

CHAPTER 1

Where Are We Now? Where Are We Going?

Preparing Our Students for an Uncertain Future

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A conundrum in education today is how to prepare our students for the future. This task, which education has always faced, has become a challenge because we can no longer predict what our children's future will hold. Consider this: could you have predicted our lives as they are today even a decade ago? The rate of change has accelerated to the point that we don't really know what to expect. This uncertainty creates an unparalleled level of stress among educators, students, and their parents, triggering a mental health crisis and interfering with learning. It is more evident than ever that we must prioritize resilience and adaptability so we can cope with these rapid social changes. We need to learn ways to calm our anxious nervous systems and tackle change and the challenges that accompany change with mental clarity, emotional calm, and kindness to others—other human beings, animals, and our environment. The growing popularity of mindfulness- and compassion-based practices in schools suggests that many of us are beginning to recognize these practices as potential approaches to cultivate these strengths. This handbook is intended to provide educators with the most current research

and evidence-based practices and approaches to transform our schools with mindfulness and compassion.

Mindfulness and Its Place in 21st-Century Schools

Mindfulness is commonly defined as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145), and is developed through mindful awareness practices, such as meditation and yoga. Continual engagement with mindful awareness practices cultivates a state of mindfulness in one’s everyday life, which involves a greater awareness of one’s inner mental and emotional processes, as well as a deepened contact with the outer world through heightened sensory experiences and greater attunement in interpersonal interactions. The state of mindful awareness has also been described as “open-hearted” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 24), where one is not simply more attentive to life’s experiences, but is also more accepting and nonjudgmental toward the inner and outer happenings of life. Thus, individuals experience a deeper and more caring sense of connection to themselves, others, and the world around them when they bring mindful awareness into their daily lives. Mindfulness has gained increasing popularity in the West over the last 15 years, and research has shown mindfulness-based programs to be beneficial for adults’ psychological health (Khoury et al., 2013), stress management (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009), attentional abilities, and maintaining emotional balance (Sedlmeier et al., 2012).

Considering the attentional and emotional demands of teaching, many mindfulness-based programs have been developed specifically for teachers. Such programs aim to provide teachers with the “habits of mind” (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012, p. 167) to create emotionally supportive learning environments while maintaining their own well-being and motivation to teach. Understanding that teachers are a foundational part of any educational endeavor and also that teachers’ own social and emotional competence is necessary for any student growth in this domain (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), many mindfulness-based educational initiatives have been started by working with teachers. The programs for teachers, highlighted by Cynthia Taylor, Patricia A. Jennings, Alexis Harris, Deborah L. Schussler, and Robert W. Roeser (Chapter 5, this volume), have demonstrated early success in impacting teachers’ well-being and their abilities to manage occupational stressors (Benn, Akiva, Arel, & Roeser, 2012; Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013; Roeser et al., 2013), while also improving the quality of their interactions with students (Jennings et al., 2017) and student engagement (Brown et al., 2017).

Additionally, many scholars have identified how mindfulness can cultivate essential skills for students’ success (Meikelfohn et al., 2012; Mind

and Life Education Research Network, 2012). Helping students pay attention in school, providing them with skills to manage stress and navigate emotional challenges, and learning ways to cooperatively interact with others are some of the primary goals of mindfulness-based programs for students. Many of these programs have also demonstrated success in these areas and are reviewed by Rebecca N. Baelen, Michael V. Exposito, and Brian M. Galla (Chapter 2, this volume). Although interest in mindfulness-based programs for students is rapidly growing, the research on their efficacy and ideal structural components (i.e., program length and format, delivery approach) is still very nascent. Therefore, schools must be deliberate and intentional in implementing such programs to ensure they meet each school's unique culture and needs. Chapter 2 offers some important considerations in regard to this decision-making process.

While the research on mindfulness-based programs for teachers and students is promising yet still burgeoning, there is also a great need for understanding how other educational stakeholders play a role in adopting and implementing mindfulness in schools. Engaging school administrators, mental health workers, and parents will also be vital in making mindfulness initiatives cohesive and sustainable. Therefore, in the current handbook we included the experiences and scholarship of these stakeholders to offer a comprehensive perspective of how mindfulness can be infused into schools.

Compassion

As mentioned earlier, mindfulness involves an awareness and acceptance of internal and external experience. These factors are prerequisites of compassion, defined as “the process of recognizing suffering and the motivation to relieve suffering” (Jennings, 2019, p. 131). First one must recognize the suffering of another by becoming aware and noticing the signs of suffering. These signs can be obvious, such as seeing a student crying, or subtle, such as a student quietly tensing up in anticipation of an unexpected exam. Signs of suffering can also be confusing. For example, often when a person is deeply suffering, he can attempt to hide his condition by acting defiant, angry, or aloof. The awareness cultivated by practicing mindfulness can help us recognize these behaviors as symptoms of suffering, rather than automatically judging them as bad behavior. Next, the openness and non-judgmental acceptance of what is occurring is necessary to attune with the other. If we are judging him, it may be difficult to empathize, to understand how he is feeling and feel *with* him. These initial steps in the cultivation of compassion are critical. However, they are not enough. The next step is to regulate the strong emotions that often accompany empathy. If I feel with his suffering but become overwhelmed by his pain, I won't be able to help him. So, I must also calm the strong feelings that can arise in the face of such suffering and consider what he needs and how I best can help, which may involve creating space for the answer to unfold, rather than a knee-jerk

impulse to “fix.” Finally, I must express my intention to help, which may be simply being present for his suffering and listening. We cannot always solve others’ problems and eliminate their suffering, but our calm, open-hearted, mindful presence can make a huge difference to their healing. In this way, mindfulness can help us build compassion and provide our students with models of compassion.

Compassion is not simply an interpersonal process; it involves an expansion of our sense of connection to others in society. It broadens our connection to the whole of humanity. By recognizing our common humanity, we open our inner circles to include all humans regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, ethnicity, sexual identity and preference, national origin, or religion. It expands further to encompass our care for other species of animals and plants and the whole of life on our planet. Finally, it can expand to include those living things yet unborn, our future generations. In the school setting, compassion is a powerful catalyst for building strong and supportive school communities that are diverse, equitable, and resilient.

School Transformation

We are not merely calling for another educational reform effort. There have been enough failed educational reforms in recent decades that have only resulted in disrupting schools’ abilities to serve the needs of students, while perpetuating many of the educational inequities that plague our schools. What we are calling for is a complete transformation of the educational system. While reforms attempt to improve the condition of an existing system, transformation involves changing the very nature of the system itself. We do not hold that mindfulness and compassion alone are enough to fully transform schools, nor do we claim to possess the blueprint for the transformation we are seeking. However, we do feel that mindfulness and compassion can serve as an essential vision and framework for the transformation we seek.

Just as mindfulness helps us more clearly see and understand our internal processes and their impact on the outer world, mindfulness can also help us collectively see the internal and external workings of our school systems and its impacts on children, adults, and the larger society. Seeing these relationships more clearly, we can then identify what is needed most and respond to the challenges in an intentional and skillful way. Compassion provides the necessary framework for grounding the change in an ethics of care and attending to the needs of the most vulnerable. Mindfulness and compassion also provide the patience and constant critical reflection required to guide the unfolding transformation.

Transformation will likely not result from the continual striving for a “silver bullet” solution to our educational issues, as has been the case with previous educational reforms. When pressured to solve a problem, our egos, anxieties, and perhaps even hurt and anger can prevent us from seeing clearly and responding skillfully. Yet, mindfulness allows us to fully

behold and experience the present moment for all that it brings and helps us see the situation from an entirely new perspective. Such a widening of our viewpoint can allow for a multitude of new connections to be made and brand new possibilities to arise.

While mindfulness orients us to the present moment, we do not simply ignore the past and how it has brought us here. This is particularly important for work in educational systems in which the historical structures and relationships with other systems (cultural, political, economic, etc.) will continue to impact the current state of education. Much of the needed healing and transformational work will have to be informed by our past failures and constantly renewed systems of oppression. By fully inhabiting the present moment, we must also contemplate where the present moment is taking us and keep an eye on the future. Transformation will not occur overnight, so we must consistently align our decisions and actions toward the future we envision.

When we inhabit the present moment with clarity, no longer driven by our past hurts or fears about the future, we create a space for insight, wisdom, creativity, and innovation to arise. Constantly grounded in an ethics of care and understanding of our interdependence, we ensure that our movement is meeting the needs of all and shares a commitment to our shared humanity. Then we begin to generate the personal and collective energy to fuel the transformation, all the while staying open to new insights and voices to inform the movement so that it is responsive to change and does not become stagnant.

The school transformation we are calling for will not be accomplished quickly, easily, or by a single group of educational stakeholders. Transformation will require a sustained and collaborative effort among practitioners working within schools (teachers, administrators, mental health workers, etc.), students, their parents, researchers, policymakers, and even the larger general public who shape schools through their political decisions. Schools operate as systems with numerous interrelated and interdependent elements. All parts, both human and inanimate (i.e., physical spaces and resources), work together and influence one another, such that all must contribute to the comprehensive, cohesive, and sustainable transformation we advocate. Not only must all stakeholders' perspectives and experiences be valued and infused into the work of transformation, but a broader understanding of systems is also needed to plan for both the bottom-up and top-down work needed to create a full transformation.

Understanding the need for a collaborative and cohesive effort, we have assembled as many different perspectives as possible and made the content accessible to all who are looking to contribute to this transformation. We have gathered the authentic voices and experiences of various educational stakeholders to contribute to this work by highlighting successes, learning from past failures, and creating a vision for what is possible with continued commitment to mindfulness and compassion in schools.

Important Considerations

Meta-analyses examining data from numerous studies have found that mindfulness-based programs for students and teachers show promise for improving well-being (Carsley, Khoury, & Heath, 2018; Klingbeil et al., 2017; Klingbeil & Renshaw, 2018; Rawana, Diplock, & Chan, 2018; Zoogman, Goldberg, Hoyt, & Miller, 2015). However, research involving adults has occasionally found increases in psychological distress as a result of participation in MBIs (Van Dam et al., 2018). Among healthy adults, this may be a transitory effect as participants become more aware of emotions resulting in increased perceived stress (Hayes & Feldman, 2004). More research is required to determine the best approach for at-risk populations. To be on the safe side, educators should proceed with caution and consideration for individuals with trauma and other mental health issues (see Jennings, 2019, for specific recommendations). This volume offers years of collective wisdom regarding how to successfully introduce mindfulness and compassion practices in schools settings. Two important considerations: (1) educators must cultivate their own mindfulness and compassion first before introducing activities to students, and (2) practices should be presented as invitational and program participants should be allowed to opt out of activities if they so choose.

Overview of This Volume

In Chapter 2, Rebecca N. Baelen, Michael V. Esposito, and Brian M. Galla review the most rigorous research to date on mindfulness programs for PreK–12 students. They first provide an overview of the various ways that programs have been structured and delivered in schools, including detailed descriptions of some of the most widely used and evidenced-based programs. Then they summarize the current body of research on these programs and evaluate the strength of the evidence on the impact of mindfulness programs on students' mental health and psychological well-being, self-regulation, physical health, and academic functioning. The authors then provide some lessons learned from the research and recommendations for educators, administrators, and policymakers interested in implementing mindfulness programs in schools. Also included in the chapter is a case study of the implementation process of one mindfulness program and the insights gained from the various successes and challenges experienced in different school contexts.

This chapter is followed by a case study (Appendix 2.1) about the integration of mindfulness at the International School of Geneva. Edmundo Timm, the mindfulness coordinator and drama teacher, shares his experience coordinating and implementing mindfulness programs and innovative initiatives at the secondary school. He describes the mixed student perceptions that

were encountered in delivering a mindfulness-based program to adolescents, and how important it is to be flexible, creative, and responsive in order to successfully share the benefits of mindfulness with students.

In Chapter 3, Pamela Seigle, Chip Wood, and Lisa Sankowski share how mindful awareness and compassionate practices can be thoughtfully integrated into the work of the adult community in schools. They emphasize the importance of creating school cultures based on relational trust, and outline the components for a healthy school community (the four R's): respectful relationships, space for reflection, models of resilience, and time for renewal. They propose that listening to self and others is "the indispensable foundational skill" for adults to effectively engage in the four R's. The authors describe several practical ideas, simple approaches, and vivid case studies that bring this work to life.

In Chapter 4, Eleanor Drago-Severson and Jessica Blum-DeStefano explore the key role that school principals play in supporting mindfulness in themselves and in their schools. Working through a constructive-developmental lens, the authors highlight the qualitatively different orientations (or developmental ways of knowing) adults bring to teaching, learning, and leading. They provide a novel exploration of the parallels between mindfulness and adult development in relation to the school context, and describe how mindfulness and developing greater internal capacities can help principals encourage growth within themselves and others and work more effectively with their school communities to lead meaningful change. Not only do the authors explain the benefits of this approach, but they also describe useful strategies for principals to promote greater mindfulness in themselves and others, while considering the developmental diversity that exists in their adult school community.

This chapter is followed by a case study (Appendix 4.1) by former principal Linda Rosenbury, who has spent time implementing schoolwide mindfulness programming at the Brooklyn Urban Garden Charter School in New York.

In Chapter 5, Cynthia Taylor, Patricia A. Jennings, Alexis Harris, Deborah L. Schussler, and Robert W. Roeser draw on the results of their research and work on teacher dispositions to present a conceptual framework of the "mindful teacher": The Calm, Clear, Kind Framework. They review both qualitative and quantitative research that show how these qualities can be developed through mindfulness and compassion training programs for teachers. Additionally, their chapter includes descriptions of the core program practices of Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB), Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE), and Community Approach to Learning Mindfully (CALM for Educators) programs, as well as rich anecdotes from teachers who have participated in these programs that illustrate the three dimensions of the mindful teacher framework.

In Chapter 6, Polina P. Mischenko and Patricia A. Jennings present a multiple-case study of how three elementary school teachers, delivering a

mindfulness-based social–emotional learning curriculum with high implementation fidelity, cultivated a passion (or a high level of buy-in) for practicing and teaching mindfulness. The authors first explore the role of buy-in and passion in effective teaching, especially as it relates to mindfulness, and review relevant literature on the mechanisms and conditions that may foster buy-in. Then the authors provide narrative accounts of how three teachers with no formal experience in mindfulness (including one teacher who was initially resistant to delivering the curriculum) developed a passion for practicing and teaching mindfulness. The mechanisms and conditions that promoted the development of their passion are discussed and presented in a preliminary conceptual framework.

In Chapter 7, Rebecca L. Tadlock-Marlo and Meghan Damler describe how school counselors are positioned to be key change agents for integrating mindfulness into schools and transforming school culture. The authors highlight the ways that school counselors can teach students mindfulness exercises and the applications of the exercises to personal, social, academic, and college and career readiness domains. They also discuss the various opportunities school counselors have to collaborate with administrators, teachers, and parents to create a cohesive and comprehensive support system for students' holistic well-being. The chapter includes several case examples from one school counselor's experiences using mindfulness to help students navigate challenges related to managing stress, regulating attention and hyperactivity, and working through exposure to trauma.

In Chapter 8, J. Douglas Coatsworth, Melissa Ward George, and Aimee Kleisner Walker advocate for the inclusion of parents as partners in creating mindful and compassionate schools. They review the theoretical background and conceptual model of the Mindfulness-enhanced Strengthening Family Program 10–14 (MSFP), a school–family partnership training program developed around mindfulness concepts and practices. They describe the five dimensions characteristic of mindful parenting, which they use within their program as foundational mindfulness skills: listening with full attention, nonjudgmental acceptance of self and child, emotional awareness of self and child, self-regulation in the parenting relationship, and compassion for self and child. This chapter also includes case study examples from research on MSFP and argues for the importance of teacher mindfulness in parent–teacher interactions. Finally, the authors identify the barriers to engaging parents in school–family partnerships and how mindfulness and compassion skills can help facilitate collaboration.

Chapter 9 addresses the role of teacher education in school transformation. Richard C. Brown and Elizabeth Grassi share the story of how Naropa University's state-approved teacher licensure program was founded. This program integrates elements of mindfulness, awareness, compassion, sensory embodiment, and artistic expression to prepare contemplatively competent teachers. The authors discuss how they developed a vision for contemplative teaching into a comprehensive teacher education program now recognized

by the State of Colorado for teacher certification. Brown and Grassi describe the process of aligning the curriculum with state standards of teacher quality, intentionally sequencing learning experiences, and providing faculty and instructors with the specialized skills needed to deliver this type of curriculum. They also provide curricular artifacts from this one-of-a-kind program to clearly illustrate the major components of such an undertaking.

In Chapter 10, Velma L. Cobb reminds us that any school transformation must operate with an equity lens if it is to truly meet the needs of all students. Attending to the historical structures that have brought the U.S. educational system to its current state, Cobb provides a vision for how we need to move forward and repair the harm that has been inflicted and continues to affect our most vulnerable students, families, and communities. She also outlines the fullness of the challenge we face, requiring both internal and external work to create the individual and collective transformation we seek.

Conclusion

We recognize that the transformational process we propose in this book is a tall order. It will not happen overnight. It will take many years to turn our huge educational bureaucracies toward a more equitable and just system that effectively prepares our children and youth to make valuable contributions to our rapidly changing society. In the words of W. H. Murray:

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred.

A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance which no man [or woman] could have dreamed would have come his [or her] way. (Murray, 1951, p. 6)

As stated by Goethe (1835/1902):

Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now. (Goethe, 1835/1902, p.15)

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