindful awareness allows us to observe our mental states without

overidentifying with them, creating an attitude of acceptance that can lead to greater curiosity and better self-understanding” (96). While mindfulness is helpful in allowing students to examine their own attitudes, I argue that it can also be used as a basis to generate deeper understanding through exploring concepts that move beyond the self, as a means of cultivating non-judgmental curiosity about people, issues, social injustices, and positionalities that may be outside the scope of students’ personal experiences.

By incorporating accessible applications of mindfulness, deep listening, NVC, and empathy as invention work, students gain different types of awareness of purpose, audience, and the rhetorical approaches available to them that go beyond the compromise of common-ground argumentation. Instead of approaching invention as solely a practice of an objective, critical mind, the first canon of rhetoric might also entail “re-integrating bodily, [to include] emotional ways of knowing into the process of invention,” with a potential for more ethically-grounded outcomes (Spoel 201). Writing pedagogies rooted in embodied, mindful awareness can lead to deep listening, nuanced understanding, and a more ethically rooted rhetorical stance for students who seek to create civically engaged arguments.

Empathy, Listening, and Nonviolent Communication

As a Writing Program Director at a Jesuit university, I was asked to design an upper division course that would meet the requirements for the university’s Writing Flag. Keeping in mind my institution’s commitment to Ignatian values of solidarity, service, reflection, discernment, compassion, interconnection, and justice, I created a course called “Writing as Social Action.” Because this course would combine rhetorical practice with Jesuit values, I based it on the Jesuit rhetorical tradition of *eloquentia perfecta*, writing well for the greater good that is “understood as the joining of ‘erudition’ (knowledge, wisdom) with ‘virtue’ and ‘eloquence’” (Gannett and Brereton 10). In a different institutional setting, I might have been required to make a case for the connection between rhetoric and ethics, domains which have had a troubled historical relationship and are sometimes viewed as “not strong allies, and may even have antithetical goals” (Agnew 9). However, because of the institutional focus on Ignatian values, all courses (to some degree or another) are expected to examine and uphold these qualities as part of their pedagogical approach or content. For “Writing as Social Action,” I planned to integrate Ignatian principles into my course as effectively as possible, not only because I was encouraged to do so, but also because they are values that resonate with me. To that end, I also applied for and received the Ethics and Religion in Society Flag, as well as approval to have the course count for the Peace Studies minor.¹

I designed the course with these lofty focuses in mind—intensive writing with a rhetorical foundation, a focus on ethics in society, and discussion practices that promote peace and justice—and then paused, wondering how to implement activities for students that would give them an experiential basis to engage with these ideas on a deeper level. I had a long-standing meditation practice, but also knew that it would be difficult for students to “pick up” meditation in the space of one semester, at least in a way that would be directly applicable to our work with rhetoric and writing. As Vaishali

1. “Flags” designate baccalaureate requirements.

Mamgain notes, taking a meditation practice out of its intended context may not yield the transformative potential that comes from a fully-rooted practice, and without more detailed instruction, students may not derive anything from meditation beyond relaxation. Unlike a colleague of mine who was using meditation in her course on Buddhism and rooting it in that context, I did not believe that I had the time in a rhetoric and writing course to support meditation as the primary contemplative practice in our class, nor would I be able to easily connect such a practice to the theoretical rhetorical work we would also cover.

Rather than meditation, I chose to focus on deep listening, empathy, NVC, and mindfulness exercises that we could do in class and as homework. Like Gesa Kirsch, I believed that practices that promote mindfulness, introspection, and reflection could “enable rhetorical agency” so that students become better listeners, readers, writers, and gain more comfort with uncertainty (Kirsch W2). Further, because this was a course predicated on the idea of writing as a means for implementing social action, I was looking for a way to encourage the “deep commitment to civic and social issues” that Kirsch likewise proposed could be fostered through contemplative practices (W11). I also thought that it was possible to connect contemplative practices to rhetoric through a focus on *kairos* and mindfulness. My own Buddhist meditation practices underscored the ways that mindfulness—being there in the moment—allows for a deepening understanding of *kairos* “as something we embody and not something we use or embrace... especially when it comes to the understanding of subject position and research” (Smith 43). With these ideas and experiences in mind, I sought to integrate embodied practices into “Writing as Social Action” in a manner that would be both useful to students and directly connect to the rhetorical theories we would discuss in class.

In addition to utilizing mindfulness to promote deeper, more ethical uses of rhetorical skill and agency, I could also easily connect these practices to the Jesuit values of reflection and discernment. Reflection and discernment are two key practices embedded in Jesuit educational goals, so unlike other institutions where I had previously taught, students would be unlikely to balk at the idea of spending time in a class “being aware in the present moment,” especially when that can lead to a state where “discrimination is more refined because [students] are not bringing a prejudgement to the situation” (Barbezat and Bush 98). Students at a Jesuit university typically expect to be asked to reflect in various ways upon their own thinking and positions and are often challenged to question how actions may or may not serve the greater good. In “Writing as Social Action” in particular, these expectations were quite clear in the syllabus and reflected in the learning outcomes. Thus students were primed to anticipate a certain amount of direct reflection in the classroom.

Additionally, Jesuit education calls for the concept of *cura personalis*, or care of the whole person. We are called to embody this as professors and to facilitate skills that encourage such practice for our students. As Deborah Haynes notes, contemplative practices are an effective way to promote the education of the whole person as they “develop concentration, deepen understanding and insight, and...cultivate awareness and compassion,” all practices that support *cura personalis* for students and give them skills to continue this development throughout their lives (2). Paula Mathieu further argues

that mindfulness can be viewed as an ethical classroom practice since it teaches greater awareness, rather than just the practice of “thinking.”

Used pedagogically, mindfulness “can help us teach both the human and the being,” which is a way of enacting *cura personalis* in the classroom, as well as promoting deeper awareness of ethical considerations for our students (18). While critical thinking remains an important educational goal, cognocentric approaches to teaching, while still privileged in most Western educational settings, have been challenged by multiple historic waves of contemplative pedagogy (Morgan). Contemplative pedagogies recognize the importance of awareness and “being fully present” as they differ from conventional notions of thinking, which may be viewed as a type of habituated problem that contemplative methods seek to counter (Mathieu 15). Conventional intellectualized thinking posits a divide between the thinking subject and the object thought about, which allows little space for the deeper forms of understanding, empathy, and listening that I was hoping to enact for and with my students. While the conventional means of critical thinking would also certainly be important for students’ rhetorical work, I wanted the work of invention—of finding the arguments in the first place—to occur at a level of awareness and deeper compassionate connection than conventional intellectualized thought processes allow.

I often use readings from Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication*, both to introduce the multiple definitions of rhetoric used throughout history and to make a connection between rhetoric, ethics, and power. With the Booth readings as grounding, students typically find it easy to grasp the importance of listening as an effective strategy for conflict resolution in specific rhetorical situations at the local level.² It was not a large cognitive leap, then, to ask students to engage in deep listening practices as invention work, since they had already arrived at a consensus that listening deeply to the multiple perspectives in a controversy was an effective first step to finding solutions to contested issues.

For listeners to be truly present and aware, they must move away from conventional thinking and be more aware of their immediate surroundings—including the person to whom they are listening—and the embodied experience of hearing without the habituated cognitive movement toward forming a response or relating what they hear to their own opinion or position. To enact this in class, I tried to find materials that would be easily accessible to students and give them a true “beginner’s guide” to practices of deep listening. I combined an introduction to attentive listening with a basic overview of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) to see if expanding their vocabulary and the way they used language to engage empathy would aid in their practice of deeply hearing others.

2. For instance, students divided into three groups were asked to apply the various types of rhetorical approaches outlined by Booth—Win Rhetoric, Bargain Rhetoric, and Listening Rhetoric—to a current campus controversy called “Hijab for a Moment,” which was intended to promote cross-religious understanding, but which some students believed promoted discrimination or supported terrorism. Students in the class were asked to mediate an event where dissenting positions were presented and then come up with a proposed solution based upon the type of rhetorical approach they were assigned. In class discussion, it became clear that Listening Rhetoric provided the best potential for a mutually beneficial solution to the controversy.

To present the basics of NVC, I provided students with a handout from the Center for Nonviolent Communication, which in the title describes NVC as “a language of compassion rather than domination” (1). Developed by Marshall Rosenberg, NVC is predicated on the idea that all people share a set of universal needs that are never in conflict, but that the strategies to meet these needs are where the potential for strife arises. For instance, all people have needs for safety, inclusion, belonging, expression, and integrity, but how they attempt to meet those needs may vary drastically from person to person. NVC communication asks practitioners to first *observe* a behavior rather than evaluate it (which can be much more difficult than it appears on the surface). Then practitioners identify the *feeling* that this observation inspires, locate the *need* that is met or unmet in this dynamic, and make a *request* of the person to whom they are speaking. In this form of NVC expression, the speaker takes his or her judgments out of the situation—for instance, saying “I see your socks on the floor” rather than “Why do you always leave your socks on the floor?” At the same time, the practitioner takes responsibility for the feelings and needs arising from a situation, e.g., “I feel frustrated because I value order.” The request which follows (“Would you be willing to pick up these socks?”) is a request only insofar as the person is welcome to say “no,” in which case the dialog might continue. NVC is clear about its intentions as “a tool that leads us toward a quality of connection among people where everyone’s needs are valued,” rather than a way to manipulate or coerce others into doing one’s bidding (CNVC 1).

The other side of NCV dialog—and the one I wanted to focus on most with my students—is listening with empathy. In this receptive state, the listener hears the words of others and tries to translate them into the feelings and needs the person is experiencing in order to connect and understand more deeply. Rather than “agreeing with,” validating, or trying to remedy a situation, the person hearing empathically stays in a state of open presence, connecting with the underlying feelings and needs that the other person may be having. If the listener speaks, it is to reflect back what they hear the person saying, which may take the form of an empathy-based question that seeks to connect with the experience of the person speaking (e.g., “Are you feeling hurt because you’d like to be heard and acknowledged for your efforts?”)

In conjunction with the NVC handout, students visited a web site from The New Conversations Initiative that give an overview of deep listening techniques and connect that overview to the practice of empathy. On this page, students also watched the iconic RSA Short video by Brené Brown that gives a visual demonstration of the dynamics of empathy, as opposed to sympathy. The information on the site, which is intended for a general audience, offers concrete instruction for listening more deeply and attentively when others are speaking and “separates *acknowledging* from *approving* or *agreeing*” (“Listening,” emphasis in original). Deep listening requires hearing what the other person is saying with simple presence and awareness, rather than listening in order to agree/disagree, express an opinion, or give advice. The short video by Brown also highlights the difference between sympathy (feeling for) and empathy (feeling with) in a way that is moving and easy to follow.



Figure 1. Excerpts from “Brené Brown on Empathy”

With this homework as a foundation, students came to class prepared to implement deep listening techniques with one another. For several weeks, students had already been working on a particular social issue that they cared about and on which they would focus most of their work for the semester. At the point in the semester when I introduced the topic of deep listening, empathy, and NVC, students were in the drafting process for a rhetorical analysis of a website that represented their issue and were ready to embark upon deeper research into that issue to create multiple arguments of their own, culminating in a website that would include all of this information. The positioning of this exercise at this point in the semester was intended to (1) give students deeper insight into their issue as they completed their rhetorical analyses and (2) initiate invention work toward upcoming research-based arguments surrounding their issue.

After an in-class discussion about the readings and differentiating ideas—such as the distinction between sympathy and empathy, and the difference between acknowledgment and agreeing—students paired up to practice deep listening techniques. Students were asked to focus specifically on the issues they were researching and to spend time connecting with what motivated them to spend so much time and energy working on this topic, while their partners were instructed to listen deeply without engaging in the usual mental responding typically found in conventional conversation. Students were instructed to spend a few minutes engaged in the following directions prior to beginning to the exercise:

- **Speaker:** Spend a minute thinking about the issue you are planning on researching. Why does it matter to you? Why do you care? Why do you think it is important? Do you have any personal stories or experiences that inform your commitment to this issue?
- **Listener:** Spend that same time preparing to listen deeply to your partner. Remember to stay in a place of reflective, empathetic listening, which means that you don't have to approve, evaluate, give advice, sympathize, or think of related stories. Just listen.

After both students had a chance to speak, listen, and reflect back what they had heard, the class took a few minutes to freewrite about their experiences as both listeners and speakers. Students reported that listening in this way was a unique experience. They realized how much mental energy they typically spent forming their own opinions and responses, and they found it surprising how much more information they retained when they simply listened. This reaction points to the idea of embodied presence inherent in the production and reception of sound through oral communication, as discussed by Casaregola and Ong before him, which allowed students to “bodily experience speech in time and place” in a way that they did not usually attend to (Casaregola 382-83). Some student speakers also talked about the discomfort of speaking for that long with-

out hearing an approving response, as well as how much more deeply they were able to think through their issue when they were not interrupted or sidetracked. Other students remarked that they did not realize how profoundly they cared about an issue or why until they had spoken at some length about it and that this realization made them even more inspired to work on their upcoming projects.

As follow-up homework, I asked students to visit the websites that they were analyzing for their rhetorical analysis papers and to “listen deeply” to what was being said about the cause or issue they were examining, specifically looking at what unmet needs these websites were trying to address. Additionally, I asked them to “listen” to those directly affected by their issue and connect with the feelings and needs of the people affected, and then to reflect upon that before responding to a prompt that they would turn in for homework. This part of the exercise brought students back to their issues and the specific assignment they were drafting, serving to extend their awareness as reflected in their rhetorical analysis papers, as well as prompting them to approach the ongoing research process for their issues in light of this understanding.

Walking students through the process of deep listening and giving them tools to both experience and express empathy allowed students the opportunity to enact Booth’s “Listening Rhetoric” in concrete, actionable ways that applied directly to their writing and rhetorical choices. Instead of simply asking students to “pursue the truths behind . . . differences,” these exercises demonstrate techniques to actually accomplish this aim. After deeply listening to each other in class, students also used NVC as a tool for developing empathy for the people involved in the issues they were researching. This preparation encouraged students to develop more clarity about their commitment to their chosen issues and articulate why they cared so much. It also helped them gain greater connection to the consequences of these issues upon the populations they were attempting to serve. Interjecting deep listening, empathy, and NVC practices at this point in the composing process encouraged students to expand the depth of their understanding and helped direct them toward more ethical and effective arguments for the research portion of their projects. I hoped that by asking students to listen with a “stance of openness,” it would lead to greater understanding of their issues, where “*understanding* means listening to discourses not *for* intent but *with* intent” (Ratcliffe 25, 28). Engaging in embodied practices of mindfulness, listening, and empathy at the invention stage furthered students’ abilities for greater awareness of their subjects that went beyond conventional intellectualized knowing. By connecting empathetically to their topics and those served by them, students were able to gain a different type of awareness of their subjects, enacting the kind of awareness-based, ethical, rhetorical stance that creates the “necessary linkage between assertion and compassion” suggested by Mathieu (18). Engaging in deep listening and empathy as invention work gave students an ethically grounded position from which to begin their research and afforded them insights through which to form arguments grounded in embodied awareness and connection across difference.

Mindfulness, Audience, and Invention

Further along in the drafting process, after an extended annotated bibliography but before the first logoi-based argument paper, I introduced instruction on mindfulness,

connecting that practice with the work students were doing on their issues. For homework, students visited a site to read an article entitled “What is Mindfulness?” and watch two embedded videos by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Also for homework, they downloaded a chapter by Steven Hayes from the book *A Year of Living Mindfully: 52 Quotes and Weekly Mindfulness Practices*. Hayes’ chapter details the experience of being mindful of one’s self and how that can extend to greater awareness of another’s experience. He foregrounds the practice with a short anecdote of a strong feeling of connection and empathy that he had with an older woman he saw struggling with her physical limitations at a grocery store. He further describes the moment when he, in tears, made eye contact with her and experienced their common humanity, realizing, “There is no way to open up fully to our own experiences, our joys and sorrows, without opening to the joy and pain of others” (19). This story is followed by an exercise that asks the practitioner to become aware of his or her own environment in a mindful, conscious way but then to expand that awareness outward so that practitioners see themselves from a different spatial perspective, then from a different point in time, and then through the eyes of another person, all the while staying aware of the breath and body sensations that arise during these shifts in perspective. After these homework exercises, students responded to a discussion-board prompt that asked them to explain their understanding of mindfulness and to reflect upon the practice outlined in the chapter by Hayes after trying it for themselves.

With this preparation completed, students came to class, where we walked through a mindfulness exercise based upon the instruction in the Hayes’ chapter but adapted for application to the composing process we were engaging in our course. The practice began with mindful focus on sitting and breathing, noting bodily sensations, and becoming aware of one’s self within the environment. The next step, which repeated the instructions by Hayes, asked students to alter their awareness to a distant point in the room and note the environment from a different perspective before shifting back into one’s own position and experience again. After this, we shifted to envisioning a wiser, future self, looking back at the self sitting in the room, “as if looking back at yourself through time” with compassion and openness (Hayes 20). From this point onward, my directions diverged from the original as I asked students to bring to mind an awareness of their issue and those affected by it. At this point in the semester, they had developed greater depth of knowledge about these issues through their research, so when I asked students to “connect with a real or theoretical person who is affected by this issue . . . [and imagine] . . . the thoughts, feelings, emotions, or sensations they might experience in their day to day lives,” they reported finding it relatively easy to do so. Later in their post-practice reflections, many students wrote about the deeply moving emotional connection they felt during this part of the exercise, one that carried over into the motivation and calls to action they later incorporated into their papers. For the sake of the exercise, though, students were asked to return again to their own perceptions and experience of sitting mindfully in the room, focusing on their breathing and body.

To extend this practice in directions that might be more challenging, I then asked students to alter their perceptions again, only this time to imagined potential audiences who either did not know, or did not care, about their issue. What thoughts, feelings, emotions, or sensations might these audience members experience that prevent them from caring or acting upon this issue? Is it a lack of knowledge or understanding? Or a

different way of viewing the issue? I asked students to imagine being in the position of an audience like this and to see their perspective for a moment, hold that awareness, and then return back to the awareness of their own selves and breathing. Students sat this way for a few more minutes, mindfully breathing in an embodied attention on their own position in the room, before silently opening their laptops and responding to a writing prompt about their experiences.

While many students reported finding it both moving and easy to connect with people affected by their cause, they had more difficulty reaching across differences in ideologies and attitude to connect with potential audiences who either did not know or care about their issues. In some cases, students realized that the disconnect between their own deep caring about their issue and a potentially apathetic audience member had more to do with misunderstanding or a lack of education, in which case they could adapt their rhetorical stance to include a “no-fault” position for those who simply did not know or understand this issue. For these students, connecting with uninformed audiences gave them greater insight into how to reach these populations and to inspire them to care, which was very helpful at the invention stage of their argument papers. However, for the students who tried to connect with audience members who were truly apathetic or dismissive of their issues, students tended to report anger and hostility. How could anyone be callous enough to not care about something as important as childhood poverty, mental health stigmas, or polluted water supplies? In these cases, students had a difficult time imagining strategies to connect with these audiences, though it did help them recognize that there were those who might not be persuaded to care or act, regardless of the rhetorical skill they applied to promote their issues. Some students were able to connect with apathetic audiences on a different level, though, and reported finding the experience humbling or even grounding. They recognized that they had not genuinely considered that people might have other very divergent ideas of these issues than they did, but by trying to mindfully connect, they gained deeper insight into what motivated people to see the issues in a different light.

A few days later, students were asked to reflect back on the mindfulness exercises again, especially in the ways that these perspectives might have altered the way that they viewed both those affected by their topics, as well as the different types of audiences they would like to reach. With some time to reflect and work toward a draft of their paper, students reported a much deeper understanding of difficult-to-reach audiences than they had initially held during the short reflection immediately after the practice in class. I was impressed with the level of engagement students demonstrated in their reflections, many of whom talked about gaining a greater sense of understanding and empathy for people who did not know, care, or act upon the causes they were researching and how this awareness had allowed them to expand their rhetorical approaches to be more inclusive as they began drafting. Even students who initially expressed anger or outrage at audiences who might be apathetic or unsympathetic had largely tempered these responses and committed to at least making an attempt to reach these audience members in ways that would not result in alienation. While the students’ foray into mindfulness, deep listening, and empathy were limited to the time we had in class to devote to these practices, the exercises were successful in helping students cultivate greater understanding of

their issues, as well as allowing them an expanded perspective from which to connect with potential audiences.

Conclusions and Implications

Employing deep listening, empathy, NVC, and mindfulness as invention practices positively affected the ethical stance, rhetorical strategies, and audience awareness for the students in “Writing as Social Action.” While these strategies were not the only ones enlisted to promote deeper thinking about students’ research and composing, they did support the type of awareness and connection that I hoped to inspire in a course founded upon Jesuit principles and the practice of *eloquentia perfecta*. Students came away with rhetorical skills that were grounded in ethics and compassion, as well as tools that could be used in other situations where greater understanding was needed in order to enact mutually beneficial solutions or connect with diverse audiences. While more research is certainly needed, instructors of writing and rhetoric should consider adopting pedagogies rooted in embodied, mindful awareness. These practices can lead to deeper listening, nuanced understanding, and more ethically rooted rhetorical stances for the students we hope to inspire toward civically engaged arguments.

While deep listening has the potential to work as an effective invention strategy for creating effective arguments, we should also not discount the other values of listening mindfully. Discussions by Booth, Ratcliffe, Ong, Casaregola, and others point to the inherent human need to be heard, acknowledged, and understood. In Rosenberg’s Non-violent Communication model, these qualities are viewed as universal human needs, values that all human beings hold to some degree or another. By learning to listen—really listen—we fulfill a basic human drive to communicate, hear one another, and be understood. These qualities enrich the lives of those on both the giving and receiving end of a reciprocally beneficial dynamic where listening to understand and be present supersedes a desire to master, outwit, or rebut the words of a speaker. This change in stance does not mean that we should forego all arguments, but rather that we should listen to hear as the first priority, with a desire for empathy for another’s perception, so that when we *do* create arguments, they may serve others as well as ourselves and have the potential to reach wider, more diverse audiences.

Perhaps there was a time when eristic rhetoric, “to win at all costs, whether honorable or dishonorable” was the most productive means to cultural and physical survival (Booth 43), and perhaps in those times invention work that relied upon “finding all of the available means of persuasion” was the best way to go about meeting those ends (Aristotle). However, to meet the needs of any given age, rhetorical practices must change with the times to address the exigencies of current situations. Given the global interconnectedness of our contemporary world and the potential dire consequences for conflict and violence, the way rhetorical invention is approached needs to change. As global crises affect wider ranges of people, new invention techniques should be explored to create arguments based in compassion and connection, rather than competition and domination. By giving students concrete invention skills that promote deep listening, mindfulness, and empathy, they can become more compassionate and engaged rhetors as they learn to connect purpose and audience across difference. These skills, rooted in

the exigencies of an interdependent yet endangered world, may prepare our future citizens with the rhetorical means necessary to create ethical arguments based on inclusion, compassion, and safety, promoting a future where rhetors deeply listen before they speak.



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