

Exploring Mindfulness to Create Conditions to Help Gifted Students Bloom and Flourish

Dorothy A. Sisk

Lamar University, Beaumont, TX, USA

Michele Kane

Northeastern University, Chicago, IL, USA

Be the change you wish to see in the world.
Gandhi

Abstract

This article explores the art and science of Mindfulness from the perspective of a Buddhist Monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, author of five books in the Mindfulness Essentials series, and an American medical doctor, Jon Kabat Zinn founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction clinic (MBSR) at the University of Massachusetts. In addition, we will explore mindfulness and its connection to compassion; the importance of being, belonging and becoming focusing on the present moment; exploring self-affirmations and sense of identity; helping students find purpose, make connections and model caring; self-regulation; developing caring school cultures; strategies for implementing mindfulness in the classroom; peace building and peace education. Mindfulness practices have the capacity for transformation in students, their teachers, and parents.

Keywords: Mindfulness; meditation; stress reduction; well-being; transformation.

Introduction

Gandhi's words remind educators working with children and youth, that we are agents of change. Mindfulness provides insight to help educators create a vision of education to meet the needs of the growing diversity of students with unique educational and behavioral needs, many of whom are unidentified high potential and gifted students. Change is particularly needed for gifted students who are often disengaged with wandering attention, and performance well below their potential. Yet, mindfulness is not a new idea, since William James (1950) in *Principles of Psychology* said, "The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character and will." (James, 1950: 424). According to the *Mindful Research Guide* (2013) the number of scientific literature articles published on mindfulness per year grew significantly in a 30 year period moving from one study in 1982 to 477 studies in 2012, and the American Mindfulness Research Association (AMRA) reports that 203 articles were published in 2019.

Mindfulness is the art of living in the moment, with very ancient roots; yet, incredible modern applications have been made in medicine, business and education. Rechtschaffen (2014) championed these great strides, particularly those made in understanding the effect that mindfulness practices have on the mind, heart, and body.

This article examines leaders in mindfulness including two very different individuals who made phenomenal contributions in building an understanding of mindfulness, as they worked with mindfulness practices and meditation over the last 40 years. One is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the second is an American medical doctor Jon Kabat-Zinn from the University of Massachusetts Medical Center (UMASS).

Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh wrote five books in the Mindfulness Essential Series including *How to Sit* with meaningful inspiration and clear and simple directions for anyone wanting to explore mindfulness meditation. In the second book *How to Relax*, he talks about the daily stress that we experience, making us less productive and less happy. In this book Thich Nhat Hanh shares techniques for bringing life back into balance. The third book *How to Walk* emphasizes touching the Earth with awareness and how to arrive fully in the present moment. The fourth book *How to Love* brings clarity, compassion and humor to the question of how to love. The fifth book *How to Eat* tells how the process of eating can be a joyful and sustainable activity in all aspects of eating, including preparing the food, and even cleaning up after the meal. Thich Nhat Hanh shares how as a young novice, he and one other novice washed the dishes for over 100 monks without running water or soap; and yet, they were able to make it an enjoyable activity.

Thich Nhat Hanh calls mindfulness an art form that can be cultivated in every area of life, such as waking up in the morning and greeting the day with gratitude. In *How to Eat* he suggested you bless the food and nourishment that is essential to your body, and when you are finished with your meal say the following *gatha*:

In this food
I see clearly
the presence of the entire universe
supporting my existence. (Hanh, 2014: 110)

Thich Nhat Hanh said mindfully look at a grain of rice and recognize that the grain of rice contains the whole world. "When you put that grain of rice in your mouth, you are putting the whole universe in your mouth." (Hanh, 2014: 30). In *How to Walk (2015)* Thich Nhat Hanh stressed love of the Earth, and expressing love of the Earth with each step saying:

With each step
I come home to the Earth
With each step
I return to my source
With each step
I take refuge in Mother Earth.
Or as you walk, you can say:
I love the Earth.
I am in love with the Earth. (Hanh, 2015: 114-115).

Focus on your breath and as your feet touch the Earth, be aware of the sky and the wonder of your environment. With each step, there is the possibility of mindfulness, concentration and insight. Walk slowly and mindfully at your own pace, and focus on your breathing as you walk, you are unifying your mind and body. Walking can help you be calm, and with focused attention on your breath, you stop your thinking, blaming, and judging that take you away from the present moment.

Maslow (1968) championed a similar way of perceiving, behaving and focusing which he called the *here-now*. This concept of Maslow is echoed when Thich Nhat Hanh stresses that life is only available in the present moment. In walking, you can become free of your past, your future, and your worries and fears. When you walk, you don't think, and you don't talk, even if you are walking with another person. (Hanh, 2015: 35)

Thich Nhat Hanh in *How to Relax (2015)* said in many Zen monasteries there is a sign over the door that says *Do Not Squander Your Life*. (Hanh, 2015: 54). He added if you are rested and relaxed, everyone will profit from your relaxation and energy, and that you should smile. A smile relaxes your nervous system and he suggested the use of the following *gatha*:

Breathing in, I calm my body,
Breathing out, I smile,
Dwelling in the present moment,
I know this is a wonderful moment. (Hanh, 2015: 67).

Thich Nhat Hanh said, "The only moment to be alive is the present moment and mindful breathing helps you go back to that precious island within, the *island of ourselves*, so that you can experience the foundation of your being" (Hanh, 2015: 69).

Much of Thich Nhat Hanh's work and teaching are found in the theory of spiritual intelligence proposed by Sisk and Torrance (2001) in *Spiritual Intelligence: Developing Higher Consciousness*, especially the reverence for Mother Earth, and the core values of connectedness, unity of all, compassion, a sense of balance, responsibility, and service, as well as the key virtues of truth, justice, compassion, and caring.

From an examination of Psychology, Science, Ancient Wisdom and traditions of Eastern Mysticism, the wisdom of Native American and indigenous people, Sisk and Torrance defined spiritual intelligence as the "capacity to use a multi-sensory approach including intuition, meditation, and visualization to tap inner knowledge to solve problems of a global nature." (Sisk and Torrance, 2001: 153).

Mindfulness can help you to attend to the *wars* you may have going on within you or with others. Mindful walking and mindful breathing help you to face your pain and sorrow (Hahn, 2015: 73). The mind is often described as a monkey swinging from branch to branch, and the challenge is to identify what is happening and clearly recognize your mental state and consciously make it calm. This *gatha* can be helpful:

In, Out,
Deep, Slow,
Calm, Ease,
Smile, Release,
Present Moment, Wonderful Moment. (Hanh, 2015: 105)

Thich Nhat Hanh used a flower as a metaphor for a child and said every child is born into the garden of humanity as a flower, and as grownups, we need to tell them they are already beautiful and they don't have to be someone else. (Hanh, 2015: 25) For gifted children with their perfectionism and critical self-judgment, this affirmation is essential. There are many powerful messages for parents, care givers and teachers of the gifted in the words of Thich Nhat Hanh. The second individual to be discussed as a contributor to the understanding of mindfulness is Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Jon Kabat-Zinn established the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) clinic at the Massachusetts Medical Center in 1979. At that time, the word *mindfulness* was nowhere in the medical lexicon. Today, there are nearly 50,000 certified MBSR instructors teaching mindfulness techniques, including meditation, and the clinics are in nearly every state in the United States and in more than 30 countries.

Early on Kabat-Zinn worked with treatment resistant patients of other doctors, and after 8 weeks of mindfulness training, the treatment resistant patients showed remarkable transformation. The MBSR patients had symptom reduction in blood pressure, psoriasis, and fibromyalgia, and patients with chronic pain disorder reported a greater sense of well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 1998). As a result, considerable interest was sparked in the clinical use of mindfulness, and MBSR is used widely to reduce psychological morbidity associated with chronic illnesses and to treat emotional and behavioral disorders (Kabat-Zinn, 1998).

Randomized controlled trials and studies show impressive reductions in psychological morbidity, as well as the reduction of stress and enhanced emotional well-being in non-clinical samples (Williams, Kolar, Roger & Pearson, 2010).

Mindfulness training for stress reduction

Over the years, numerous health professionals have taught mindfulness-based stress reduction and developed well-established clinical and research programs. Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003) in discussing the effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) made the following comments:

The feedback coming from people attending mindfulness programs when we have occasion to meet them, tends to be highly positive. They tend to speak of the experience as transformative. There is a sense among those of us teaching mindfulness that we continue to be nurtured personally and professionally by the work itself and by the practice. This, and a sense of connectedness with local and global communities of colleagues who do this work are constant reminders of the importance of staying true to the spirit of mindfulness practice.

(Kabat-Zinn, 2003: 151)

In a study conducted by Davidson et al (2003) 41 employees of a biotechnology company were randomly assigned to either an MBSR condition (N=25) or to a wait-list condition (N=6). The MBSR subjects participated in an 8-week program during their working hours. All subjects received extensive laboratory testing on three occasions, receiving pre- and post-tests during the 8-week intervention period, and during a 4-month follow-up including EEGs to measure brain electrical activity in response to a variety of emotional challenges. All subjects were also vaccinated with influenza vaccine at the end of the 8-week intervention period and then subsequently studied for antibody titers. As originally hypothesized, the researchers found significant increases in left-sided activation in the anterior cortical area of the brain of the subjects who had the MBSR training as compared to the wait-list controls. Left-sided activation in several anterior regions of the brain has been observed during certain forms of positive emotional expression and in subjects with more dispositional positive affect.

Right-sided activation is usually associated with negative emotional expressions such as anger, anxiety and depression. The researchers found that the meditators displayed a significantly larger rise in antibody titers, whereas there was no significant relationship for control subjects. This study suggested that MBSR training can lead to brain changes consistent with more effective responses to negative emotion under stress. The changes that were noted during the study endured for at least 4 months after the intervention.

Kabat-Zinn (2003) said such studies suggest the need for further research that might illuminate critical issues in mind/body medicine and psychological approaches to patient care and treatment, particularly with mindfulness-based approaches. In addition, there is a need to apply mindfulness practices to education, particularly with teachers who are stressed with the over-emphasis on standardized testing and prescribed curriculum which thwart their efforts to differentiate the curriculum and meet the needs of individual children, particularly their advanced and gifted students.

Mindfulness and its connection to compassion

Compassion is defined quite literally as suffering with others. However, compassion includes an element of action which is missing from empathy and sympathy that primarily focus on feeling. A classic research study focusing on compassion was conducted at Princeton University in the 1970's by John Darley and Daniel Batson. They examined the reaction of seminary students in which one group was told they were to deliver a talk on the Good Samaritan, and that they were already late for the talk. An actor was placed in the hall, visibly and audibly suffering; 10% of the students who thought they were late stopped to help. Yet, more than six times that number helped in the group who were not told they were late, and they were not in a hurry. The researchers concluded that the seminary students were not inherently morally insensitive, but when stressed by a sense of having to hurry, they lost touch with their deeper values of compassion.

Jim Doty, a neurosurgeon and clinical professor of neurosurgery at Stanford University said mindfulness and compassion must go hand in hand, and mindfulness without compassion is problematic. Doty gave an example of Type A- driven individuals who practice mindfulness to become more attentive and more focused; without compassion these individuals can be extremely competitive and ruthless. He said the practice of mindfulness cultivates compassion by helping us see our interconnectedness, and this “clear seeing” leads to greater compassion (Doty, 2016).

Compassionate instinct

According to Emma Seppala (2013) there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that at our core, both animals and human beings have a compassionate instinct. Yet, even though compassion appears to be a naturally evolving instinct, mindfulness training can strengthen compassion. Shapiro (2006) suggests self-talk and saying to yourself “I care about you,” “tell me about your experience” instead of judging your experiences, you can take an interest in them. Gifted students often are hard on themselves and their perfectionistic nature makes it difficult for them to reflect on their experiences with an openness and compassion for themselves. Self-talk stresses reflecting on an open approach to our experiences and gifted students enjoy the “fun” nature of self-talk.

Self-compassion

Fred Bryant from Loyola University in Chicago suggests ten ways to be more mindfully engaged to build self-compassion. Bryant pointed out that as we become more self-compassionate and more compassionate toward others, we become mindfully engaged which he described as “savoring.” (Bryant & Veroff, 2006). Figure 1 depicts Bryan’s suggestions to develop savoring:

1. Share your good feelings with others.
2. Take a mental photograph.
3. Congratulate yourself.
4. Sharpen your sensory perception.
5. Shout it from the rooftops.
6. Compare the outcome to something worse.
7. Get absorbed in the moment.
8. Count your blessings and give thanks.
9. Avoid killjoy thinking.
10. Remind yourself of how fast time flies

Figure 1: Bryant’s Ten Ways to Develop Savoring

Tara Brach (2019) in *Radical Compassion* talks about the transformative power of self-compassion. She said we need to awaken self-compassion and love ourselves into healing. And we need to attune to others with an active caring, and include all beings in our heart (p.40), She uses a meditation called **RAIN** to use self-compassion in addressing issues in situations that she adapted from Michele McDonald that has 4 steps: **R** for Recognize what is happening; **A** Allow life to be; **I** Investigate with a gentle, curious attention; **N** Nurture with living presence.

Science and practice of gratitude

The John Templeton Foundation in collaboration with the University of California at Davis and the Greater Good Science Center came together to support the science and practice of gratitude in an initiative (2012-2015) that included a research grant competition, a series of articles on gratitude, and a large public event. They received 300 applications and selected 14 as awardees with topics such as: how the practice of gratitude might prevent bullying, the neuroscience of gratitude, and the role of gratitude in romantic relationships. A retreat was held to provide a venue for the programs discussed. In addition, they provided 15 individual doctoral grants of \$10,000 to support research on gratitude. The last event was a public meeting of 600 people participating in a day of science, stories, resources and inspiration.

A resource for practicing everyday gratitude is *Everyday Gratitude* (2018) edited by Saoirse McClory, Kristi Nelson and Margaret Wakeley. It is a collection of inspirational quotes and accompanying questions to help slow you down, look anew at each moment, recognize its gifts, whether large or small, welcome or non-welcome, hidden or obvious. For example, one from Kabir: *Wherever you are is the entry point* and the accompanying question: *What can I do right now, big or small, to make a change that I long for?*

Cultivating Global Compassion

Paul Ekman (2014) in his book *Moving toward Global Compassion* calls for researchers and us to develop more compassion for people who are away from us socially and geographically. He suggests that there are two kinds of compassion, proximal and distal. Proximal is where we see someone in need and help them. Distal requires social forecasting and the ability to anticipate harm before it happens. Gifted students with their keen sense of wanting to make a difference and problem solving are fascinated in engaging in social forecasting and viewing how materialism and self-centeredness get in the way of distal compassion. Ekman said our goal is developing *stranger* compassion.

Being, belonging, and becoming

Carl Rogers, the psychologist, emphasized the importance of being, belonging, and becoming. He said one of the most important conditions in supporting the growth of an individual is empathic understanding, the ability to understand another's experiences, emotions and thoughts from his or her perspective. This process is currently being emphasized in education as the Theory of Mind, which is the same process as the mindfulness practice of deep listening described by Thich Nhat Hanh (2015). In *A Way of Being* Rogers (1980) described the good life as an increasing tendency to live fully in each moment. Again, Thich Nhat Hanh's focusing on the present moment, the here and now, resonates with Rogers' concept of becoming.

When you have a sense of being, you have a strong sense of identity and the capacity to maintain relationships with others. To fully develop a sense of being it is important to explore, build on, and extend your interests and to recognize your own individual values and skills that define you as a unique individual. Belonging is a dynamic sense of being connected, being a part of a group, a family or a community, and feeling comfortable in these different groups. When you have a sense of belonging, you are more confident, secure and creative.

To increase a sense of belonging engage and interact with others, accept their diversity and see/value their sense of being individuals in the groups. Becoming includes a sense of change through different experiences, events and circumstances. You are in the process of becoming when you continue to grow, learn and develop. George Land (1973) in his book *Grow or Die* said that over time we gain knowledge, extend our understandings, create relationship and develop social and emotional skills, and he said indeed we must grow or die. Mindfulness practices that enhance becoming include meditation with an emphasis on compassion. Land said through meditation you can have experiences of greater meaning, feelings of connectedness and a sense of happiness.

There is growing awareness in education of the importance of social and emotional skills in determining how well-equipped children and adults are to meet the demands of a swiftly changing society and environment with a positive sense of identity. One major way to help students, particularly gifted students work toward a positive sense of identity is to introduce the idea that competence or ability is changeable and controllable as an aspect of self-development. This idea has been facilitated with the work of Carol Dweck (2006) who described two mindsets in her research, a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. With the growth mindset you can learn and grow with limitless potential with practice, perseverance and effort.

Exploring self-affirmations and sense of identity

Consciousness of self is not just a cognitive process. As psychologist Rollo May (1953) said:

We experience our self as a thinking-intuiting-feeling and acting unit. The self is then not merely the sum of the various roles one plays—it is the capacity by which one knows one plays these roles. It is the center from which one sees and is aware of different “sides of self” (May, 1953).

A sense of self evolves from our accumulated experiences and the messages we receive from others. Rollo May’s concept of the individual is expressed in the Awareness of Self Model (Sisk, 2009) and depicted in Figure 2.

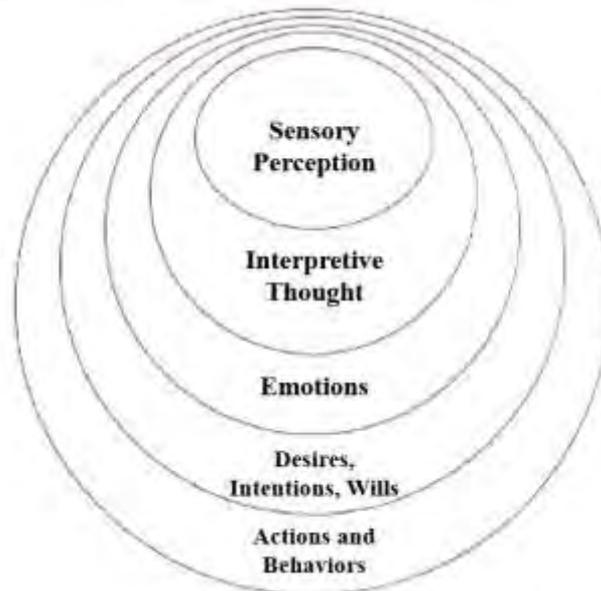


Figure 2: Awareness of Self-Model.

This self-awareness model was developed by Sisk (2009) to help gifted students become more aware of themselves as they examine the different parts of self in the model: sensing, interpreting, emoting, desiring, intending, willing and behaving. The first component of the Self-Awareness model is sensory perception and a nature walk provided for a group of 5th grade students is one example of a sensory perception activity. The students explored their playground, noted squirrels scampering up the trees, bees buzzing around the flowers, and birds tending their nests in one of the trees. After the walk, the teacher gave the students a frame with sentence starters of I see, I hear, I touch, I feel, I taste and I experience to write a collaborative class poem. Their class poem is below:

I see squirrels scampering up the bark of the trees;
I hear the busy buzzing bees as they fly around the flowers;
I touch the smooth green moss on the trees;
I feel a quiet feeling in our playground;
I taste the sweat on my lip as my tongue waggles back and forth; and,
I experience being a part of nature. (Sisk & Kane, 2018:105)

Rollo May (1953) said our senses provide us raw data, as noted in the nature walk of the students, but what we do with that data is the interpretive component of awareness.

Interpretive thought

After the walk and writing their class poem the students talked about how different the playground was with no one having recess or physical education, and that the playground was busy with the squirrels, birds and insects. One student said, “I saw so much beauty there that I had never

noticed before,” and she continued, “I guess we need to be quiet and really look or we will miss a lot.” Another student said, “Our playground could be more beautiful if it had flowers. Can we make a garden?”

Emotions

The teacher was amazed at the wide arrange of emotions the students expressed after the walk, and with their excitement and enthusiasm on starting a garden. One student was so elated about the garden at the dinner table at home, that his parent agreed to donate the flowers.

Desires, intentions and wills

Desires represent the things we want to accomplish, to do or to have, and intentions can be both desires or wills, and they can be short or long term. Desires and intentions can also be thought of as objectives, things you want to accomplish.

Actions and behaviors

The last component of the Self-Awareness model is action and behavior. Our actions tell others how much we care about an issue, such as stepping forward to make a garden for the school playground. The Self-Awareness Model based on Rollo May’s theory can be used with gifted students to help them become more aware of themselves as they consciously examine and work with the component parts of self: Sensing, interpreting, emoting, desiring, intending, willing, and behaving. Consciousness of self-identity is not an end point, but a journey (May, 1953).

Taking time to become conscious of self

Many people including gifted students are over -scheduled and need time to relax and enjoy silence, such as the walk of the fifth-grade students in their playground. It is important that gifted students learn to step away from daily routines and reflect on the bigger questions such as : How would I describe myself? Why am I here? What should I do next? And Who am I? These are the questions that many gifted students are reflecting on in their own quiet moments.

Reflection

One way of describing reflection is “studying yourself.” You can reflect by writing in a journal, talking with a friend or simply sitting quietly and thinking. Gifted students learn about themselves in many different ways and reflecting can have the following five positive outcomes:

1. Become aware of how they act or behave with their family, friends and classmates.
2. Look at a given situation from another’s perspective.
2. Identify how their personality, family and skills influence what they notice or how they
3. interpret a situation and choose to act.
4. Think about how to approach a situation differently in the future, and
5. Identify new skills to try to learn or improve.

Helping students find their purpose: make connections and model caring

In the past, people who pondered the big ideas and mysteries of life were the mystics and philosophers. Today, contemporary educators and psychologists are tackling these questions of meaning and purpose with implications for caring adults in guiding gifted students who are searching for answers.

Dr. Martin Seligman, a psychologist, past president of the American Psychological Association, and founding member of the Positive Psychology Movement and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania reframed the study of psychology from identifying personal deficits and remediating to focusing on strengths and virtues that allow people to thrive. They scientifically examined the psychological traits that cut across cultural and ethnic boundaries which lead to goodness and flourishing. They generated a categorical system that was presented in the book, *The Classification of Strengths and Virtues* (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivicha, Linkins, 2009).

Signature strengths

According to positive psychologists, creating meaning comes from recognizing and identifying the strongest individual signature strengths, and then using these strengths to serve something beyond the self. Adults who interact with gifted students can help them identify these strengths with the use of an assessment or by reflection and contemplation to foster awareness of and developing their personal assets.

The power of awe

At the Center for Greater Good in Berkeley, researchers working with psychologist Dacher Keltner, are studying the concept of awe, being overwhelmed by something vast or with a strong aesthetic. Visiting the Grand Canyon, staring at the Milky Way or being intrigued by the beauty of a Georgia O’Keeffe painting are pathways to awe. Creating such opportunities can enhance well-being, develop mindfulness, and foster creativity and connectedness. Classroom activities such as taking time to enjoy world class music or enjoying the work of renowned artists are entry points for being immersed in awe-inspiring experiences (Keltner, 2015).

Embracing errors through mindfulness

Ellen Langer (2000), called the “mother of mindfulness” has been researching mindfulness for decades. Her focus is on the nimble thinking that comes by noticing things in the present. This allows for a flexibility of thought that is accepting of mistakes and failures, especially when they lead to more intense observation. Actively noticing generates an overall sense of enhanced personal health, according to Langer. For gifted students who are perfectionists this approach makes room for errors, so they can be celebrated. Clarity of purpose becomes more apparent as the individual embraces the whole self.

Individual Action = Back to Basics

The power of individual action is the core of the work of Tal Ben-Shahar (2015). His six basic steps toward creating more happiness in life include simplifying daily living, expressing gratitude and remembering the mind/body connection of healthy nutrition, sound sleep and exercise. His suggestions serve as reminders of our intentions such as wearing a bracelet with key words or keeping inspirational aphorisms close to our workspace. Ben-Shahar’s suggestions offer encouragement and support for staying in the present moment with enhanced awareness.

Mindfulness and Self-Regulation

Self-regulation enables us to change our behavior in order to pay attention and conform to rules, plans, promises, ideals, and other standards. Vohs & Baumeister (2004) said self-regulation is the key to success in human life. They stressed that most of the social and personal problems that afflict people in modern Western society involve some element of self-regulation failure at their root (p.2). Gifted students are often classified as underachievers and the figures vary from 20% to 70% (Clark, 2013); underachievement has a dimension of poor self-control or procrastination, and both can be a cause of poor performance in school, and a reflection of poor self-regulation (Diamond & Lee, 2011). Poor self-regulation also contributes to gifted students being unwilling to persist in the face of failure, being less able to choose effective performance settings, less able to set and reach goals, and less able to sustain effort over a period of time unless it is a topic in which they have a high interest (Sisk & Kane, 2018). Self-regulation is one of the major executive functions of the self and the other major executive function of the self is “choice” (Baumeister, Schmeichel and Vohs, 2004) Mindfulness increases awareness of present moment experiences and promotes mindful exploration of inner mental states.

Mindfulness intervention aids executive function

Diamond & Lee (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of successful programs that used mindfulness, yoga, aerobic activities, martial arts, games, and computerized training to improve the executive function of students. They found successful programs provided repeated practice and

progressively increased the challenge to executive functions. Students with the worse executive functions benefitted the most from the activities. In a later study, Diamond & Lee reported that early executive functioning training may avert widening achievement gaps later on. Intervention outcomes included the ability to mentally play with ideas, make considered rather than impulsive responses, staying focused, self-control, and discipline. Diamond and Lee (2012) suggested that focusing narrowly on cognitive self-regulation may not be as effective with students as addressing both emotional, social and physical development, since positive effects were noted from the use of aerobic exercises, martial arts, and yoga.

Students who struggle to wait their turn, to calm themselves down, or to follow rules are not necessarily destined for a life of difficulty; instead research indicates that mindfulness tools can build self-regulating behaviors and emotional control that will set them on a better life trajectory (Sisk & Kane, 2018). Self-regulation enables us to hold back our first impulse and be more mindful with more complex and flexible ways of deciding and being. Self-regulation is essential for individuals, but particularly for gifted students to work toward success in their personal and academic lives.

Paths to develop a caring school culture

As stress and anxiety mount globally due to the challenges of climate change, illness/disease, poverty, violence, and social injustice it is no surprise that a nurturing school culture can serve as an important anchor for students living with daily uncertainty. School climate, the vibe of the school, is continuously changing and varies with activities and educational programs similar to individual changes in mood. School culture, on the other hand, is similar to the personality of the school; it is comprised of core beliefs and attitudes that change little over time (Greunert, 2008). Fostering a positive school culture is essential in maintaining and regulating the physical and mental health of all who interact within an educational environment.

Mindful teaching and teaching mindfulness

Teachers can be effective in creating a classroom climate of care by engaging in thoughtful practices that enhance caring actions and feelings. These efforts in promoting such actions have a cumulative effect in contributing to the positivity of the overall school climate. Schoerberlin (2009) distinguishes between mindful teaching and teaching mindfulness. Educators who bring self-awareness, non-judgmental observation, and stay in the present are apt to generate a sense of calm and peace within the classroom setting. As teachers model mindful teaching students can observe these practices in action. It is easier to understand practices such as walking with focused attention or taking several deep breaths to center and be calm, when they are informally demonstrated.

Intentionality

Teaching mindfulness allows both students and teachers to join in mindfulness practices as teachers present practices for the group to experience. However, even small children are able to lead a group in mindful walking, deep breathing, or similar practices designed to focus attention on the present moment. Intentionality is an important element of designing lessons that emphasize or practice mindfulness. The teacher needs to have a clear vision of how a lesson will serve the students. Encouraging respect of the self, of others, and the place are classroom expectations that generate a sense of trust and safety. Creating a “chill zone” or “peace corner” respects the need for the individual student to be able to calm down and reset emotionally. Morning meetings or Council meetings are also ways that students can share opinions and concerns while others listen attentively. Collectively, such practices contribute to the overall sense of a positive classroom climate and a caring school culture.

Strategies for implementing mindfulness in the classroom

Daniel Rechtshaffen (2016) said mindfulness or showing up fully for each moment and paying attention with an open heart is different from mindful practices. His approach to creating mindful practices for the classroom uses a framework with five realms of mindful literacy. Each of

the practices begins with the teacher/facilitator understanding and modeling mindfulness, and then guiding students through the various practices.

Realms of mindful literacy

Physical literacy

This realm focuses on body awareness and creating a sense of peace and calm. Activities include noticing the parts of the body and bodily sensations through a body scan, physical movement such as walking a labyrinth or becoming centered and moving while listening and responding to a guided meditation.

Mental literacy

A core of mindfulness is focusing attention on the breath and noting the in and out process of breathing. In this realm, you focus awareness on the physical sensations of breathing. This practice requires both relaxation and concentration to be attuned to the workings of your mind. When your mind wanders, bring your awareness back to the breathing and build the muscles of awareness.

Emotional literacy

Loving-kindness meditations center on sending love, strength or any positive feeling to the self and then to others. For example, the students might repeat this affirmation after the teacher: “May I be well, may my school community be well, may my country be well, may the world be well.” Research shows that sending caring sentiments via gratitude is a practice that enhances well-being, and gratitude journals or bulletin boards can be integrated into classroom practices.

Social literacy

A sense of community can be strengthened by practices such as morning meeting or close of day check-ins. Starters like “I am noticing” or “I am feeling” help students in the group to develop a feeling vocabulary and to build trust with others.

Global literacy

The natural world and our relationship to it comprise the essence of global literacy, and how our choices affect our planet can be developed through global literacy practices. Time in nature observing, experiencing, and contemplating aspects of the natural world like trees, clouds, or stones can broaden connections. Noticing the similarities and differences can develop perspective-taking and a deeper awareness of our connection to the natural world.

The willard model of teaching and learning mindfulness

The Willard model has five domains arranged in a triangle including: mindful self, mindful system, mindful awareness, mindful instruction, informal mindful integration, and mindful living. This process-oriented approach begins with the self and then moves to more broad systems such as the classroom, the school and then beyond those walls. Willard suggests starting small to integrate mindfulness beyond the classroom with activities such as watching ripples on the water, trying to balance pennies on your shoes, walking intentionally or eating breakfast slowly to savor the moment. Once there is a sense of confidence and ease then one can move to more involved tasks of paying attention in the present (Willard, 2016).

Educators and parents can find the practices that they enjoy such as walking in a forest or listening to guided imagery and then sharing their excitement and joy with their students and sons and daughters. Adult enthusiasm can be contagious.

Peace building and peace education for inner peace and tranquility

Peace building is one of the greatest challenges we have today in the global world. It seems no region of the world is immune from conflict and violence with immense damage, untold grief, and the impoverishment of millions of people (Sisk & Kane, 2018).

Need for inner peace and tranquility

Inner peace can be developed and nurtured using mindfulness practices. Gifted students with their sensitivity to global issues and their intensity are deeply troubled by global issues and problems.

Remez Sasson (2017) the founder of Success Consciousness, described inner peace as a state of being emotionally and mentally at peace and in control of one's mind, moods and reactions. Sasson suggested using meditation and yoga to strengthen and develop inner peace. In his book *Peace of Mind in Daily Life*, Sasson said inner peace can increase tranquility, inner strength, and power which enables one not to be swayed by events, hardships, difficulties. He said that with inner peace one can maintain inner poise, clear judgment and common sense.

Peace heroes

The Peace Museum of Vienna (PMV) mission is to introduce historic as well as contemporary individuals who dedicated their lives to promoting peace. The Peace Museum has a research team which nominates peace hero candidates. The goal of PMV is to provide a global stage with a network of at least 5,000 peace heroes by 2020.

Selected notable peace heroes include:

Linus Pauling, an American chemist the only person to be awarded two unshared Nobel prizes, one for Chemistry and the other for Peace.

Mahatma Gandhi a primary leader of the independence movement of India and advocate of nonviolence who influenced the world to consider a peaceful form of civil disobedience.

Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan environmentalist and political activist who initiated the Green Belt Movement, planting thousands of trees with the help of women who were unemployed.

Nelson Mandela, a South African activist who was jailed for twenty-seven years for opposing racial segregation in South Africa. On his release he practiced forgiveness and compassion and became the first black president of South Africa.

Martin Luther King, Jr., an American minister and leader of the Civil rights Movement in the United States. He said as long as the mind is enslaved, the body can never be free

These Peace Heroes made significant contributions toward national and international peace and manifested an inner sense of peace and tranquility in their lives.

Education programs working with students

The City Montessori School in India

The City Montessori School (CMS) is in Lucknow, India. CMS's major objective is to provide students with spiritual, moral and material knowledge. The school serves Pre K-12 grades with 29,000 students. The mission of the school is to promote world unity and peace by shaping future generations as world citizens (Sisk & Kane, 2018).

The Peace Boat

The Peace Boat student program was founded in 1983 to educate students for peace and sustainability through educational voyages. Students attend lectures and workshops onboard the ship and in ports of call. They approach peace and sustainability related studies using conflict resolution. Students come from Palestine, Israel, Serbia, Croatia, Cyprus, India, Pakistan, Colombia, the United States, Korea, China and Taiwan. Peace Boat helps student learn about peaceful conflict negotiation so that when they return to their homes they can work for peace (Sisk & Kane, 2018).

Zone of Peace

Jack Kornfield (2015) a Buddhist teacher suggests that you make a zone of peace for yourself, by turning off the news, meditating, listening to Mozart, and walking through the park. In his book *Bringing Home the Dharma: Awakening right where you are*, Kornfield said we can stop and begin to heal our own suffering and fear with meditation and inner transformation. Following his advice, we can learn to make our own hearts a place of peace and tranquility.

Conclusion

Through the eyes of Thich Nhat Hanh and Jon Kabat-Zinn, two very different individuals, the Art and Science of mindfulness was explored. Both individuals demonstrated that you can step off the treadmill of daily stress and change and enter into the present moment. With its emphasis on being fully present in the moment and not judging or criticizing, mindfulness is able to help us begin a path of compassion and most important self-compassion. Mindfulness is the current topic of numerous documentaries, magazine articles and scientific papers, and mindfulness training is widely practiced in hospitals and in the corporate world. In addition, schools are offering mindfulness training for students and teachers and teachers who teach mindfulness are reporting that students show increased attention to learning and kindness toward each other. Finally, the work of affective neuroscience (Davidson, 2011) shows convincing data that people who practice mindfulness meditation have positive changes in the brain, and this opens new paths for studies on mindfulness and brain research (Sisk, 2017).

The transformative nature of mindfulness for gifted students and their teachers, as well as for parents and their children holds high expectations and hope for greater development of individual potential. As more schools integrate mindfulness into their programs, the results will be amazing. Being able to generate positive emotional states, knowing how to use mindful action are skills gifted students will need to not only transform themselves, but to reach out and transform others by addressing real problems in their schools, communities, and as adults in society. The question that so many gifted students ask is "How can I help?" Mindfulness practices provide the essential skills they need to make a difference and to help (Sisk & Kane, 2018).

References

- Ben-Shakar, T. (2015). *Choose the life you want: The mindful way to happiness*. New York: The Experiment.
- Baumeister, R., Schmeichel, B., & Vohs, K. (2014). Self-regulation and the executive function: The self as controlling agent. In Kruglanski, A. & Higgins, E. (Eds.) *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles*, New York: Guilford.
- Brach, T. (2019). *Radical Compassion*. New York: Random House.
- Bryant, F., & Veroff, J. (2006). *Savoring: A new model of positive experience*. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Clark, B. (2013). *Growing up gifted: Developing the potential of children at school and at home*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Davidson, R., Kabat-Zinn, J., Schumacher, J., Rozenkrantz, M., Muller, D., & Santorelli, S. (2003). Alterations in the brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 65(4), 564-570.
- Davidson, R., & Begley, S. (2012). *The emotional life of your brain: How its unique patterns affect the way you think, feel and live, and how you can change them*. New York: Hudson Street Press.
- Diamond, A. & Lee, K. (2011). Intervention shown to aid executive function development in children 4-12 years old. *Science*, 959-64.
- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Ballentine Books.
- Ekman, P. (2014). *Moving toward global compassion*
- Greunert, S. (2008). School culture, school climate. They are not the same thing. *Principal*, 56-59.
- Hanh, T. N. (2014). *How to sit*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- Hanh, T. N. (2014). *How to eat*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- Hanh, T. N. (2015). *How to walk*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- Hanh, T. N. (2015). *How to relax*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- Hanh, T. N. (2015). *How to love*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- James, W. (1950). *The principles of psychology*. New York: Dover.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1982). An out-patient program in behavioral medicine for chronic pain patients based on the practice of mindful meditation. *Clinical Joint Pain*, 2: 159-173.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1998). An outpatient program in behavioral medicine for chronic pain patients. In: J. C. Holland (Ed.) *Psycho-oncology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 508-5017.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present and future. *Clinical Psychology. Science and practice* 10(2), 144-156.

- Keltner, D. (2015). Positive affect and markers of inflammation: Discreet positive emotions predict lower levels of inflammatory cytokines. *Emotion, 15*(2), 129-133.
- Kornfield, J. (2015). *Bringing home the Dharma: Awakening through where you are*. Boulder, CO: Shambala.
- Land, G. A. (1973). *Grow or Die: The unifying principle of transformation*. New York: Random House.
- Langer, E. (2000). Mindful learning. *Current directions in psychological science, 9* (6), 220-223.
- Maslow, A. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand.
- May, R. (1953). *Man's search for himself*. New York: Norton.
- McClory S., Nelson, K., Wakelely, M. (2018). *Everyday Gratitude*. North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing.
- Mindful Research Guide, (2013). Research Publications on Mindfulness, 1R80-2012. Retrieved on May 1, 2020 from: <http://www.mndfulnedxperience.org/mindfo/php>.
- Rechtschaffen, D. (2014). *The way of mindful education*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Rogers, C. (1980). *A way of being*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Sasson, R. (2017). *Peace of mind in the busy daily life*. Retrieved from: www.goodeads.com/ook/
- Schoerberlin, D. (2009). *Mindful teaching and teaching mindfulness: A guide for anyone who teaches anything*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Seligman, M. (1991). *Learned Optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. New York: Knopf.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York: Oxford University Press and Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Seppala, E. (2013). Compassion: Our first instinct [Blog Post] Retrieved from: www.psychologyody.com/blog/feeling-it/20136/
- Shapiro, S., & Carlson, L. (2009). *The art and science of mindfulness: Integrating mindfulness in psychology and the helping professions*. Washington D.C., APA.
- Siegel, D. (2014). *Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain*. New York: Tarcher.
- Sisk, D., and Torrance, E. P. (2001). *Spiritual intelligence: Developing higher consciousness*. Buffalo: Creative Education Foundation Press.
- Sisk, D. (2009). *Making great kids greater*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Sisk, D. (2017). The art and science of teaching mindfulness. *Gifted Ed. International, 34*(2) Sp. 5-21.
- Sisk, D., and Kane, M. (2018). *Planting Seeds of Mindfulness*. Unionville, New York: Royal Fireworks Press.
- Vohs, K., & Baumeister, R. (2004). *Depletion of self-regulatory resources makes people selfish*, Unpublished manuscript, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada.
- Willard, C. (2010). *Child's mind: Mindfulness practices to help your children be more focused, calm and relaxed*. Berkeley CA: Parallax Press.
- Willard, C. (2016). *Growing up Mindful: Essential practices to help children, teens and families find balance, calm, and resilience*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
- Williams, K., Kolar, M., Roger, B., and Pearson, J. (2001). Evaluation of a wellness-based mindfulness stress reduction intervention: A controlled trial. *American Journal of Health Promotion 11*(6), 422 -432.

About the Authors

Dorothy A Sisk, Ph.D., is the Conn Professor of Education at Lamar University. She was the Director of the U.S. Office of Gifted and Talented; a teacher of the gifted; a district supervisor of gifted education; and coordinator of gifted education at the University of South Florida. Dr. Sisk is a founding member of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children (WCGTC) and served as president and executive administrator. Her major interests are leadership and talent development, and effective education intervention for high potential and diverse gifted students.

Michele Kane, Ed.D., is Professor Emerita in Special Education from Northeastern Illinois University, where she coordinated the Master of Arts in Gifted Education program. She has been a frequent presenter at state, national, and international conferences. Her leadership positions include being President of the Illinois Association for Gifted Children, Chair of Global Awareness Network of NAGC, and currently Chair of the Parent and Community Network of NAGC.

Address

Prof. Dr. Dorothy A. Sisk

The Gifted Child Center; Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas, U.S.A.

e-Mail: dorothy.sisk@lamar.edu