

## Essential Activities - Practice Mentality

Reading Time: 5-7 minutes

In advocating for [ecosocial literacy](#) as a foundational organizing principle in classrooms, schools, homes and institutions, we aim to broaden and deepen the principles, practices and mindsets, and importantly, the possibilities, that educators and facilitators can draw upon to become active participants in manifesting a more peaceful, harmonious, just and sustainable world and mentoring an entire generation of ecosocially literate humans. Every educator, parent and mentor has their own unique situation, yet within those situations, each of us can find small steps we can take in alignment with our vision of a more eco-socially just and harmonious world.

In “Foundations of Ecosocial Literacy” we briefly discussed the four foundational ideas or thoughts summarized as follows:

- ▶ Adopt an *enriched view of human beings*
- ▶ Recognize that outer change begins with *inner transformation*
- ▶ Develop our *non-cognitive ways of knowing*
- ▶ Incorporate and honor our *contemplative and reflective lineages*

Keeping in mind these four foundational thoughts, we draw upon eight essential activities or mindsets that we aspire to include in our everyday language, lessons, curricula and conversations. At all times, we’re looking for ways to engage activities that will illuminate and explore these following eight ideas.

### **Eight Essential Activities**

1. The Importance of Language & Human Stories
2. Reverence (Pointing to a Universal Set of Values)
3. Self-Reflection, Introspection, Inquiry (Contemplative Education)
4. Disorienting Dilemmas (Exposure to Different Worldviews)
5. Practice Mentality (Small Consistent Steps with Intention)
6. Appreciative Inquiry as a Method of Non-force Based Change
7. Creativity and Creative Recovery Practices
8. Cultivating the Eight Intrinsic Attributes of Ecosocial Leadership

These eight activities or mindsets are not separate; rather, they are interconnected at many different levels. Often, to engage one means to engage others. But each one points to a particular facet of our orientation and world view that we manifest in different ways and in different circumstances.

### **Practice Mentality** (Small Consistent Steps with Intention)

*“Continuity of practice is the key to success.”* — S.N. Goenka

Cultivating a practice mentality means that we recognize, accept and embrace the importance of small, consistent steps in creating large, sustainable change. This aligns with

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cosmic principles and also the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. When we include our awareness of non-conceptual knowing and wisdom, we fold our intention into the small steps we honor and act upon.

Practice, similar to a custom, ritual or habit, is something we do in an on-going way and usually involves a relatively simple activity or routine. Over time, however, the intentional, mindful and periodic return to the same thing again and again allows a depth to emerge that wouldn't typically occur if the activity is only done a few times or for a brief period. In our case, it's not the same as practicing math problems or second language vocabulary or social studies facts. In those activities, once we learn something specific (often indicated by some measured assessment), we progress to a different topic or level. Ostensibly, at some point we will have reached our target and we stop the practice altogether.

However we're cultivating practices that are generally non-conceptual and experiential in nature. We don't conceptualize some "end point". We might say something like, "the more you listen, the more there is to hear." Even though we may try to describe our experience in words, the heart of the practices are non-cognitive, internal and contemplative or reflective. As non-conceptual, reflective routines, what we experience isn't always easily translated into words. With perseverance and consistent intention, our experience deepens over time — we might also say it transforms. The intention we adopt is that of patiently looking, seeking or listening within. It's as if we're searching for something inside ourselves that has previously been hidden. This often manifests as an untranslatable depth in our experience. Any so-called "results" of the practices are only seen or felt internally by the practitioner and may not always manifest in an obvious or external way.

An easy example to understand is the daily practice of gratitude. As noted previously, gratitude is a felt sense. While we may use a journal to write down our gratitudes, the writing isn't the point. The actual practice is to internally feel and experience the state of gratitude. We explore our physiology when we're in a state of gratitude, we reflect on the things or beings that invoke that state and we imagine how those things have enriched our lives. We may expand that physiological state to include additional things or others. In other words, if we focus on the words alone, we're not wholeheartedly engaging the practice. Further, we acknowledge and appreciate that the way in which the practice unfolds each time we participate in the ritual is different and is different for each person who does the practice.

As we come to understand all this, we don't necessarily engage in our practices to "get something" or to "accomplish" something specific, tangible, measurable or immediate. We trust our human capacity to self-reflect, contemplate or inquire and we trust the routine or practice itself to lead us towards a deeper self-awareness and understanding. We honor that the process isn't linear or necessarily predictable and will unfold differently for each individual. It's the patient process that is important. We might compare it to playing or listening to music. We don't engage in music to get to the end of the song. It is something we do for the experience and process of playing or listening itself and is different for each person. Further, we recognize that it's not our place to judge how it will turn out or try to mastermind and

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control the outcome. We take small steps diligently and wholeheartedly (the practice), and then “spring comes and the grass grows by itself”.<sup>[1]</sup>

We also recognize that deeper understanding, insight or self-awareness doesn't happen by itself by wishful thinking. Our responsibility is to trust the process and engage the practices or routines whole-heartedly. Whether the practice is journaling our gratitudes each day, reflection with specific journal prompts, becoming aware of the sensations of our emotions, or dialoguing reverently with peers, we give ourselves wholeheartedly to the process.

This practice perspective aligns with the same cosmic principles that have given rise to galaxies, hummingbirds, blues whales and grand canyons. While on rare occasions significant disruptions do occur relatively quickly, (supernovae, collisions with asteroids or comets) the evolution of the universe (and of Earth) has happened slowly and imperceptibly. Over much time, wind and water carve beautiful canyons. Small steps, taken consistently, produce large change. In our case, that change is a deepened self-awareness, insight, a transformed world view, and a germinating commitment to the practices themselves.

There is a particular kind of patience involved in this perspective. We act in good faith even though we may not see the results of our actions. This goes counter to our modern society, where we expect instant results and have a hard time even waiting in line. But as we develop our practice mentality, it dawns on us that, in many ways, we're acting for others, even for future generations. We begin to adopt the mentality of an extended or “[long now](#)” and we learn to rest with not knowing the outcome. Over time, this creates what we might call a “practice environment” where we're each given the space and encouragement to progress in our journey at our own pace, without judgment.

### *Notes*

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[1]“Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes and the grass grows by itself.” - Haiku by Matsuo Bashō, 1644-1694]