

“A treasure trove of practical strategies,
and an exceptionally important contribution to the field!”

—Richard C. Brown, chair of the Contemplative Education Department, Naropa University

MINDFUL TEACHING AND TEACHING MINDFULNESS

*A Guide
For Anyone
Who Teaches Anything*



DEBORAH SCHOEBERLEIN

WITH SUKI SHETH, PH.D.

FOREWORD BY STEPHEN VIOLA, PH.D.

A Note from the Publisher

We hope you will enjoy this [Wisdom](#) book. For your convenience, this digital edition is delivered to you without “digital rights management” (DRM). This makes it easier for you to use across a variety of digital platforms, as well as preserve in your personal library for future device migration.

Our nonprofit mission is to develop and deliver to you the very highest quality books on Buddhism and mindful living. We hope this book will be of benefit to you, and we sincerely appreciate your support of the author and Wisdom with your purchase. If you'd like to consider additional support of our mission, please visit our website at wisdompubs.org.

**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

(over)

“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

Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness

Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness

*A Guide for Anyone
Who Teaches Anything*

Deborah Schoeberlein

with Suki Sheth, Ph.D.

Foreword by Stephen Viola, Ph.D.



Wisdom Publications • Boston

Wisdom Publications
199 Elm Street
Somerville MA 02144 USA
www.wisdompubs.org

© 2009 Deborah Schoeberlein

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photography, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system or technologies now known or later developed, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schoeberlein, Deborah R.

Mindful teaching & teaching mindfulness : a guide for anyone who teaches anything / Deborah Schoeberlein, with Suki Sheth ; foreword by Stephen Viola.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-86171-567-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-86171-991-4 (ebook)

1. Reflective teaching. I. Sheth, Suki. II. Title. III. Title: Mindful teaching and teaching mindfulness.

LB1025.3.S385 2009

371.102—dc22

2009027151

13 12 11 10 09

5 4 3 2 1

Cover design by Phil Pascuzzo. Interior design by TLLC. Set in Caslon 11.5/15.5.

Wisdom Publications' books are printed on acid-free paper and meet the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

Printed in the United States of America.



This book was produced with environmental mindfulness. We have elected to print this title on 30% PCW recycled paper. As a result, we have saved the following resources: 24 trees, 8 million BTUs of energy, 2,311 lbs. of greenhouse gases, 11,132 gallons of water, and 676 lbs. of solid waste. For more information, please visit our website, www.wisdompubs.org. This paper is also FSC certified. For more information, please visit www.fscus.org.



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



Table of Contents

Foreword by Stephen Viola	xi
Preface	xiii
CHAPTER 1: TEACH AS YOU LEARN	1
Take 5: Mindful Breathing (for Teachers)	14
CHAPTER 2: MINDFULNESS IN THE MORNING	17
Noticing Thoughts (for Teachers)	27
Noticing Feelings (for Teachers)	28
CHAPTER 3: ON TO SCHOOL	35
Take 1: Mindful Breathing (for Students)	45
CHAPTER 4: HOW YOU SEE IT	53
Mindful Seeing (for Students)	64
CHAPTER 5: KINDNESS AND CONNECTIONS	71
Kindness Reflections (for Teachers)	81
Kindness Reflections for Loved Ones (for Teachers)	82
CHAPTER 6: BEADS ON A STRING	89
Drawing the Mind (for Students)	93

Mindful Eating (for Students)	97
Noticing Thoughts (for Students)	106
Noticing Gaps (for Students)	107
CHAPTER 7: BODY AWARENESS	111
Walking with Awareness (for Students)	117
Mindful Walking (for Students)	120
Mindful Walking—Attending to the Body (for Students)	121
Mindful Walking—Developing Awareness with Distraction (for Students)	122
CHAPTER 8: MINDFUL WORDS	131
Mindful Journaling with Take 1 (for Students)	134
Journals and Mindful Seeing (for Students)	136
Kindness Reflections (for Students)	141
Mindful Speech (for Students)	147
CHAPTER 9: FULL CIRCLE	157
Analytical Meditation on Satisfaction (for Teachers)	164
Short Reflection on the Day (for Teachers)	169
Appendix 1: Summary Encapsulation	177
Appendix 2: Formal Instructions and References to Informal Activities	179
Index	197
About the Authors	203



Foreword

MINDFULNESS AND EDUCATION are beautifully interwoven. Mindfulness is about being present with and to your inner experience as well as your outer environment, including other people. When teachers are fully present, they teach better. When students are fully present, the quality of their learning is better. It's a “win-win” equation that can transform teaching, learning, and the educational landscape.

Mindfulness helps teachers in multiple ways by supporting emotion management, reducing stress, and focusing the mind. These skills are essential for career success and satisfaction. With nearly 40% of teachers leaving the profession after five years, we know that the familiar approaches aren't adequate when things get tough in the classroom.

Focused awareness, as cultivated through mindfulness, also helps students by improving attention, promoting academic achievement, reducing problem behaviors and increasing enthusiasm for learning. But the greater educational potential of mindfulness goes beyond raising test scores. Mindfulness has much to offer as educators address other intractable problems of education through facilitating the flexible transfer of

skills and knowledge to new contexts, developing deep understanding of student motivation and engagement, strengthening critical and creative thinking, and fostering more self-directed learners.

Tapping into the potential of mindfulness begins when teachers and students learn to pay attention to the *experience of paying attention*. Since teaching stems from personal experience and understanding, educators' familiarity with mindfulness must precede implementation of student-centered methodologies.

The point is that we have to go first—and this book, written by a longtime educator who “gets it,” shows how.

Stephen Viola, Ph.D.
Director, Transition to Teaching Program
University of Missouri–St. Louis



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.

“Yes,” I said, “that’s how it usually happens when you plan to have a child.” Everyone laughed. Then, once the tension diffused, I drew their attention to the link between staying healthy as a teen and having options as an adult. We discussed responsibility for our own health and well-being, as well as that of others. Real-life relevance, in the form of my seven-months-pregnant figure, was right there in front of them. They got the point.

I got the point too—though, of course, it was different from theirs. I had dabbled with meditation, and that experience had unconsciously primed me to notice what was happening—inside me and among the students—as soon as the girl asked her question. I experienced myself standing in front of that class with all eyes on my belly. (*This feels really intense.*) I felt the impact of thirty students’ perceptions and unspoken questions about a typically taboo topic. (*There’s a lot of energy in the room right now.*) I noticed that I had the ideal opportunity to teach with my words, my physical presence, and my emotional response. (*Take a breath, focus.*)

In the moments before I spoke, as I breathed and waited for quiet, I noticed the quality of my inner thoughts (scattered), feelings (uncomfortable), and physical sensations (flushed) as well as the students’ reactions (amusement combined with an increased willingness to take both the class, and me, seriously) and behavior (direct gazes, along with some laughter and squirming).

I noticed all these things without becoming wrapped up in any of them. I felt multiple emotions, but focusing on my breath helped me witness them without reacting unconstructively. I knew that responding to the girl’s question in a calm,

Preface

gentle, and kind manner would convey a powerful message about protecting health, making responsible choices, and caring for others.

By switching my attention to my breathing and opening my awareness to what was happening, I could better manage my own emotions, reactions, and pedagogical response. Doing so positioned me to meet my students' needs and capitalize on this intense—and very teachable—moment. I didn't need to manage their *behavior*, because they shifted their attention and adjusted their own actions in response to my example.

The discussion that followed was transformative for everyone. There were clear boundaries—I was the teacher and they were the students—but we were also “in sync.” We were all there, *really there*. They understood the relevance of classroom learning in real life, as expressed by my belly. I understood that teaching modeled *being in the moment* and could infuse the classroom with openness, presence, and caring. And I came to see that students learn as much if not more from *what we do* as teachers and how we *are*, than from what we *say*.

That was my first direct experience of mindful teaching in the classroom.

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

Preface

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 compassion, support and are supported by mindfulness. Mindfulness and deep caring contribute to healthy relationships at school and at home. Mindfulness is the means, and deep caring describes the manner.

School-based learning is complex, in part because teachers and students carry individual webs of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors into an interactive classroom environment. Learning is most effective when teachers initiate the process of weaving these varied webs together. To do so, teachers need to understand their own inner experiences, recognize their students' needs, and implement appropriate educational strategies. The teacher's own skills in attention and awareness drive this process; the stronger these skills, the better the outcomes—for everyone.

Attention and awareness are dynamic, and this means that you can sharpen them and enhance them. One of the most powerful ways to do this—for yourself and with your students—is by cultivating mindfulness. The approach involves learning and practicing some brief, simple mental training techniques and teaching methodologies. Once you learn the basics, you can bring mindfulness into your normal routine at home and at school—directly and indirectly.

This book explores two main themes that twine together to apply mindfulness to education. The first concerns the educator's direct experience of mindful teaching and the related benefits for students. The second, training students to develop mindfulness themselves, addresses the process of introducing specific techniques directly to youth at school, or more broadly, on the playing field; in the context of home-schooling; or during an after-school program, camp, or any other learning environment.

Implicit in these themes is the assumption that training attention and developing awareness of the present moment are appropriate educational activities, whether or not the term “mindfulness” is used. So, the salient question concerns methodology—how can teachers go about applying mindfulness to teaching and implementing developmentally appropriate techniques with their students?

There are multiple responses to this question, and determining which is most likely to suit your situation begins with identifying your specific context. Are you, as an individual teacher, embarking on this initiative in the classroom alone? Or are you one of many teachers, if not an entire school community, implementing mindfulness as part of a formal curriculum? In addition, will you include guest presentations, and if so, will these fill an essential or supplemental role?

The following chapters explore common issues relevant to all three of these sets of circumstances and identify significant topics pertinent to the distinct approaches. You’ll also find sample strategies that promote mindful teaching and teach students about mindfulness directly. In addition, I’ve included a number of scripted instructions for generic mindfulness techniques that you can pick up and immediately use 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 *mindlessness*—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 distracted, well, the classroom is more likely to be dull or in chaos.

Mind and Brain

Using the mind to know the mind is a uniquely human capacity, as is using the mind to change the brain and thus the body. In this book, I use the term *mind* to refer to consciousness and the term *brain* for the organ, located within the skull, that supports consciousness. This is not a strictly scientific distinction, but differentiating between the mind and brain simplifies the discussion considerably.

My high school biology teachers taught that the human brain stops growing after adolescence. My classmates and I didn't welcome this information. We resisted the idea that our brain's power would begin to wane once we reached adulthood. Contemporary high school students learn that the connections among the 100+ billion neurons in the brain are "plastic," and can change throughout a lifetime. Today's students might take this information for granted, but knowing it's not all downhill after age 21 helps motivate me to make the effort required to train my mind during adulthood.

Old dogs *can* learn new tricks. Regular mindfulness practice trains attention, promotes emotional balance, fosters a sense of well-being, and thus leads to physiological and anatomical changes in the brain associated with these experiences. Other changes in the body demonstrate further benefits of ongoing mindfulness practice, including heightened immunity, improved stress-management skills, and reduced exposure to stress hormones. These health-related outcomes are relevant at school, since good health makes teaching easier and more effective. It also promotes learning and successful performance in both students and teachers.

BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

FOR TEACHERS:

- Improves focus and awareness.
- Increases responsiveness to students' needs.
- Promotes emotional balance.
- Supports stress management and stress reduction.
- Supports healthy relationships at work and home.
- Enhances classroom climate.
- Supports overall well-being.

FOR STUDENTS:

- Supports “readiness to learn.”
- Promotes academic performance.
- Strengthens attention and concentration.
- Reduces anxiety before testing.
- Promotes self-reflection and self-calming.
- Improves classroom participation by supporting impulse control.
- Provides tools to reduce stress.
- 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 inte-

grate 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' prac-

tice 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.

The learning sequence for mindfulness is essentially the same one you already use when you teach students other skills, from math to music, or language arts to athletics. Information and instruction come first followed by lots of practice. Over time, the brain becomes familiar with generating mindfulness. With repetition, these skills become more automatic and require less effort.

In the beginning, a few minutes to practice mindfulness can feel like an eternity, so using short sessions is appropriate. Then, as you become more accustomed to the techniques, you

might choose to practice longer. It's good to go at your own speed and see what happens. And just five minutes practice regularly is more useful in the long-run than longer sessions done more sporadically. All you need to do to get started is "Take 5."

Begin by taking five minutes to sit still, by yourself, in a quiet, comfortable, and private place. Turn off the ringers of your phones, turn off the TV or radio, and put aside your "to-do" list. If you're concerned about how long you're going to practice, set a timer that has an audible bell or flashing light.

It's best to sit in a stable position, with your spine as straight as possible, either on a chair without leaning against the back, or cross-legged on a comfortable cushion set on the floor. Place both your hands in your lap or palm-down on your thighs. The idea is to get comfortable without getting caught up in trying to find a position of perfect comfort. And, of course, don't sit in a way that causes you serious pain—or lulls you to sleep.

Once you're settled, allow your gaze to soften and gently go out of focus as you keep your eyes slightly open. Look forward and downward at a 45° angle so that your eyelids relax and lower a little. Try to breathe through your nose, and let your lips, mouth, and jaw relax. Now that you're in position, you can begin the basic breathing practice outlined in the following progression.

TAKE 5: MINDFUL BREATHING (FOR TEACHERS)

- Breathe normally, paying attention to the feeling of the breath as it fills your lungs and then flows up and back out the way it came.
- Notice when you lose awareness of the breath and

start thinking about something else, daydreaming, worrying, or snoozing.

- **Return your attention to the breath, with kindness toward yourself and as little commentary as possible.**

When you first begin mindfulness practice, you're likely to pay attention to the breath for a few seconds and then lose focus. That's perfectly natural! You'll eventually become aware that the focus of your attention moved away from the breath and onto something else. You might feel like you're becoming even more mindless. All these sensations are normal, and in fact, 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.