Mindfulness in the Classroom

An Overview for Educators

Programs for Mindful Living
3343 East Calhoun Parkway
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Programs for Mindful Living

Programs for Mindful Living is a 501(c)(3) secular non-profit organization located in the Twin Cities area (3343 East Calhoun Parkway, Minneapolis 55408). Teaching mindfulness-based techniques to students and teachers has proven to be exponentially more effective when it is based on long-term personal practice. Founding members of Programs for Mindful Living are priests and staff at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center (MZMC) who have extensive experience in teaching mindfulness-based ways of being in the world to children, adolescents, and adults. During their training, each priest, whom we prefer to call a meditation teacher, has undergone 5 – 7 years of education in mindfulness-based activities before they became eligible to be called an independent meditation teacher. This founding team provides training and guidance for all of the teachers who participate in Programs for Mindful Living activities.

Established in 1972, the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit religious organization. In order to expand its outreach activities, MZMC created the secular Programs for Mindful Living in 2015 in order to be able to apply for grants to support these outreach activities. At present, the activities of Programs for Mindful Living are concentrated in three areas: mindfulness in the classroom, mindfulness in elder care, and mindfulness in the corporate and business world. A background document similar to this one has been prepared for the mindfulness in elder care focus and is available upon request.

Programs for Mindful Living encourages teachers and administrators at all levels of education (K – 12 and higher education, and more broadly "anyone who teaches anything") to contact us at (612) 822-5313 to arrange a meeting to discuss programs for mindful living suited to your teaching focus and/or to discuss our present and past activities as mindfulness-based teachers.
Table of Contents

1. Mindfulness, Health, and Happiness

2. Mindfulness in the Classroom
   • Introduction
   • How It Helps Students
   • How It Helps Educators

3. Sample Mindfulness-Based Activities for Students, Teachers, and Parents
   • Introduction
   • For Students
   • For Teachers
   • For Parents

4. Potential Funding Sources

5. Supplemental Resources
   • Books: Mindfulness for Students
   • Books: Mindfulness for Educators
   • Articles: Mindfulness for Students and Educators (Overviews)
   • Books: Mindfulness for Parents
   • Books: Mindfulness Practices in General
   • Web Sites: Mindfulness for Students and Educators
   • Mindfulness Apps
   • Mindfulness Organizations, Programs, and Research Centers

6. References Cited in the Text
1. Mindfulness, Health, and Happiness

People everywhere are suffering from mental and emotional stress, physical pain, disease and dis-ease and the suffering seems to begin at younger and younger ages. Not long ago the onset of major clinical depression usually came about in a person in their fifty’s or sixty’s. Increasingly we are seeing it in teenagers and even pre-teens. Studies show that depression has been occurring at progressively younger ages since the early part of the twentieth century and today it is a problem of epidemic proportions. Nobody understands why and consequently we have no map to recovery.

What is needed is nothing less than a profound shift in consciousness. When one realizes that a thought is just a thought rather than a truth, a shift occurs. This is the onset of a new understanding and appreciation of one’s own mind. A new perspective opens up and with it comes new possibilities and potentials. This in itself is healing.

To help us visualize the possible impact of perceiving reality in a new and open way Jon Kabat-Zinn uses this analogy: if you put two polarized filters together light is blocked. But if you rotate one of the filters by 90 degrees light streams in. Different perspectives, when held in a steady state of mindful awareness, can give rise to a rotation of consciousness. New degrees of freedom and possibilities open up.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is both a process and an outcome. We learn how to be mindful by doing it. The only proven process is a regular mindful meditation practice, a systematic practice of attending in an open, caring, non-judgmental, and discerning way which gives rise to a capacity to sustain a state of abiding presence. This deep knowing is mindfulness. It manifests as a freedom of mind, freedom from deeply ingrained, conditioned thought patterns and ways of perceiving and responding to the world.
Mindfulness is not an exotic or lofty state. It is a natural human capacity to inhabit one's body, mind, and experience with openness and receptivity. It allows one to see beyond her or his fear, anger, and desire for things to be different. Mindfulness practice is the practice of clear-seeing. It is about wiping the dust from one's lens of perception so we can see the world as it actually is.

Across cultures, our ancestors have used meditation practices that produce deep relaxation and mindful awareness for thousands of years—to heal, to foster positive feelings, and, to cultivate positive emotional states. Our thoughts and emotions influence every aspect of who we are. Learning to be mindful of one’s thoughts is a key to mental and emotional health.

Today progressive scientists are trying to understand how mindfulness practices actually work. Magnetic resonance imaging technology (MRI) has given us empirical data showing that we do have the ability to choose the thoughts and emotional reactions that define us. But first, we have to become mindful of our thoughts *as they arise*. Being mindful of our thoughts “as they arise” is an important point to emphasize because the possibility of a shift in consciousness abides: what comes later is regret and we all know that regret is not an affective way of changing behavior.

Below are two studies. The most astounding data that came from these studies is how quickly we can change our way of perceiving and responding to the world through mindfulness.

*An Eight-Week Study:*

This study involved sixteen participants. Before the study began, each participant had a brain MRI scan taken and responded to a questionnaire. Along with weekly meetings that included mindfulness meditation, participants practiced guided meditation at home using recordings for an average of thirty minutes each day.
After eight weeks, a second MRI and questionnaire confirmed positive changes. The MRI showed increased density in the hippocampus, which is important for learning and memory, and in other parts of the brain associated with self-awareness, compassion, and introspection. The participants reported reductions in stress, which correlated with decreased density in the amygdala, an area of the brain associated with anxiety and stress. In other words, their quality of life soared after only eight weeks of mindfulness training.

*A One-Day Study:*

This study investigated the effects of just one day of intensive mindfulness practice in a group of experienced meditators. They were compared to a group of untrained control subjects who engaged in quiet, non-meditative activities.

As in the previous study, MRI’s were taken before and after the eight-hour day. The meditators showed a range of genetic and molecular differences, including levels of gene-regulation and reduced levels of pro-inflammatory genes, which means faster physical recovery from stressful situations.

“To the best of our knowledge, this is the first paper that shows rapid alterations in gene expression within subjects associated with mindfulness meditation practice,” said study author Richard Davidson, who is a psychologist and neuroscientist and the founder of the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**Mindfulness and the Capacity for Happiness**

There have also been studies to investigate how mindfulness cultivates the inner conditions for true happiness. In any discussion about happiness it is important to distinguish between hedonic happiness, which is about pleasure-seeking, and eudemonic happiness, which is an abiding happiness that arises from a healthy state of mind. These two types of happiness are not new. Philosophers and spiritual leaders have been pointing out the difference for centuries.
Recently, it was discovered how these two types of happiness actually affect our physical health. Barbara L. Fredrickson of the University of North Carolina and her team looked at the biological influence of hedonic and eudemonic happiness on a molecular level. They wanted to know if the two kinds of happiness had an effect at the level of our genes.

Dr. Fredrickson discovered that while both offer a feeling of satisfaction, hedonic and eudaimonic happiness are experienced very differently within our immune cells. Hedonic pleasures are associated with an increased expression of genes involved in inflammation. This increase is responsible for inflammatory diseases such as arthritis and heart disease. And eudemonic pleasures are associated with a decrease in the expression of these genes.

Summing up her discovery, Dr. Fredrickson said, “We can make ourselves happy through simple pleasures, but those ‘empty calories’ don’t help us broaden our awareness or build our capacity in ways that benefit us physically. At the cellular level, our bodies appear to respond better to a different kind of well-being, one based on a sense of connectedness and purpose.”

Abiding happiness, which arises naturally from mindful awareness, is about finding one’s purpose in life and cultivating the capacity to move toward it. It does not break down under the pressures of life, disharmonies, and sufferings of life. Eudemonic happiness is not possible without the capacity to sustain mindful awareness.

Mindfulness Training in a Palliative Care Setting

Between 2008 and 2009 an independent research psychologist interviewed sixty-six hospice patients with advanced cancer who underwent twelve weeks of mindfulness training. Initially, the participants were surprised by the emphasis on learning new ways of being in the world. At a point in their life where they felt helpless, useless, and beyond hope, they were being presented with a challenging invitation to engage actively and radically with their experience.
Fifty-two of the participants reported that where they had felt helpless and ashamed in the face of their fragility, they now used breathing exercises as a coping tool and were better able to manage their moods. After mindfulness training they reported that they were aware, present, and able to respond to their daily struggles, both physically and emotionally. Overall, within themes ranging from mood management to openness and acceptance most of the participants reported heightened feelings of well-being and a greater focus and appreciation of the present. Some gained a more holistic sense of themselves. A majority of the participants felt a turning toward their experience and more connected to their physical and emotional states.

**Parallel Mindfulness Training for Parents and Children with Attention/Impulsivity Problems**

Concomitant parent and child mindfulness training appears to be a promising approach for adolescents with a range of disorders including attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, oppositional-defiant and/or conduct disorder, and autism spectrum disorder. The overlap between these three disorders may be partially explained by common underlying attention and behavior control deficits. In 2008, fourteen clinically referred adolescents suffering from externalizing disorders underwent eight weeks of mindfulness training. Concurrently, their parents underwent an eight-week program for mindful parenting.

The adolescents self-reported substantial improvement on personal goals, internalizing and externalizing complaints, attention problems, happiness, and mindful awareness, and performed better on a sustained attention test. Likewise, parents reported improvement on their child’s goals, externalizing and attention problems, self-control, attunement to others and withdrawal. In addition, parents improved on their own goals.

**Mindfulness Training for Elementary School Children**

In another study reported in the *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, a formative evaluation of whether participation in mindfulness training could effect first, second, and third grade students' outcomes on measures of
attention. The training was designed to increase the student’s capacity to focus and sustain attention. The 24-week program used a series of exercises including awareness of the breath, body scanning, and meditative movement activities.

Results using three different measuring parameters revealed significant differences between those who did and did not participate in mindfulness practice training. This formative evaluation resulted in recommendations for future work in this developing field of interest.

**Background Resources:**


2. **Mindfulness in the Classroom**

**Introduction**

Mindfulness-based training in education, which is also referred to as contemplative pedagogy, has proven to greatly improve the education experience and well-being of both students and teachers. This assertion is being increasingly supported by scientific research reported in peer-reviewed journals. For a sampling of this literature, see: Burke 2010, Greenberg and Harris 2012, Huppert and Johnson 2010, Huppert 2014, Jennings et al. 2011 and 2013, Semple et al. 2010, Weare 2013, Zenner et al. 2014, and Zoogman et al. 2014. For general reviews of mindful teaching in the classroom, see Albrecht et al. 2012, Langer 1989 and 1997, McHenry and Brady 2009, Meiklejohn et al. 2012, Miller 1994, O’Reilley 1998, Rechtschaffen 2014 Ritchhart and Perkins 2000,
Rotne and Rotne 2013, and Srinivasan 2014. The introduction of mindfulness-based training in education has been spurred in large part by a growing dissatisfaction with the current state of education in our schools. For a sampling of this literature, see Kessler 2000, Perkins 1992, Rosenberg 2003, and Silberman 1970.

See the Supplemental Resources section for Web sites that focus on mindfulness for students and teachers. These include: Calm Classroom, Calmer Choice, Inner Kids program, Inward Bound Mindfulness Education, Mindfulness in Schools Project, and Mindful Schools. The Supplemental Resources section also contains a list of mindfulness organizations, programs, and research centers that educators should be aware of and look in on.

This section provides an overview of how mindfulness training can help both students and teachers. For additional references and information, see the Supplemental Resources section of this report.

**How It Helps Students**

According to Schoeberlein and Sheth in *Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness* (2009:9), mindful teaching for students:

- Supports “readiness to learn.”
- Promotes academic performance.
- Strengthens attention and concentrations.
- Reduces anxiety before testing.
- Promotes self-reflection and self-calming.
- Improves classroom participation by supporting impulse control.
- Provides tools to reduce stress.
- Enhances social and emotional learning.
- Fosters pro-social behaviors and healthy relationships.
- Supports holistic well-being.

This list of the benefits of mindfulness-based teaching activities is supported and elaborated upon in numerous publications. For a sampling, see: Fontana

**How It Helps Teachers**

On first encounter an educator looking into the promise of mindfulness-based activities in education often assumes that mindfulness in the classroom is aimed solely at students. As the following literature illustrates, a large proportion of the literature is aimed at teachers. Schoeberlein and Sheth also summarize the benefits of mindful teaching for teachers in *Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness* (2009:9):

- Improves focus and awareness.
- Increases responsiveness to students’ needs.
- Promotes emotional balance.
- Supports stress management and stress reduction.
- Supports healthy relationships at work and home.
- Enhances classroom climate.
- Supports overall well-being.


3. **Sample Mindfulness-Based Activities for Students, Teachers, and Parents**

   **Introduction**
Today, there are an ever increasing number of books and organizations that provide activities that train both students and teachers in being mindful. Many of the organizations, such as the Mindfulness in Schools Project and Mindful Schools, provide curricula to follow, videos showing the use of mindfulness in a classroom, and certification in these activities for teachers. The most common ways of introducing mindfulness-based activities in a classroom setting are (from the most effective to the least effective): to train teachers how to use mindfulness techniques in their teaching, to have a mindfulness instructor teach a regular session on mindfulness (let’s say, once a week) throughout a semester or school-year, and to have an outside mindfulness instructor give a special talk on mindfulness once or twice a semester. Given the typical workload of a teacher, it has proven most effective to have a teacher bring in mindful moments within a class session: thus the emphasis on training teachers to teach mindfully. A prerequisite for this avenue of introducing mindfulness in the classroom is a personal mindfulness practice for a teacher.

Besides focusing on mindful education within schools, there is a growing emphasis on teaching parents these skills, too. The intent is to provide students with opportunities for learning to be mindful both inside and outside of school – and there is no better place than within the home.

For Students

Schoeberlein and Sheth in *Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness* provide easy to use instructions for the following mindfulness-based exercises for students: Take 1: Mindful Breathing; Mindful Seeing; Drawing the Mind; Mindful Eating; Noticing Thoughts; Noticing Gaps; Walking with Awareness; Mindful Walking; Mindful Walking – Attending to the Body; Mindful Walking – Developing Awareness with Distraction; Mindful Journaling with Take 1; Journals and Mindful Seeing; Kindness Reflections; and Mindful Speech.

**For Teachers**

Schoeberlein and Sheth in *Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness* also provide easy to use strategies for becoming both a mindful teacher and a teacher who teaches mindfulness to students in order to improve their educational experience and personal well-being. The strategies for teachers are: Take 5: Mindful Breathing; Noticing Thoughts; Noticing Feelings; Kindness Reflections’ Kindness Reflection for Loved Ones; Analytical Meditation on Satisfaction; and Short Reflection on the Day. These strategies are interspersed in the book with strategies for teaching mindfulness to students (as mentioned above), which makes the book especially attractive to teachers intent on becoming a mindful teacher and a teacher of mindfulness to students. Take 5: Mindful Breathing is, for example, a basic meditation exercise that starts a teacher on the path to becoming mindful.

The chapters in Patricia Jennings’ *Mindfulness for Teachers: Simple Skills for Peace and Productivity in the Classroom* illustrate in an easy to understand way the benefits of mindful teaching. Starting with Chapter 2, the chapters are: (2) The Emotional Art of Teaching, (3) Understanding Your Negative Emotions, (4) The Power of Positivity, (5) The Heart of Teaching, (6) Orchestrating Classroom Dynamics, and (7) Mindfulness and School Transformation. As an example, here are the subsections in Chapter 6: Classroom Dynamics: Emotional Climate, Reducing Noise, Arranging Students and Furniture, Transitions, Mindful Communication, Building a Community of Learners, Building Good Relationships, Rules and Procedures, Conflict Resolution, Mindful Wait Time (creating mindful pauses throughout the day), Dynamic Instruction (a classroom management theory), Responding to Challenging Behavior, (e.g.,
nonjudgmental awareness, reasons for misbehavior, temperament, consequences versus punishment, and unmet emotional needs: assessing the motive behind the behavior), Skill-Building Practices (e.g., practicing with-it-ness and mindful wait time), and Introducing Mindfulness to Students (mindful listening, mindful walking, mindful eating, and bell activity to promote mindful awareness). The first chapter in the book asks, of course, “What is Mindfulness?”

There is an extensive resources section at the back of Jennings’ book. The book also offers practical applications for classroom life that will enhance your experience as an educator. Jennings’ book is a highly recommended resource for teachers contemplating becoming a mindful teacher.

For Parents


4. Potential Funding Sources

5. Supplemental Resources

The Garrison Institute website (http://garrisoninstitute.org) and Mindful Magazine (www.mindful.org) contain many references to mindfulness in general and in education, with links to many mindfulness resources. Also see the extensive resource section in P. Jennings (2015).

Books: Mindfulness for Students


**Books and Audios: Mindfulness for Teachers**


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**Articles: Mindfulness for Students and Teachers (Overviews)**


Books: Mindfulness for Parents


**Books and Audios: Mindfulness Practices in General**


Web Sites: Mindfulness for Students and Teachers

Calm Classroom, Chicago, L: http://calmclassroom.com
Calmer Choice, Cotuit, MA: http://calmerchoice.org
Inward Bound Mindfulness Education. http://www.ibme.info
Mindful Schools, Program and Teacher Training. http://www.mindfulschools.org
www.mindfuleducation.com (Daniel Rechtschaffen)

Other Web Sites of Interest

Hawn Foundation, MindUP Program. http://www.thehwnfoundation.org/min
Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). http://www.mbcct.com
Still Quiet Place. http://www.stillquietplace.com

Mindfulness Apps

Insight Timer: https://insighttimer.com
The Mindfulness App: http://www.mindapps.se/?lang=en
Mindfulness Daily: http://mindfulnessdailyapp.com
Mindfulness Meditation App: http://mentalworkout.com/store/grams/mindfulness-meditation

Mindfulness Organizations, Programs, and Research Centers
(Descriptions of organizations, programs, and centers are taken from their Web sites)

Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education. The site provides event announcements, syllabi, information about trainings in contemplative pedagogy, and resources including research and teaching tools. The Association is a subgroup of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society.

Association for Mindfulness in Education (AME): http://mindfuleducation.org

Center for the Advancement of Contemplative Education at Naropa University. The center aims to provide both local services and to contribute to the larger field of Contemplative Pedagogy. The center has a particular emphasis on cultural diversity and civic engagement.

Center for Contemplative Mind in Society http://www.contemplativemind.org

Center for Teaching, Mindfulness in the Classroom at Vanderbilt University.

The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (Stanford). http://www.ccare.stanford.edu

The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society. http://www.umassmed.edu/content.aspx?id=41252
Contemplative Studies Initiative at Brown University. The initiative includes faculty from a variety of disciplines who share a common interest in the contemplative experience.

Education as Transformation is an international organization that works with colleges, universities, K-12 schools and related institutions to explore the impact of religious diversity on education and the role of spirituality in educational institutions.

Garrison Institute. The institute explores the intersection of contemplation and engaged action in the world. Founded in 2003, its mission is to apply the transformative power of contemplation to today’s pressing social and environmental concerns, helping build a more compassionate, resilient future. They have a special initiative in Contemplation and Education.

Greater Good (UC Berkeley). http://greatergood.berkeley.edu


Mindful Schools. http://www.mindfulschools.org

Mindfulness Awareness Research Center (UCLA Semel Institute). http://marc.ucla.edu

Mindfulness in Education Network. The network was created to facilitate communication among all educators, parents, students and any others interested in promoting contemplative practice (mindfulness) in educational settings. The website has numerous relevant resources and articles.


6. References Cited in the Text


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(comments invited)

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