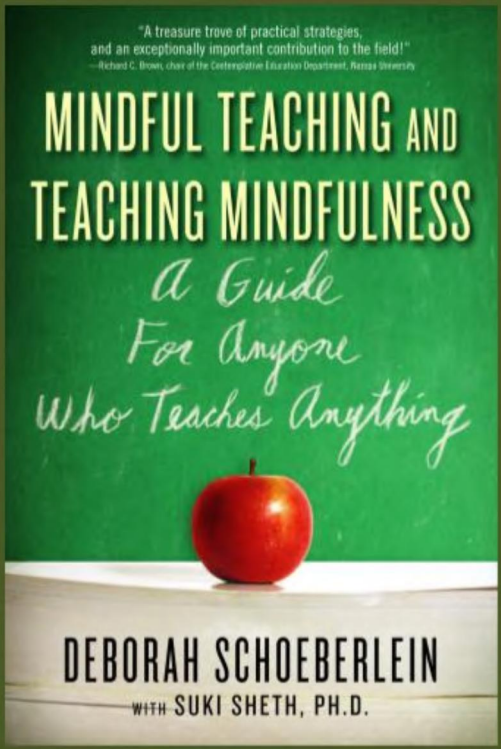

Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness

A Guide for Anyone Who Teaches Anything

By
Deborah Schoeberlein
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More Educators' Praise for Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness

"Many teachers often sense there is a mysterious element to their teaching, something that impacted their effectiveness even more than the material they were offering. This book reveals that element, and offers many specific ways to cultivate, harness, and incorporate it. **A must-read for those interested in the potential of education.**"—Soren Gordhamer, author of *Wisdom 2.0*

"This book offers concrete strategies for being less stressed and more emotionally balanced, and present in the classroom. Practicing these techniques will improve any teacher's ability to deal with the myriad of situations that challenge teachers every day. **It is a gift to the education profession and to teachers, learners, schools, and our communities.** "—Suzanne Vitullo, ESL teacher

"A rich resource for teachers, school counselors, and faculty involved in preparing the next generation of educators. **I can't wait to share this book with my colleagues and students.**"—Susan Theberge, Ed.D., professor of education at Keene State College

"A must-read for all educators."—Dr. Thomas Farrell, former school superintendent, Kennebunk, Maine

"Offers hands-on tools, exercises, and insights tempered by the voice of experience that help to build

relationships with students and engage them in learning, and that **will renew teachers' own energy, passion, and commitment.**"—Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, vice president of the Search Institute

"The lessons this book has to offer are simple and easy to relate to yet **important enough to affect the way you choose to live your life.**"—Kristina Weller, elementary school teacher

We hope this book serves teachers and students, in school and beyond school, and all those whose lives they touch.

Preface

> Some people need to know their goal or they can't search at all. For others, though, the quest itself is enough.
>
> Gerald Morris, *The Quest of the Fair Unknown*

Nearly twenty years ago, I taught a class on HIV prevention as a visiting specialist at an urban middle school in the Northeast. The students were street-smart seventh graders who clearly questioned whether they had anything more to learn about sexual decision-making and disease prevention. While their health teacher stood nervously at the back of the room, the students sized me up.

One girl noticed my maternity clothes and saw an opportunity to test me. She raised her hand and asked, "Well, so, it looks like you're gonna have a baby ... and, um, that probably means you had sex and didn't use protection ... right?"

It was a teachable moment the likes of which I'd never imagined. There was enormous opportunity there—and also the potential for the entire class to derail. My face burning, I took a deep breath and paused, collecting my thoughts, centering myself while the students' buzz of "I can't believe she said that!" and "Ooh! What's the teacher going to do now?" quieted.

A second illuminating moment came in a sex education class with high school students whose behavior had already put them "at risk" for a range of undesirable health outcomes. These sexually active students had already "been there, done that" and were skeptical of my assertion that, except for cases of abuse or assault, everyone has some degree of control and choice about sex. They'd comment dismissively, "That's not true—sometimes it just happens."

Everyone knew that the "it" was sex, and the "happens" referred to the absence of an active choice. They weren't talking about abuse or assault; rather they viewed having sex as an acceptable default option associated with certain conditions and situations, like being drunk or high. Sex-by-default was also a frequent outcome of "leading someone on" or having the feeling that "it was easier to let it happen than to say no." The more I heard these comments, and over time I heard them in many high school classes, the more I thought about what students were really communicating.

The underlying issue that informed their responses was basic: my students didn't have the skills to pay attention and develop an awareness of *what was happening, in the moment, with their bodies, emotions, and thoughts.* In other words, by the time they understood what they were doing, experiencing, and/or enduring, it was too late. As a result, they had far fewer available options than they would have had before their sexual activity escalated to that stage.

They couldn't say no, in part, because they had trouble accurately interpreting what was happening—much less predicting what was coming next.

Most health education models are based on the presumption that people do know what's happening and can therefore assess situations and make rational choices. Even social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula assume that students already have some basic familiarity with self-awareness and self-reflection on which to build specific competencies with practice. But what if students don't have this baseline level of awareness and the attendant option of informed behaviors?

Telling them about prevention wasn't going to help if they *weren't present while taking risks.* My immediate challenge was to teach students the skills that would enable them to "show up" and be active agents in their own lives. In short, they needed to learn *to notice what they were doing in the moment* so they could *decide what to do next.* Mindful teaching facilitated my insight, but I knew the quality of my presence by itself would not translate directly into students' skill development.

That's when I began teaching mindfulness at school.

It's been a little more than fifteen years since my initial experiences with mindfulness in the classroom. Since then, I've met many other teachers and students whose interests and work have enriched my understanding and skills. I am indebted to the

teachers who nurtured me as a student and encouraged me to teach. In addition, I am immensely grateful for my family, friends, and colleagues whose input, trust, and inspiration gives me the confidence to teach as I learn, and to continue learning through teaching.

Several individuals helped bring this book into being through their incredible generosity and attention. Their gift to me, and through this book to you, reflects their love of learning and dedication to teaching. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the sage advice, as well as unbounded skill and kindness, I received at every step of the way from Josh Bartok, Senior Editor at Wisdom Publications. I am also grateful to Goldie Hawn, Gianni Faedda, and Theo Koffler who encouraged me "to do what I had to do," and whose wisdom, work, and care guided me. Heartfelt thanks to Diana Rose of the Garrison Institute for her friendship and the opportunity to work so closely together for four precious years.

Thanks to my dear friend, Sukeshi Sheth, who appeared unexpectedly at the best possible time and joined in creating this book. In addition, I am indebted to Cesar Piotto and Allison Graboski for their unwavering support, understanding, and humor; Stephen Viola, for his input and expertise; Dawn Lamping, for her meticulous attention to detail and heartfelt enthusiasm; and Ezra Doner, for his wise counsel.

Finally, my experience writing this book ends as it began, beyond words, with my family: Joede,

Mirelle, Raphael, my parents, and my brother Graham; and my teachers: A.R., R.T.R., and H.H.K.

Deborah Schoeberlein

CHAPTER 1

Teach as You Learn

"We're doing spring cleaning up here." He tapped her forehead with a long finger. "Once you put everything into its proper place—once you organize your mind—you'll be able to find what you want quickly."

Tamora Pierce, *Wild Magic*

Master teachers are mindful teachers, aware of themselves and attuned to their students. Mindful teaching nurtures a learning community in which students flourish academically, emotionally, and socially—and teachers thrive professionally and personally. *Teaching mindfulness* directly to students augments the effects of the teacher's presence by coaching youth to exercise simple, practical, and universal attention skills themselves. These two approaches are mutually reinforcing and benefit everyone in the classroom.

Mindfulness is a conscious, purposeful way of tuning in to what's happening in and around us. This specific approach to paying attention and honing awareness improves mental focus and academic performance. It also strengthens skills that contribute to emotional balance. The best of our human qualities, including the capacity for kindness, empathy, and

in the classroom. I developed some of these techniques, others are in public circulation in some form or other.

All of these formal techniques and informal activities enrich the conceptual discussion of teaching methodologies and lesson implementation. I encourage you to adopt and adapt any of them to suit your own circumstances and inclinations.

What Mindfulness Does

Mindfulness isn't a panacea for the world's problems, but it does provide a practical strategy for working directly with reality. You might not be able to change certain things in your life, at work, or at home, but you can change *how* you experience those immutable aspects of life, work, and home. And the more present you are to your own life, the more choices you have that influence its unfolding.

With mindfulness, you're more likely to view a really challenging class as just that, "a really challenging class," instead of feeling that the experience has somehow ruined your entire day. Purposefully taking a mental step back, in order to notice what happened without immediately engaging with intense emotions and reactions, provides a kind of protection against unconstructive responses and the self-criticism that can slip out and make a hard thing even harder. Even just pausing to take a breath can help you slow down, see a broader perspective and redirect the energy of the situation.

I've had moments (as I'm sure have you) when a cascade of little annoyances gathered momentum and I lost it—only to regret my outburst later. Developing mindfulness promotes awareness of the cascade, but from a distance. This way, I have a better chance of working with my assumptions without losing my perspective. Annoyances can be events that don't have to gain momentum, rather than triggers for more and more difficulty. Mindfully noticing the discrepancy between what *I wanted to accomplish* and what *I actually achieved* provides useful information without the distraction of unproductive anger, frustration, or disappointment.

I've also known days when one challenging class rattled me to my core and poisoned whatever came next. Even after school, such experiences often lingered—as if the actual class weren't bad enough, the ongoing mental repercussions were worse. If this has happened to you, then you'll know exactly how painful and frustrating this feels. It's easy to torment yourself by questioning your competence as a teacher when a forty-five minute class can cause you to take students' poor behavior personally and lose your center. Even reflecting, "I should have handled that differently since I'm a professional after all—and I'm the adult in a room full of kids!" doesn't really provide any practical guidance for the future.

So what's the answer? Put simply, part of it is all about mindfulness: practice and application, and more practice and yet more application. Practice begins with

developing mindfulness in a calm, quiet place, a place where the practice is comparatively easy. Application is about walking into a more challenging situation in real life, like your most difficult class, with increased skills and the confidence to help you stay focused, present, flexible, and available. Should you lose the quality of mindfulness you'll eventually notice what's happened. And when you do, you can practice returning your attention to paying attention, and redirect your awareness onto the experience of awareness. As you practice and apply mindfulness, you'll gain skills that will help you accurately assess challenges and handle them with greater ease.

Having techniques that help you manage your own experiences and emotions is more comfortable than feeling powerless as a result of your emotions and habits or, worse, buffeted about by the changing winds of other people's behaviors and the environment. It's a simple fact of life that we cannot change other people to suit our will. Yet you can change your own habits and your relationship to your reactions—but reaching that goal requires effective strategies. Learning mindfulness techniques that support *responding* rather than *reacting* allows you to align your emotional patterns and your actions with your current understanding and needs.

Mindful Teaching: You've Done It Before

Most likely, you've already experienced moments of mindfulness, but perhaps not recognized them as such at the time—or at least not until afterward. Even if you haven't, the techniques in this book will help you develop that awareness. Considering these examples might prompt the recollection of similar experiences:

- You're teaching a class when you notice—as if you were witnessing the situation while living it—your students and you are totally focused on the experience of learning.
- You're listening to someone when you realize you're totally tuned in to the experience of listening—and you're not thinking at all about what to say next.
- You consciously hear your tone of voice while speaking and notice how sounds can communicate—without automatically focusing on the meaning of the words.

These are all examples of becoming aware of mindfulness. That realization of "Ooh! I'm being really mindful of this moment!" is not itself the experience of mindfulness. When you're truly present in the moment, your awareness isn't split between your experience of presence and your commentary about the experience. Mindfulness

precedes the recognition of self-awareness, and the commentary may or may not arise afterward.

Another way to identify mindfulness is by examining mind-*less*ness—the quality of losing your awareness of what's happening inside and around you. See if you recognize any of these examples from your own experience:

- You react very strongly to a relatively minor issue with a student, and later realize your emotional arousal was due to something else, and had nothing to do with what happened in class.
- You suddenly notice a colleague has been speaking to you for at least fifteen minutes and you've missed most (all?) of what she said.
- You gulp down your lunch only to realize you didn't taste a bite.

Most teachers intuitively know the feeling of being in or out of sync with themselves as well as their students. Or, to put it differently, you probably feel the qualitative difference between mindful and mindless teaching. When you're *really here,* your teaching is effective and you feel energized. In contrast, mindless teaching isn't so effective, and often leads to feeling drained and cranky.

There is also a noticeable difference in students' performance when they learn mindfully versus when they do schoolwork mindlessly. When students are *really there,* the classroom is alive with learning and their work shines. When they're disengaged or

- Enhances social and emotional learning.
- Fosters pro-social behaviors and healthy relationships.
- Supports holistic well-being.

Taking Mindfulness to School

The most common model for taking mindfulness to school relies on an individual teacher—perhaps someone like you—with an interest in the subject. Perhaps you stumbled on a reference to mindfulness while searching for strategies that help students concentrate on their work or calm their minds more effectively. Or maybe you have personal experience with mindfulness and wonder whether this practice could help your students—and, if so, how to teach it to them.

Most teachers start bringing mindfulness to school without the benefit of professional training on the subject. That's fine and can be effective, but first it's important to gain familiarity with the experience of mindfulness on your own. As you do so, you'll naturally bring your heightened attention and awareness into the classroom and teach more mindfully.

This type of personal development supports professional development, and you don't need administrative approval for mindful teaching so long as the outcomes are consistent with standard practice. Everyone accepts that patience, attentiveness, and responsiveness

are desirable, even essential, qualities for teachers. How you cultivate them is secondary as long as you maintain a professional presence at school.

There are other approaches and considerations if you want to teach mindfulness more directly to your students than simply through your own informal modeling. The most comprehensive approach is to use a formal mindfulness curriculum—which might not be practical given the specifics of your class, school, or situation. One potential difficulty with this strategy lies in the paucity of curricula and training programs accessible to individual teachers. Typically, formal curricula are only available to schools and school districts for pedagogical as well as practical reasons such as financial cost. As an individual teacher, you're also likely to face obstacles related to obtaining administrative approval for a new curriculum, especially when other teachers are satisfied with existing materials.

Fortunately, there are other options better suited for use by an individual teacher. The most promising of these is to integrate discrete and simple mindfulness techniques within your existing curricula or regular schedule. In addition to developing your own familiarity with mindfulness, you'll also need to find developmentally appropriate techniques for your students or develop them yourself (and this book will set you well on your way to doing this). You can easily introduce short techniques during class, homeroom, or even during the few minutes left before or after

you mark attendance, go to lunch, or dismiss your students. More elaborate and time-intensive activities are less flexible, but you can still introduce them as lesson extensions or during special events. Whether you'll need administrative approval for this type of curricular enhancement is likely to depend on your chosen approach, school policy, and community norms.

Peer support is important—for teachers and students—and teaching mindfulness is easier, and arguably more effective, in schools and school districts where everyone participates. Getting everyone involved in a schoolwide program that incorporates research-based methodologies requires strong administrative support—but schools are also more likely to approve large-scale, demonstrated methodologies. Once adopted, such programs have the greatest potential to impact the overall school culture as well as individual classroom climate.

From the teacher's perspective, there are other, more immediate, benefits associated with using an approved mindfulness curriculum. Generally, approved curricula are comprehensive and include developmentally appropriate lesson plans with performance measures for students, background information for teachers, and cross-references aligning curricular content with education standard for administrators. All these components facilitate planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Formal curricula typically include a teacher-training component. At a minimum, the training covers the

nuts-and-bolts aspects of implementation, addressing issues like *how* to present each lesson and *when* to assess whether students are learning. Enhanced training goes further by presenting new curricular content to teachers, providing them with instruction in new skills, and offering opportunities for supervised practice and feedback. While direct interaction with an official trainer is standard practice, other promising options include instructional DVDs and online education, both of which are less expensive and time-intensive.

The third model for bringing mindfulness to school minimizes, if not eliminates, the need for teacher training since guest presenters carry the responsibility for presenting the material. Enhancing classroom-based mindfulness instruction by exposing students to a credible resource from outside the school community is a common, and often very productive, strategy for involving guest presenters. This methodology works best when you prepare students in advance and introduce the presenter in the context of ongoing study, and follow-up later to reinforce their learning.

Another approach involves community-based presenters with a contractual relationship to provide regular school-based instruction in specific subject areas, such as yoga, Tai Chi, or meditation. These guest presenters have special expertise, and fill in for regular teachers with full administrative support.

Yet another option is inviting guest presenters to school for a one-time-only event. As a stand-alone approach, this model has limited long-term impact—it's difficult to develop mindfulness or understand a basic mindfulness practice within the course of a single lecture. Nonetheless, a special event can work beautifully if classroom teachers support students' practice afterward and provide reinforcement as the students develop new skills.

The classroom teacher's role is critical to the success of any approach that takes mindfulness to school. Your presence will inform your students' experience regardless of whether you take the lead in developing techniques, implementing a curriculum or bringing in a guest presenter. Mindful teaching supports teaching mindfulness.

While you don't need to have extensive prior experience, the familiarity that comes with a little practice does help by building the confidence needed for teaching mindfulness effectively in the classroom.

Personal Practice: Beginning Now

Gaining experience with mindfulness sets you up to teach authentically within your comfort zone. There's a huge difference between teaching something "I think ought to be useful" and something "I know, from my own experience, is useful." You don't need to have significant *expertise*—rather, you just need to practice yourself so you have an *experiential foundation* on which to base your teaching.

they signify that the practice is working—you're noticing what's really happening. If thoughts about the quality of your practice come (because that's what thoughts do...), don't worry about them, just notice them and refocus on watching what's happening right now.

The essence of this technique is attending to the process (the experience of noticing) without getting caught up in content (what the thoughts are about). First, simply notice thoughts as they first appear on the horizon of your mind. Keep some distance as you watch them and let them fade away. This is the difference between witnessing thoughts and engaging with them. It's an attitude of, "Oh, here are some thoughts about work (or a relationship or something else), but I'm not going to get into them now." Be gentle with yourself, and patient, and kind.

As you practice mindfulness, you might start noticing all sorts of changes in your daily life. You might be less reactive, and more likely to pause and breathe when something comes up. You might also notice that pausing for breath facilitates your ability to choose a response that promotes better outcomes for everyone. Amid all of this, you might begin to take pleasure, or find more pleasure, in your mindfulness practice and seek new opportunities during the day in which to Take 5. In addition, you might also notice greater patience and kindness in relationship with your sense of self.

Cultivating mindfulness begins with practicing a simple progression like Mindful Breathing and becoming adept at moving through the three basic phases: (1) committing to practice and doing so; (2) noticing your breath and remembering that you're noticing it; and (3) refocusing and returning to practice when you become distracted. Then, as mindfulness becomes more familiar, you'll focus your attention and extend your awareness more spontaneously while you gain the experience that supports teaching the practice to others.

CHAPTER 2

Mindfulness in the Morning

> [Sherlock] Holmes had cultivated the ability to still the noise of the mind....
>
> Laurie R. King, *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*

Mindfulness instills freshness as you move through the morning. Noticing what you're doing *as* you're doing it initiates the transformation. Even if you're not a morning person, there is no need for radical change. As you'll see, there are many simple strategies that can help you shift the experiential quality of your normal routine by focusing attention and awareness on *how* you do what you do.

The very first opportunity for mindfulness occurs as you transition from sleep into wakefulness. If you bring mindful attention to the process of waking, you may start to find that the quality and texture of your day differs from simply moving automatically through your morning routine.

The objective in waking mindfully is paying attention, deeply, regardless of whether your immediate experience is marked by calm or chaos.

Greeting the Day

What's the first thing you like to do when your students enter the classroom? I like to greet them by acknowledging their presence and communicating welcome. This feels good for me, and I know they are more likely to learn when they soften into the learning environment. Since genuine greetings support positive outcomes in the classroom, why not adapt the same methodology first thing in the morning?

Best practices in the classroom are often relevant at home. I like to acknowledge the experience of shifting from sleep into conscious awareness silently, with a sense of gratitude. The feeling is more an attitude than a statement, but it includes recognition—"I'm here, now"—and appreciation—"I'm glad to know that I'm here."

You might greet the day silently, or with words like "Here I am," "Okay, it's morning. Let's go," or "Hello, day!" Or you might look out the window each morning before you get out of bed to meet the day with your eyes. The nature of a greeting is personal; it has to feel right for you as both giver and receiver.

Mindfulness plays a role in all these greetings. First, you attend to the experience of noticing that it's morning. Next, you begin to become aware that your experience of noticing the morning cues you to greet the day. Finally, you offer your

greeting with awareness that this greeting welcomes you to the day and the day to you. Greeting the day involves witnessing and participating in its arrival, and your gesture of acknowledgment merges mindfulness with your behavior.

Mindfulness and Intentions

Setting an intention that highlights an aspect of daily experience builds on your initial greeting. Developing an intention is similar to visualizing, but instead of a picture you develop a mental, emotional, or *attitudinal* model of what you would like to accomplish or perhaps just the *way* you intend to encounter activities.

"Casting an intention" over the day is like throwing a ship's anchor into the sea. Once the anchor is lodged in the sea floor, the ship maintains its general location even if the wind and tides alter its surface position. Likewise, an intention positions your mind to hold a particular orientation during the day, as you shift between activities. Mindfulness is the line that attaches the anchor of intention with your moment-by-moment experiences during the day.

Intentions and mindfulness reinforce each other. Intention focuses attention on a particular objective, and mindfulness harnesses awareness to sustain your focus.

Mindfulness permeates the process of working with an intention at multiple points: