When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom
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“As teachers, we guide and support our students to become independent thinkers. We must teach the whole person, with an intention to go beyond the mere transfer of facts and theories”
(Barbezat & Bush 2014)

“It is the one who does the work who does the learning.”
- Terry Doyle, The New Science of Learning

What is Mindfulness?
Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations.

Where is this in Higher Ed?
“Opening the contemplative mind in schools is not a religious issue... Inviting contemplative study simply includes the natural human capacity for knowing through silence, pondering deeply, beholding, witnessing the contents of consciousness and so forth.” (Hart, 2004)
“Contemplation is... not the emptying of the mind of thoughts but the cultivation of awareness of thoughts within the mind.” (Barbezat & Bush, 2014)

Reflective Learning vs. Contemplative Learning

Reflection/Reflective Learning
is retrospective and/or prospective
involves ill-structured, complex problems

Contemplation/Contemplative Learning
is deliberate
involves emotion
can be meta-cognitive

is focused on the present moment
investigates one’s subjective experience
is non-judgmental

(Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Moon, 2004)
Practical Strategies
Mindfulness & Attention
Stroop Interference Test

- The words themselves have a strong influence over your ability to say the color. The interference between the different information (what the words say and the color of the words) your brain receives causes a problem. There are two theories that may explain the Stroop effect:
  - Speed of Processing Theory: the interference occurs because words are read faster than colors are named.
  - Selective Attention Theory: the interference occurs because naming colors requires more attention than reading words.

### Table 2. Components Proposed to Describe the Mechanisms Through Which Mindfulness Works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Exemplary instructions</th>
<th>Self-reported and experimental behavioral findings</th>
<th>Associated brain areas</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Attention regulation</td>
<td>Sustaining attention on the chosen object; whenever distracted, returning attention to the object</td>
<td>Enhanced performance; executive attention (Attention Network Test and Stroop interference), orienting, alerting, diminished attentional blink effect</td>
<td>Anterior cingulate cortex</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Body awareness</td>
<td>Focus is usually an object of internal experience: sensory experiences of breathing, emotions, or other body sensations</td>
<td>Increased scores on the Observe subscale of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire; narrative self-reports of enhanced body awareness</td>
<td>Insula, temporo-parietal junction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Emotion regulation: reappraisal</td>
<td>Approaching ongoing emotional reactions in a different way (nonjudgmentally, with acceptance)</td>
<td>Increases in positive reappraisal (Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire)</td>
<td>(Dorsal) prefrontal cortex (PFC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Emotion regulation: exposure, extinction, and reconsolidation</td>
<td>Exposing oneself to whatever is present in the field of awareness; letting oneself be affected by it; refraining from internal reactivity</td>
<td>Increases in nonreactivity to inner experiences (Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire)</td>
<td>Vento-medial PFC, hippocampus, amygdala</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Change in perspective on the self</td>
<td>Detachment from identification with a static sense of self</td>
<td>Self-reported changes in self-concept (Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, Temperament and Character Inventory)</td>
<td>Medial PFC, posterior cingulate cortex, insula, temporo-parietal junction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mindfulness & Creativity

Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (alternate uses task)

- Fluency – number of responses
- Originality – comparison across subjects
- Flexibility – number of categories
- Elaboration – detail


Creativity Findings

- “Open-monitoring” meditators show significantly greater originality, fluency and flexibility
- “Open-monitoring” meditation associated with positive affect, which in turn is associated with holistic thinking
What does it look like in class?
How to implement a guided mindful practice in the classroom:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qywQJSboliw

Mindfulness Awareness Practice – 5 Mindful Minutes
- Quiet and intentional (phones of silent/no-vibrate)
- Relaxed, good posture (“lifted from crown of the head”)
- Eyes closed to the extent that you are comfortable
- Focus on body relaxation, breath sensation (“count”)
- Acceptance of distraction as it occurs (“thinking”)
- Re-focus on relaxation, breath-sensation
- Re-focus on relaxation, breath-sensation (reps)

Deep Engagement - Practice

Contemplative Reading (lectio divina)
Increasingly deep “dialogue” with a reading
Current-moment awareness of its features and their effects on the reader

Contemplative Writing
Freewriting without stopping
When you pause and don’t want to write something, that’s the sign it’s potent and must be written.

Guidelines for Contemplative Activities
- Plan a structured exercise but be flexible.
- Allow students their own experience.
- Have a clear pedagogical purpose and communicate that so students understand how it fits into the course.
- Allow students to opt out during any exercise so they feel safe
- Consider allowing students time after an exercise to reflect/write.

How could you incorporate mindful practices in your classroom?
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