



A Short Introduction to Mindfulness for Educators, Students and Clinicians

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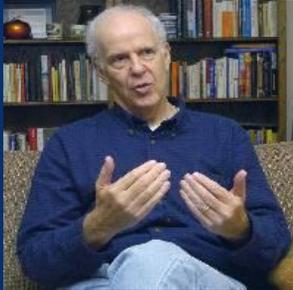
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“From grade school on, education is a fearful enterprise

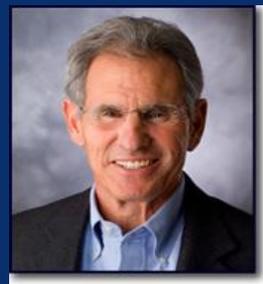
Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, p. 36



- As a student, I was in too many classrooms riddled with fear, the fear that leads children, born with a love of learning, to hate the idea of school. As a teacher, I am at my worst when fear takes the lead in me, whether that means teaching in fear of my students or manipulating their fears of me.”

What is mindfulness?

- “Mindfulness means moment-to-moment nonjudgmental awareness. It is cultivated by refining our capacity to pay attention, intentionally and in the present moment, and then sustaining that attention over time as best we can. In the process, we become more in touch with life as it unfolds.”



Jon Kabat-Zinn (2011, p. 231)

Therapeutic effects of mindfulness meditation

- Effective in reducing anxiety, depression, panic symptoms, mood disturbances, chronic pain, and stress. (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Minor et al., 2006; Teasdale, et al., 2000)
- Reductions were maintained in 3-month & 3-year follow-ups. (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Miller et al, 1995)
- Mindfulness training resulted in improved immune function, even in patients with HIV. (Siegel, 2011)
- Mindfulness has been shown to be effective in treating conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, borderline personality disorder, and drug addiction. (Siegel, 2011)

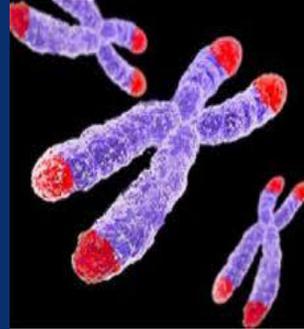
Neuroplasticity & Meditation

- Long-term meditation practice is associated with structural difference in the lower brain stem and the left forebrain compared with controls. (Vestergaard-Poulsen, P, et al., 2009)
- Left frontal activity of the brain is enhanced following 8 weeks of MBSR training. (Siegel, 2011)
- This “left shift” leads to emotional resilience and an “approach state” in which people move toward, rather than away from, challenges. (Siegel, 2011)

Meditation & Cellular Aging

- Telomeres are protective caps at the end of chromosomes.
- Chronic stress and depression degrade telomeres.
- Meditation may protect telomeres and promote cell longevity.

Epel, E., et al. (2009)



How does mindfulness meditation reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain?

- Mindfulness leads to
 - behavior that is less avoidant & less reactive,
 - greater awareness of and less entanglement in thoughts and feelings, and
 - a sense of calm, stability, & presence. (Siegel, 2011)
- Mindfulness can be a mental health practice free of spiritual connections, or it can be at the heart of a spiritual path.

Attitudinal Pillars of Mindfulness



- **Presence**
- “Our true home is not in the past. Our true home is not in the future. Our true home is in the here and now.” Thich Nhat Hanh
- **Acceptance without judgment**
- “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.” Carl Rogers
- **Equanimity**
- **Non-attachment**
- **Compassion**
- If you want **others** to be happy, practice compassion. If **you** want to be happy, practice compassion. The Dalai Lama

Lovingkindness Meditation

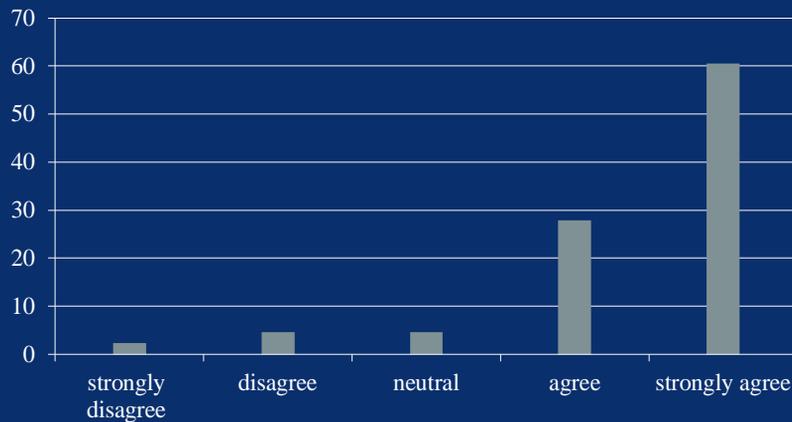
- A 2008 study at the University of Wisconsin found that the practice of lovingkindness meditation trains the brain to make us more empathetic and more capable of reading subtle emotional states. (Lutz et al., 2008)

Body Scan

Teaching mindfulness to students

- On one hand:
 - There are no shortcuts or “techniques” to teaching & learning mindfulness.
 - Teaching mindfulness to students *must* come out of your own mindfulness practice.
- On the other hand:
 - Anyone can learn these skills
 - After becoming familiar with mindfulness through meditation practice, we can, in turn, share the practice with our students.
 - I’ve found that students are very receptive.

% finding in-class mindfulness exercises to be useful. (N = 43)



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