

The Art of Noticing Deeply

The Art of Noticing Deeply:

*Commentaries on Teaching,
Learning and Mindfulness*

Edited by

Jan Buley, David Buley
and Rupert Collister

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INTRODUCTION

The collected commentaries celebrated in this book are unified through the theme of deeply noticing the world of teaching and learning around us. Storytellers, teachers, researchers, poets, photographers, writers, mentors, guides—we are all of these things. The authors assembled in this collection are integral to the sustaining of wide-awakeness and engagement in the classroom and beyond. Together, we are exploring the spaces where we teach and learn, spaces where we explore and interact, and spaces where we pause and wonder. We trust that this book will offer insights into ways in which the arts intersect our creative beings, and nudge us to think about ways to renew what we ‘thought we knew’ about teaching and learning. Special thanks is extended to all of the authors: Chris Beeman, Sean Blenkinsop, Cindy Derrenbacher, Lochran Fallon, Nicole Fisher, Libby Falk Jones, Samantha Goss, Richard Graves, Nikkia Green, Maureen Hall, Michael Hankard, Aimee Myers, Aminda O’Hare, Wendy Ryden, Susan Schiller, Sherry Swain and Daniel Weinstein. We are indebted to you all.

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SECTION ONE:

CLASSROOM CLIMATE: WIDE-AWAKENESS

“Words create worlds”¹. The way we *think* about something affects the way we *talk* (or *write*) about it. The way we *talk* (or *write*) about something affects the way we *behave* in relation to it. The way we *behave* in relation to something affects the way we *experience* it, and the way we *experience* something affects the way we *think* about it. So, in a very real way, language, behaviour, and experiences *create the world we exist within*. Words create worlds or we might also say that words create worldviews. As Tarnas says “Our worldview is not simply the way we look at the world. It reaches inward to constitute our innermost being and outward to constitute the world. [...] Worldviews create worlds”².

Originally a German word, *Weltanschauung* means the ‘view of life’ or ‘perception of the world’. The *intellectual concept* of a worldview is rooted in European or Western culture and thinking. Worldviews are human constructs. They are the systems of beliefs or understandings that we use to make sense of our existence and the language we use to *think about* and *describe* it. From them flows the structures and institutions of our societies, and the patterns of behaviour that shape our interactions with the entire complexity of contexts we exist within. It is the worldview that describes those contexts—how they are formed and how they evolve. It also describes what is important and what is not, and what is real and what is not. Finally, it is the worldview that describes the extent of our understanding of this complexity of contexts and how all entities, relationships, experiences, and phenomena, both internal and external, are to be understood and interacted with. It is the dominant worldview in each context that controls and shapes the language, behaviours, and experiences

¹ Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (San Francisco, California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2003), 53.

² Richard Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New Worldview* (New York, New York: Viking: The Penguin Group, 2006), 16.

in that context.

Of course we, as teachers, don't simply exist in one clearly defined world, and we don't all have the same worldview. Nor do our students. We *all* live in a complexity of contexts, which are all interrelated; evolving, unfolding, and enfolding in every moment³. When I say 'we' I mean human kind. Although I don't want to diminish the *uniqueness* of any *and every* individual, family, community, culture, and society by generalising, there are consistencies or synergies that can be highlighted between us. Dr. Greg Cajete (and others) calls this "unity in diversity"⁴. As teachers, we may not have full control of the context of teaching and learning we are immersed in, but we do have control over ourselves – *who we are, how we exist in the world, and the effects that our attitudes, behaviours, actions, decisions, and values have on that world*. Just as human beings, are all co-creating the world we exist in, in every moment; we, as teachers, are co-creating the context of our teaching and learning relationship in every moment too. Such an ultimate purpose cannot be achieved without **noticing deeply**, entering into mindfulness, awakening, awareness, or what others have described as '*Presence*'⁵. Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers say:

We first thought of presence as being fully conscious and aware in the present moment. Then we began to appreciate presence as deep listening, of being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense. We came to see the importance of letting go of old identities and the need to control and [...] making choices to serve the evolution of life. Ultimately, we came to see all these aspects of presence as leading to a state of "letting come", of participating in a larger field for change. When this happens, the field shifts and the forces shaping a situation can move from re-creating the past to manifesting or realising an emerging future.⁶

³ Rupert Collister, *A Journey in Search of Wholeness and Meaning* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010).

⁴ Collaborative conversation with Gregory Cajete, 29th November, 2006.

⁵ Peter M. Senge et al, *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society* 2nd ed. (New York: Currency/Doubleday: A division of Random House, 2005).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

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We need to honour alternative ways of being and ways of knowing, ones that serve to educate people and connect to a professional ethic and a sense of care and concern for our world, our relations with ourselves and others.

CHAPTER ONE

‘WIDE-AWAKENESS’ IN THE CLASSROOM: THE POWER OF MINDFULNESS ATTENTION TRAINING FOR IN-SERVICE TEACHERS IN A GRADUATE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH COURSE

MAUREEN HALL AND AMINDA O’HARE

Introduction

Recently, there has been a change in the culture of secondary education—a shifting away from the stringent, facts-based, ‘no child left behind’ mentality of high-stakes testing, toward social and emotional learning (SEL). This shift has been reflected in the Obama administration’s recent call for a reduction in over-testing in public schools¹ and the adoption of SEL curriculum programs in different states including Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia². While this shift is aimed at creating more balanced educational environments for students, (where the development of social and emotional skills is equally privileged with the development of academic skills), the development and well-being of K-12 educators has been overlooked. As such, the shift toward SEL programming in K-12 education cannot be sustainable until the individuals who provide the daily instruction to students are able to embody and model principles of SEL.

¹ Kate Zernike, "Obama Administration Calls for Limits on Testing in Schools" *The New York Times* (October 24, 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com>.

² Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, "State Standards for Social and Emotional Learning," CASEL, <http://www.casel.org/state-standards-for-social-and-emotional-learning/>.

Even with this recent and gradual shift toward SEL in secondary education, there is still a significant emphasis on high-stakes testing. This environment places pressure on educators to ‘teach to the test’ to ensure their own job security, as well as providing funding and autonomy for their schools. In a sense, this strips away educators’ identities as teaching professionals. This de-professionalization of teaching lacks the necessary responsiveness of teachers,’ and their students’ individual needs as human beings. This added performance pressure and reduced sense of self-efficacy in the classroom might contribute to the growing burnout rates in K-12 educators³.

Parker Palmer humanizes teaching and calls for a different kind of education where there is no separation between the ‘the knower and the known.’ He articulates that the current and dominant model has dominated and deformed higher education. Essentially, Palmer is articulating the disconnect between the science of SEL, best practices for learning and the current standards for how teachers are expected to teach. He sees contemplative practice as a corrective methodology, and as something that holds power to deepen the teaching and learning relationship⁴.

In many ways, our work is aligned with Palmer’s notion: we need to honour alternative ways of being and ways of knowing; one that serves to educate people about a professional ethic and sense of care and concern for our world, our relations with ourselves and with others. We have utilised mindfulness meditation as a conduit for developing these skills in practising K-12 educators. Mindfulness provides an embodied way of knowing that intertwines with the participants’ cognitive understandings about mindfulness and embodied knowledge. In this way, there is no separation.

We implemented an eight-week mindfulness-training program in a graduate educational research course for twenty in-service K-12 teachers. We draw upon Kabat-Zinn’s definition of mindfulness, articulated as “paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment,

³ John Meiklejohn, et al., "Integrating Mindfulness Training into K-12 Education: Fostering the Resilience of Teachers and Students," *Mindfulness* 3, no. 4 (2012); Patricia A Poulin et al., "Mindfulness Training as an Evidenced-Based Approach to Reducing Stress and Promoting Well-Being Among Human Services Professionals," *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education*, 46, no. 2 (2008).

⁴ Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 2nd [10th anniversary] ed. (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Imprint, 2007).

and nonjudgmentally.”⁵ The mindfulness program consisted of reading literature about the research and application of mindfulness practices in education, weekly group meetings where new mindfulness practices were learned, daily individual practice, and daily reflective journaling on the practices and one’s subjective experiences throughout the program. The program culminated with a paper assignment entitled ‘Bridging Theory to Practice’ in which participants were asked to discuss 1) what they had learned about mindfulness practices in terms of both theory and practice and 2) ways, techniques, activities, and/or approaches they could use in the classroom to foster mindfulness in their content area. These papers were qualitatively analysed to examine the impact of the mindfulness program on the teachers and their teaching techniques.

Methods

Grounded theory methodology

As a part of the process of grounded theory methodology⁶, initial or open coding was used to identify and label words or phrases in the data. Focused coding was then used to group the codes into conceptual categories as higher order, or what we refer to as “umbrella” categories. As a part of the ongoing distilling of data, a constant comparative method was used. This constant comparison allowed for patterns to emerge and was instructive in terms of adjusting the terminology, as well as combining, eliminating, and adding sub-categories based on their perceived importance in the overall data. In the initial and later coding processes, memos were created to lend detail to how and why particular information fit together into a category or needed to be moved to another category or sub-category. Representative pieces from the coded data were then chosen to illustrate the larger themes and sub-categories. A diagram depicting the final categories and sub-categories can be found in Figure 1.

Results

Many interesting themes emerged from the data. What differentiated the data into two large umbrellas of meaning or categories is what we are

⁵ Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*, 10th- anniversary ed. (New York, New York: Hyperion, 2005), 4.

⁶ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (London, England: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967).

referring to as 1) *Expanding Out* and 2) *Internalizing*.

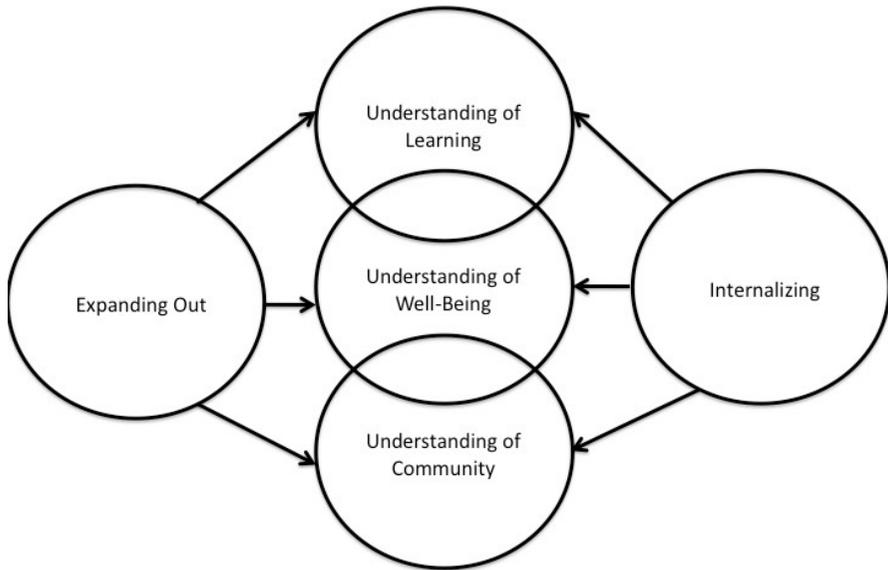


Figure 1. Two umbrella categories emerged from the Grounded Theory qualitative analysis: Expanding Out and Internalizing. Each of these had sub-categories built around the themes of learning, well-being, and community.

Expanding out

The data in the Expanding Out category evidenced a general understanding and experience with contemplative practices, which seemed to indicate a more rudimentary level of understanding. In other words, this category reflected the participants' expanded conceptual understanding of the content provided in the mindfulness program. While participants were able to demonstrate an understanding of the mechanisms through which mindfulness practices can facilitate learning environments, they did so without referencing first-person experiential knowledge in this category. Five sub-categories emerged from the Expanding Out category: basic understanding of learning, understanding of student learning, understanding of and emotional learning (SEL), understanding of teachers' well-being, and understanding of creating community. Each of these sub-categories will be described, and exemplars for each will be provided.

Basic understanding of learning:

The first sub-category of Expanding Out is *basic understanding of learning*. This sub-category emerged through participants' articulation as to how their general understanding of learning had increased through the mindfulness attention training and reading and discussing research articles about contemplative practices in education. This sub-category demonstrates an understanding of the impact of mindfulness on learning but does not apply that understanding to specific educational contexts. Some examples of this sub-category are:

Learning is holistic; the integration of mind, body, and spirit. Learning is interactive between the self and the learning environment and is continuous and ongoing (Participant Q).

With the mindfulness learning, one would experience more deeply and would allow more connections to happen (Participant A).

A student who is distracted is not going to be in a mental state conducive to learning (Participant C).

Understanding student learning:

The second sub-category of Expanding Out is *understanding student learning*. This sub-category emerged through participants' articulation as to how their understanding of applying mindfulness practices to student learning had increased through the mindfulness attention training and reading and discussing research articles about contemplative practices in education. This sub-category demonstrates an understanding of the impact of mindfulness on student learning but does not connect that understanding to the role of the teaching self in student learning. Some examples of this sub-category are:

They [students] will quiet the busy world to make way for a quiet/contemplative space; they will read deeply, write deeply, and create community. This process will allow students to make connections between their body and mind, and learning will deep seat itself into the brain (Participant L).

By increasing the amount of student reflection, I can better understand my students' misconceptions and they can see how their thinking has changed. This type of teaching is a move towards a more mindful classroom (Participant N).

Students are exteriorly stimulated constantly and given less and less opportunity to look deep within themselves to develop ideas, be creative, and deepen understanding. This poses the ever-increasing need for students to become more present and connected to curriculum [...]. They [students] can use their own life and experiences to deepen learning (Participant E).

Understanding social and emotional learning (SEL):

The third sub-category of Expanding Out is *understanding SEL*. This sub-category emerged through participants' articulation as to how their understanding of the connection between emotion and cognition had increased through the mindfulness attention training and reading and discussing research articles about contemplative practices in education. This sub-category demonstrates an understanding of the interconnectedness between emotional states and the ability to learn. Some examples of this sub-category are:

Our ability to formulate high reasoning and rational thought stems from our ability to process emotion [...]. Emotions and feelings are necessary for the development of proper reasoning, decision-making, and emotional behaviour (Participant E).

By allowing children to incorporate their inner understandings and convert their problematic emotions into understanding they may hone innovative skills for evolving as creative, empathic, and conscious human beings (Participant G).

Present moment learning allows people to be interactive participants as they reflect on their own experiences and to be empathetic [...]. Learning that values and promotes mind, body, and spirit prepares our students to be educated as well a wise as they understand the world around them and then focus on improving it (Participant O).

Teachers' well-being:

The fourth sub-category of Expanding Out is *teachers' well-being*. This sub-category emerged through participants' articulation as to how their understanding of the impact of a teacher's emotional and mental state on a learning environment had increased through the mindfulness attention training and reading and discussing research articles about contemplative practices in education. This sub-category demonstrates an understanding of the importance of the well-being of an educator, both for the longevity of the educator's career and the learning environment of the students. Some examples of this sub-category are:

If we, as faculty members, create stronger minds within ourselves and stronger bonds among us, we will be more mentally fit to battle the days when we are isolated in our classrooms during the school day (Participant C).

We can all benefit from contemplative practice, including mindfulness, as this will create long-term benefits in positive outlook and behaviour [...] We will be more effective as educators two-fold. We will have a better balance to our lives as we are more centrally grounded and centred (Participant C).

The integration of mindfulness in our practice can improve our resiliency, which in turn improves our relationships with our students...teachers need to build that ‘inner strength’ to help themselves and their students persevere against daily challenges and stressors (Participant O).

Understanding of creating community:

The fifth sub-category of Expanding Out is *understanding of creating community*. This sub-category emerged through participants’ articulation as to how their understanding of the relationship between mindfulness and relationships between individuals had increased through the mindfulness attention training and reading and discussing research articles about contemplative practices in education. This sub-category demonstrates an understanding of the relationship between being accepting of oneself and being accepting of others. Some examples of this sub-category are:

I would like to focus on using the mindfulness training as a way to bring faculty together after school as a way to increase the sense of community and decrease the feelings of isolation (Participant C).

By establishing an emotional connection with students, their ability to learn and make appropriate decisions in the real world is increased...it becomes increasingly apparent to me that it is absolutely essential to establish emotional connections with my students through the curriculum. Contemplative practices can serve as an avenue to do so (Participant E).

Contemplative pedagogy (i.e. deep/reflective writing) may be a strategy that can better a child's focus and her self-awareness. It may give students the therapy they so often need (especially in the urban school district) while building a strong sense of community that is necessary for a successful program of teaching and learning (Participant F).

Internalizing

The data in the *Internalizing* category evidenced a deeper understanding and experience with contemplative practices, whereby participants were able to transcend basic comprehension of contemplative practices through their learning experiences in the class and go deeper or internalize their learning and understanding. In other words, this category reflected the teachers' embodied, first-person understanding of the concepts included in the mindfulness program, and their ability to relate to others' experiences with mindfulness through their own experience. This category is self-referential and privileges the value of internal ways of knowing. Four sub-categories emerged from Internalizing: understanding my teaching self and how that impacts student learning, understanding how I learn and what it feels like, understanding my own well-being, and understanding how I create community. Each of these sub-categories will be described, and exemplars for each will be provided.

Understanding my teaching self and how that impacts student learning:

The first sub-category of Internalizing is *understanding how my teaching self-impacts student learning*. This sub-category emerged through participants' reflection on their direct role as educators on classroom learning. They acknowledge the importance of tending to their own emotional and cognitive state as a way of influencing those states of their students. Some examples of this sub-category are:

By establishing an emotional connection with students, their ability to learn and make appropriate decisions in the real world is increased...it becomes increasingly apparent to me that it is absolutely essential to establish emotional connections with my students through the curriculum (Participant E).

I consistently reminded myself to be centred in the present, to breathe and be non-judgmental [...]. This engagement has not only benefited my deep learning, but I hope in time (after years of practice) will improve my students' understanding, comprehension, and cognition. By interacting, becoming more present and aware, I feel as though all individuals will benefit and become more focused in engaging education (Participant F).

I can say that when a student is talking to me, and my mind starts to drift because I have a million things to do, I do notice myself pulling my attention right back to the student. I am more focused on what is going on right in front of me, and try to give my full attention to it. I guess even

being aware that I am sometimes not focused, and changing, is a benefit (Participant M).

Understanding how I learn and what it feels like:

The second sub-category of Internalizing is *understanding how I learn and what it feels like*. This sub-category emerged through participants’ reflection on their meta-cognitive awareness of their own learning and their new understanding of an embodied way of knowing. They acknowledge the role of their body’s physical and emotional state on their own ability to learn and understand the world. Some examples of this sub-category are:

The writing aspect of my involvement with the mindfulness research project effectively engaged me in a way that allowed me to fully experience the mindful practice [...]. The writing provided me with a contemplative medium through which I was able to more deeply reflect on my experience. By putting my experience into words, I provoked more concrete memory and ideas both affecting my internalization and perhaps grey matter growth, and providing stepping off points from which to discuss my experience with others involved (Participant L).

Given the connections with the mind, body, and spirit of what makes us human, contemplative practice has brought a renewed feeling of self-awareness to me. My reflections during mindful practice demonstrate that I was able to develop a relaxed and focused state after each practice. I want my students to develop the same increased concentration that I have felt since starting my mindful practice (Participant D).

My mind was not always quiet, and my thoughts were not always clear. I feel that as weeks passed and I learned more effective coping/meditating techniques (i.e. imagining thoughts passing by my mind like clouds, etc. [...]), I was able to become more focused in my meditation and more centred during my practice (Participant F).

Understanding my own well-being:

The third sub-category of Internalizing is *understanding my own well-being*. This sub-category emerged through participants’ reflection on how mindfulness practice had impacted their own sense of well-being and wholeness. Some examples of this sub-category are:

I was unsure about how this practice would fit into my career as a teacher and my life, but as we went through the training, I found the practices to be very valuable. I found myself feeling that I could cope better with the rigours of life and work when I practice regularly. Although mindfulness is

difficult for me, I know that these tools will help elevate all aspects of my life (Participant B).

I feel that the training has improved my perception on dealing with stressors in life, social issues in any relationship and confirmed my belief in the whole child curriculum for our nation's education system (as well as my own classroom) (Participant F).

When it comes to mindfulness, 'just being' is a part of my strategy for dealing with a rough day, a tough conversation with a student, or a tense meeting with an administrator. I sit in my car, let it all go, and just be. I accept it for what it is, accept that it happened and move on with my day and go home to my family [...] I definitely find that my stress levels are lower, and my mood is more pleasant when I let it go and just be in the moment (Participant P).

Understanding how I create community:

The fourth sub-category of Internalizing is *understanding how I create community*. This sub-category emerged through participants' reflection on the relationship between their own feelings of connectedness with the self and their ability to connect to others. They acknowledge that work must be done on the self in order to create room for connectedness with others. Some examples of this sub-category are:

Loving-kindness helped me become more forgiving of my peers when they do not seem as relaxed in their practice, and I have shared my experiences with my colleagues (Participant D).

I feel that the mindfulness training has been a blessing for my [graduate] class. I hope for my fellow classmates, our education system, and our spirit, that all educators embrace contemplative pedagogy and accept its gifts (Participant F).

I truly believe that a teacher needs to show his/her students that he/she is a human being too. It's important to get to know your students as people (Participant J).

Discussion

From our Grounded Theory approach to qualitatively analyse the personal reflections and academic writing of our participants, we identified two umbrella categories: Expanding Out and Internalizing. Expanding Out was found to have five sub-categories – three related to understanding learning processes at different levels, one related to understanding of well-

being, and one related to understanding of creating community. Internalizing was found to have four sub-categories – two related to understanding learning processes at different levels, one related to understanding well-being, and one related to understanding creating community. Ultimately, the distilled data reflects both the theoretical and empirical literature on the impact of mindfulness practice on education. Specifically, these findings highlight the importance of including teachers in mindfulness interventions in K-12 settings to create a sustainable culture of mindfulness among schools.

Maxine Greene⁷, articulated the importance of the recovery of imagination in the classroom:

[...] one that brings an ethical concern to the fore, a concern that, again, has to do with the community that ought to be in the making and the values that give it colour and significance. My attention turns back to the importance of wide-awakeness, of awareness of what it is to be in the world. (p. 35)

Mindfulness practice, as evidenced in the voices of this study's participants and echoed in the work of Kabat-Zinn⁸ holds promise for manifesting improved learning through moment-to-moment attention on the parts of both teachers and students.

In the introduction, we mentioned a palpable shift in education; this shift recognizes the importance of SEL as an essential element of learning. As Jennings articulates, "parents, educators, and policy-makers recognize the need for a broad educational agenda that includes the development of social and emotional competencies"⁹ This broader agenda does not diminish academic success but instead is capacious enough to include learning how to practice safe behaviours and cultivate healthy relationships, along with care for self and others as part of being an engaged citizen in the society. Teaching itself is an 'emotional practice'¹⁰, one that is rich with "intrapersonal experiences (those that take place

⁷ Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1995).

⁸ Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. (New York, New York: Delacorte, 1990).

⁹ Patricia A. Jennings, *Mindfulness for Teachers: Simple Skills for Peace and Productivity in the Classroom* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2015), 36.

¹⁰ A. Hargreaves, "The Emotional Practice of Teaching," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 14 (1998).

within the teacher and each student) and interpersonal emotional experiences (those that take place between peers, between the teacher and each student, and as a social experience of group emotion)”¹¹.

Current research evidences that mindfulness practice for adults can increase awareness and promote reflective practice¹². Also, other studies have shown that mindfulness practice can decrease stress in adults¹³. Our data replicate these findings and provide insight into how these in-service K-12 teachers experienced mindfulness practice and its application to their careers as teaching professionals. Mindfulness holds power for helping teachers and learners because it can “enhance and support self-knowledge, self-regulation, and the freedom to co-create with others’ internal states and interpersonal relationships that are coherent and emotionally regulated”¹⁴. It is our hope that mindfulness and other contemplative practices will continue to become integrated into standard teacher-training curricula.

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¹¹ Jennings, *ibid.*, 25.

¹² For example, see B. K. Hölzel et al., "How Does Mindfulness Meditation Work? Proposing Mechanisms of Action from a Conceptual and Neural Perspective," *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6, no. 6 (2011).

¹³ M.T. Marcus et al., "Change in Stress Levels Following Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in a Therapeutic Community," *Addictive Disorders & Their Treatment* 2, no. 68 (2003); Y.Y Tang et al., "Short-Term Meditation Training Improves Attention and Self-Regulation" (paper presented at the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 11th October, 2007).

¹⁴ Heesoon Bai, Charles Scott, and B. Donald, "Contemplative Pedagogy and Revitalization of Teacher Education," *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 55, no. 3 (2009), 332.