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# Social Emotional Learning and Mindfulness: Learning to be Human

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University of San Francisco

**Social Emotional Learning and Mindfulness:  
Learning to be Human**

A Field Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

Jena-Lee Rogers  
December 2015

# **Social Emotional Learning and Mindfulness: Learning to be Human**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Jena-Lee Rogers  
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UNIVERSITY SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of Problem**

I am a teacher. I always have been and always will be. As a little girl, I developed a passionate need to see fairness and justice in my world, which of course outside of my family of origin revolved around my life at school. If one of my friends could not understand something, even if I was not totally sure about it myself, I would endeavor to help them learn it in a way that made sense to them. A small act of friendship helped me learn and develop my own a belief in the oneness that connects all of us as human beings with a collective consciousness, which requires constant care and attention. These experiences have taught me that without the vision and vigilance of teachers, our children will grow up in a world steeped deeply in chaos and detachment. Education is salvation. It is the window through which we come to know and understand ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses, the world around us, and our very place within the system. It is one of the most beautiful gifts we can ever experience, and every human being on the planet has a right to it. Education should be where we can be human and experience all that it encompasses. Education is not merely academic it must embrace all parts of humanness.

Education in the US needs to incorporate emotional development and mindfulness into each classroom. Public schools are often a reflection of a broader culture that disconnects and compartmentalizes. Our society has “accidentally left this moral tradition behind. Over the last several decades, we’ve lost this language, this way of organizing life. We’re not bad. But we are morally inarticulate” (Brooke, 2015, p.15). We have lost our ethical and moral consciousness in our fast moving, technology and power driven society. These ideals have seeped into our school systems. The current education system

and the development of children are not often synchronous. Teachers should view children holistically. In others words, when children understand their thoughts, feelings, and desires, they realize an essential element of what it means to be a unique and capable human. With this ability students are able to develop empathy. Human beings are not always naturally capable of knowing how to do this without guidance and support.

Developing empathy is fundamental for developing healthy balanced relationships. Therefore, creating a place in school where students' emotions and social needs are the focus is key to empowering youth. It is important to have a time in the day that is dedicated to the emotional needs of children and a time to understand, dissect, and explore their emotions and feelings because "People with well-developed emotional skills are also more likely to be content and effective in their lives, mastering the habits of mind that foster their own productivity" (Goleman, 1995, p. 36). Teaching children how to manage and regulate their emotions and share them with others engenders awareness of themselves, and empathy for others. Creating a time of the day that allows children to be mindful of their emotional state and thoughts through meditation, yoga, or time in nature, provides a time for mindfulness. However, this time of the day must extend into the culture of the classroom. Our classrooms need to be a place of emotional safety and security for children. Teachers, as well, need to be aware of their energy and intentions in order to create and sustain this atmosphere.

Mindfulness and social and emotional learning (SEL) are vital components that need to be integrated into the core curriculum of public schools and places where children are present. SEL and mindfulness education should be an integral part of the educational curriculum. Hence, teachers should be trained to help children develop their emotional

intelligence. Constructing educational activities that nurtures SEL and mindfulness will strengthen the best of our human qualities such as kindness, empathy, and compassion. (Schoeberien, 2009). These qualities are supported and developed by mindfulness and social and emotional learning. Mindful teaching empowers students and values their knowledge and wisdom seeking. By extension, mindfulness learning is a process that focuses on drawing out knowledge as opposed to transmitting knowledge (Hassed, 2013). Mindfulness in education requires empathy as a vehicle for inquiry. Consequently, knowledge is not given its sought.

Public school systems in the US should focus on the ‘whole’ child. The public school system does not focus on the development of the child from a social, emotional, and spiritual view. SEL should be integrated into the school day. With the incorporation of SEL and mindfulness, children will learn to understand their emotions and be more empathetic to those around them, in turn creating a culture of caring and compassionate people who learn to recognize their emotions and believe in the oneness of humankind. A change in consciousness needs to start with teaching children. Creating youth who are emotionally intelligent will create a world where people do not see the difference in each other, but the oneness and connection that we all share (Arghode, 2013).

The public school system is focused on testing and rote learning. The student’s unique learning styles and strengths are not highlighted. The US school system does not look at children as unique individuals, but as automation that need to memorize and take tests. Mindfulness, SEL, and sometimes even the arts, are not part of the academic agenda. This creates youth who are unsatisfied and disconnected from all parts of themselves. On one hand, teachers are mandated to adhere to strict set of learning goals

and test preparations so that schools can get funding. On the other hand, students are forced to memorize facts, sit at a desk, and learn in a way that is not productive. School is not a humanizing environment for students. Children cannot be expected to learn when their emotions are not acknowledged and they do not feel safe, secure, and supported.

SEL work helps students develop core skills that they will have for the rest of their lives. Much of SEL work is not intuitive and people need to be taught the skills to develop a healthy social and emotional life (Zakrzewski, 2014, p. 1). The five areas of SEL are 1) self-awareness, 2) self-management, 3) social awareness, 4) relationship skills, and 5) responsible decision-making. SEL is highly connected to everything a human does. If you are not able to manage emotions or get along with others you are not going to be in a free space in your mind to be a functioning member of society. Managing humans and growing these core values of SEL is a life-long process and starting this work early is essential in developing into a healthy adult.

If an SEL and mindfulness curriculum were created that public school teachers could use in their classrooms, students would be developing as a ‘whole’. Public school systems are funded based on test results and this is what prevents teachers from diving deeper into curriculum that nurtures children from all perspectives. Creating such a curriculum for public school classrooms or afterschool programs would bring a humanizing aspect to the school system.

### **Purpose of Project**

The purpose of this project was to create a professional development course for teachers to engage in mindfulness themselves and learn ways to create an SEL culture in their classrooms. The saying, practice what you preach, is essential when it comes to



mindfulness, “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” (Schoeberien, 2009, p. 1). It is as important for teachers to be mindful, as well as model it for their students. Creating a mindfulness and SEL workshop for teachers would give teachers time to reflect and meditate on their teaching practices and their own mindfulness. The workshop would include yoga classes, meditation classes, and breathing techniques along with SEL curriculum to use in their classrooms.

Mindfulness and SEL also help build stronger relationships between students and teachers; “The relationship between teachers and students is at the heart of learning, and most teachers intuitively know this” (Zakrzewski, 2014, p. 1). Building a relationship with students, especially one that is compassionate and secure, is essential for students’ growth and learning. Humans need to feel connected and safe in order to feel invested. Research has shown, “that students who experience a caring relationship with a teacher are more motivated to learn, and, hence they enjoy school more and demonstrate greater academic success” (Zakrzewski, 2014, p. 1). A classroom that creates a mindful and SEL environment promotes deeper learning and greater enjoyment.

The goal is to use mindfulness to help teachers with their own emotional management. Teachers have high stress jobs that can take a toll both emotionally and physically. Creating a space for teachers to reduce their stress and focus on their needs would help teachers be fully present and connect with students. Teachers who are mindful and emotionally in tune will be able to create a culture of mindfulness and SEL in their classroom; “Cultivating social-emotional skills within themselves help teachers

model these skills for students—a critical factor for successful implementation of SEL” (Zakrzewski, 2014, p. 1). A classroom that is structured to include mindfulness helps create empathetic and compassionate youth. This workshop will prepare teachers to use SEL in their classrooms, create more mindful practices in the classroom, and develop a culture that supports emotional development and relationships.

To create this workshop for teachers, research was conducted on emotional intelligence, social emotional learning and mindfulness. Research on how SEL and mindfulness are incorporated in classroom and the benefits of introducing it at young age and developing SEL skills was also examined. I also focused on understanding how mindfulness and SEL learning benefit children and why it should be implemented in the public school system. In addition, I focused on how to create a mindful and SEL culture in the classroom, why we have moved away from creating a humanizing schooling environment, and how that factors into our self-image and character.

Our society has reached a critical time. A time where time is moving faster and what it means to be human is becoming blurred with technology. At this time in our culture it is essential to equip our youth with powerful tools that express their humanness. We are selfish in our culture and focused on separation. We must empower youth to be aware of themselves humbly, “In its most complete meaning, intellectual humility is accurate self-awareness from a distance” (Brooks, 2015, p. 9). Children need to understand their uniqueness but not become so consumed with self that they are unaware of others.

We need to give children an opportunity to understand themselves at a deeper level than what society is telling them they are. Children should be aware of their

motivations, desires, talents, fears, and dreams. Most importantly, they we need to help them see each other as a community while nourishing their own uniqueness and beauty. We are at a significant time in history where we can accelerate our consciousness and connect with our spirit more deeply than we have before, and we need to introduce this concept to our youth so they are ready for this challenges humanity is facing.

## CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Public schools in the US need a more holistic approach to education. Education should encompass all it means to be human and schools should provide a space where this is possible. According to Diane Ravitch (2011), a historian of education, educational policy analyst, research professor at New York University and former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education:

Our present course endangers one of our nation's most precious institutions: our public schools. Surely they need improvement, but they don't need a wrecking ball. Our policymakers' obsession with standardized testing has proven to be wrong; not only does it lack scientific validation, but any parent or teacher could have told the policymakers that a heavy reliance on multiple-choice tests crushes originality, innovation, and creativity. (para. 28)

Schools are focused on test scores and forcing students to memorize facts instead exploring their communities, themselves, and others. As a result, schools are not focusing on the uniqueness of each child's strengths, talents, and imaginations. Instead, the focus is largely on teaching students to memorize material to take tests, using test scores to evaluate students, teachers, and districts.

Implementing mindfulness and social emotional learning into the public school curriculum will help to develop students who are compassionate and in touch with themselves as a whole. Chapter two is divided into three sections. Each section will explore a different facet of mindfulness in education. Section one defines emotional intelligence. Section two delineates social emotional learning and how it can be fostered in youth. Section three explores mindfulness and its importance for not only students but also teachers.

## Emotional Intelligence

School is a place where the emphasis is put on students' intelligence quotient (IQ) and the retention of information. Students are required to memorize and learn to take tests, but their emotional intelligence is not recognized or nurtured. Students are learning in a way that compartmentalizes the process. It is necessary to acknowledge all parts of being human for that is what leads to ultimate success. Most of our success in life is based on influences other than IQ, from social class, opportunities, and social abilities. (Goleman, 1995). It is not merely our IQ that leads us to our vocation; it is a number of different factors. Our society focuses on IQ being of utmost importance, but it is our emotional intelligence (EQ) that has just as much, if not more, influence on our lives. Almost 75% of our success is based on non-IQ influences and IQ only accounts for 25% of success. (Ybarra, 2014)

IQ is by no means insignificant, but there must recognize that success in life is more than what a person scores on an IQ test, "it also depends on a number of personal qualities that involve the perception, understanding, and regulation of emotion" (Ybarra, 2014, p. 93). Emotional recognition and control refers to one's ability to recognize emotion in self or someone else. On the other hand, emotional control is managing those emotions in both self and others. Usually, this creates or maintains a positive and cohesive state. When one is able to recognize emotions in others as well as in themselves, relationships develop in a holistic fashion.

Nowadays, there is little emphasis on how "emotional aptitude is a *meta-ability*, determining how well we can use whatever other skills we have, including raw intellect" (Goleman, 1995, p. 36). The emotional and thinking brain are both equally involved in

reasoning. It is a balance. Education should be a part of this balance instead of emphasizing one over the other. Many children are growing up with limited opportunities to develop their EQ. This balance is necessary to be a healthy, well-rounded human being. The two brains work together. The emotional brain feeds into and sends information into the rational mind. In contrast, the rational mind filters and sometimes rejects the emotions of the emotional brain. Schools must recognize both brains and integrate both into the academic agenda in order to nurture students who are feeding their whole selves academically, emotionally and spiritually. (Goleman, 1995)

EQ is defined in many different ways. Yet, each definition has an underlying theme of empathy and an awareness of one's own emotions. In other words, it is the "ability to sense emotion, use emotion to enhance thought, comprehend emotions, and control emotions. Other researchers stress that openness and closed attitude toward experience also indication an individual's EI" (Arghode, 2013, p. 69). EQ combines relationships, communication, caring and prospective taking.

Schools are often focused on the cognitive mind or IQ. IQ tests do assess analytical and verbal aptitude but do not highlight or measure creativity, practical knowledge or problem solving skills. Therefore, schools should be a place where students' strengths are celebrated and their uniqueness admired. (Arghode, 2013)

EQ is something that can be acquired and nurtured. It is possible to cultivate EI in students. If teachers give students opportunities to develop skills in in order to recognize and talk about their emotions and voice their fears and motivations, it is possible to create classroom communities that nurture their intellectual curiosity. In turn, EQ "impacts students' abilities to learn, be confident, be hopeful, display imagination, solve problems,

handle stress, exhibit poise, and control emotions” (p. 70). When teachers recognize all parts of a child, they give them freedom to explore themselves and give them the security to have confidence in their discoveries.

Humans have a cognitive brain and an emotional brain. However, they do not function separately. Instead, they function interdependently to facilitate decision-making and processing of information. With this in mind, “students will be better able to think critically and innovatively devise solutions to the problems if they are able to handle their emotions well. In fact Hill suggested that emotions are the medium through which learning can be achieved” (Arghode, 2013, p. 71). When humans are able to relate to a subject they create a bond and that bond makes the concept stay in our memory longer. The connection between emotions and learning is significant and generates deeper memories.

While focusing on students’ EQ is important, teachers also need to have a well-developed EQ. Emotions may affect teacher’s motivations, beliefs and goals with classroom and students. Teachers need to be flexible with change and not stuck to rigid planning without being cognizant of the changing needs of their students. Teachers need to have training in EQ in order to connect with their own feelings and needs. EQ training develops compassion and knowledge about one’s own emotions and others. Research suggests that training in emotional intelligence should be done through multiple means (Arghode, 2013). It is one thing for teachers to read about it, but it is another thing to learn how to integrate EQ into practice.

Teachers who genuinely connect with their students and create reciprocal relationships are able to bond with students on a deeper level. Students who have teachers

who display a genuine interest in their emotional well-being and development will open up and share in profound ways. The empathetic and caring nature of teachers towards students plays a pivotal role in defining interdependent relationships, “If instructors genuinely care about students’ progress and possess the EQ to detect student mood, feelings, and reach accordingly, students will respond more positively to the instruction, which will be demonstrated through students’ eagerness to participate and willingness to contribute” (Arghode, 2013, p. 73). When students feel connected to their learning environment and teacher, it increasing their motivation to learn and the effort they make to ask questions and participate. Likewise, teachers who are aware of their students’ needs are able to create to integrate EQ in their classroom.

Developing EQ can be challenging and requires time, practice, and modeling of behaviors. Teachers and students developing their EQ need practical approaches that encourage self-evaluation and reflection on their behaviors and motivations. Training in EQ “is a step toward developing individual’s self-understanding and awareness about their traits and competencies and capitalizing on the discovery of these virtues” (Arghode, 2013, p. 73). It is essential to for teachers to have an understanding of themselves in order to teach and help students develop emotional intelligence. This idea connects with the next section on social emotional learning.

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

EQ is just as important as IQ. The question is why are we not nurturing it in our school system? The public school system in the US is largely focused on testing. Students are mandated to sit at desks, read textbooks and memorize facts with few opportunities to make connections to their lived experiences. Schools exist “for the education of children



and their preparation for a happy, worthwhile contribution to society” (Bufalino, 2013, p. 41). Are teachers preparing children for society or are they creating machines that will perform tasks and not be in touch with who they are or will become? Nowadays, the perception of many is public schools are failing students. Social emotional learning (SEL) is essential and needs to be part of the public school curriculum so that students are looked at holistically and given a fair chance to become happy, contributing members of society.

If children are not given an opportunity in the classroom to express themselves or feel safe and supported, they cannot be expected to learn. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs indicates that if the basic needs of love, belonging, and esteem are not met then students cannot move to the space that enables learning (Bufalino, 2013). If these needs are not met, students will not achieve their full potential, academically, socially and emotionally.

When students are not aware of their emotions or do not have the tools that SEL teaches, they may unconsciously send confusing messages to their peers which can create social problems. These social problems can affect their ability to make and maintain friendships or cause them to be rejected by peers and have lower self-esteem. Children who participate in SEL programs have shown improvement in these areas as well as academically. Additionally, children who have participated in SEL programs have shown improvement in abilities to cope with emotions, manage stress, and have improved attitudes about themselves, others and school (Bufalino, 2013).

SEL improves student’s achievement in all areas and engages students in reflecting on what it means to be human. This is a process most students do not have an opportunity to engage in during school hours. It is important for students to have an

empathetic approach to how they see other people who are different than them. This provides them the chance to better understand others. Children need time and space in school to explore themselves in all aspects. A safe nurturing environment is essential for students to explore themselves and others. SEL accomplishes this “by placing children in carefully tailored, caring environments with adults who respond in particular ways” (Zakrzewsk, 2014, p. 398). Therefore, it is important to have a SEL culture in the classroom. Teachers and students need to create trusting relationships that allow a classroom culture that encourages social emotional learning. (Zinsser, 2014)

SEL is an exploration of emotions, but how people respond is different based on age, gender, and race. Research acknowledges the connection between home background and academic success. Children who come to school with poor social skills often encounter relationship issues with classmates, which affects happiness and academic achievement (Bufalino, 2013). Students are coming from different cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, family structures, and communities. SEL programs need to include, “culturally sensitive content and materials and attend to the contextual factors that impact children's social and emotional behavior in schools” (Garner, 2014, p. 167). SEL works with the environment in which the students are participating in. Children and adults face dual demands and roles from family and work or school. Because of students are at different development stages than adults navigating different roles and expectations can be challenging. Research shows that considerations of social cultural characteristics need to be in mind when developing curriculum for students (Garner, 2014).

Children of different cultures and genders respond differently to SEL and emotions in general. To illustrate, girls are more able to label and recognize emotions,

“Overall, girls express more positive emotion and are more emotionally regulated than boys, although this is dependent on child age, adults and/or peers presence, type of emotion, and relational factors, such as friendship quality” (Garner, 2014, p. 171). Girls recognize emotions and their consequences more consistently than boys. Consequently, it behooves teachers to acknowledge differences in gender and create an environment that supports both. Not only is gender a differentiator but race also plays a role. According to Garner (2014), “The importance of race/ethnicity in predicting children's social and emotional competence has been demonstrated in numerous studies. Some researchers have reported that African American children are less pro socially competent than Caucasian American children” (p. 169). Cultural differences are important to acknowledge and be aware of in the classroom. Situations that encourage prosocial behavior among one race may be different than those that motivate another to feel empathy, for example. It is important to acknowledge, despite Garner’s astute analysis, the problematic nature of generalizing gender and racial differences. Nevertheless, these often socialized differences represent an opportunity for teachers to become cognizant of the variety of differences among their students.

It is important to create a culture of SEL that extends beyond teacher-directed lessons. Woolf (2014) states, “one’s sense of self consolidation’ can occur only when the child is ‘not impinged on’ by external demands, such as directed learning and teacher-led activity” (p. 30). Children must practice the tools they are being taught during play and free time. When students are immersed in a SEL culture, they will use the tools and be thoughtful during free play times. Teachers must be ready to assist in conflicts between students, but it is essential to give children that time to explore. Non-directed play,

sensory experience and imaginary play allows children to create and get to know who they are. The role of adults during this free play should be to reflect on children's play, parallel verbal and non-verbal emotional engagement and of course intervene when necessary.

Students who are given the ability to free play and experience themselves and others are given the opportunity for “their self-actualization, a holistic exploration of who and what they are and know and of what they might become” (Woolf, 2014, p. 29). This offers naturally inquisitive children opportunities to develop social emotional capabilities and excitement to learn. These students can see themselves as learners and take pride in their ideas and questions (Garner, 2014).

A teacher's role in SEL is essential; therefore, they must acquire the necessary skills to support students. Teacher must have “skillful combinations of explicit instruction, sensitive and warm interactions, responsive feedback, and verbal engagement or stimulation intentionally directed to ensure children's learning while embedding these interactions in a classroom environment that is not overly structured or regimented” (Ashdown, 2011, p. 398). SEL is about what the environment teachers create in the classroom. This is largely accomplished by bringing SEL into the classroom. It is not an easy undertaking. However, the skills students learn through SEL facilitate students learning to manage their own emotions and navigate interpersonal conflicts.

A vital condition to SEL is that the teaching should be taught by teacher or school staff not an outside agency. The relationship between student and teacher is already developed. Also teachers are able to extend the SEL lessons in to the classroom culture and reinforce the lessons and skills that have been taught. Teachers are in the position to

guide students in using their skills and be present when conflict arises between students. Parents are also an important component of SEL and can create a bridge between home and school, which is important for student success in SEL, “This would enable all students, staff and parents to have a common understanding and expectation of the strategies and processes to follow, in order to address conflicts. The entire school community would then be ‘on the same page’, enhancing student social well-being, academic achievement and school community relationship” (Bufalino, 2013, p. 41). It is important to create connections and relationships between school community and home.

Research clearly suggests that the relationship between students and teacher is essential and a secure-attachment to a teacher can moderately balance an insecure relationship with a parent (Woolf, 2014). A teacher’s values and beliefs are as important as the actual material that is being taught. Most of the research that is being done about EQ and SEL indicates that teachers’ emotions and beliefs effect their students and that is why there is such a need for teacher training in EQ and SEL (Woolf, 2014). Teachers need to be aware of the raw emotions that are involved in teachers and how to look after one’s self and students, especially during moments of intensity. Teachers are being placed in intense emotional environments and are often not equipped to deal with classroom dynamics and ignoring these issues can result in less learning taking place and more behavioral issues.

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a key factor to changing the atmosphere in public schools. Mindfulness is about being present and aware. It also reminds us that our perception is based on how we choose to see things around us. Mindfulness is about non-attachment

and letting go. Mindfulness “is within us is connecting with what we are observing. Thus, connectedness, or unity, goes hand in hand with learning mindfully” (Hassad, 2013, p. 9). Mindfulness is about creating unity and learning in a way that encompasses a number of different practices; it is not merely meditation but a way to live with awareness. Being mindful creates balance and allows individuals to focus on moments as they unfold (Schoeberien, 2009).

When consciousness is constrained, this takes away focus from the present moment. Practicing mindfulness allows the individual that “by dividing attention with multiple tasks, preoccupation with concerns that limit focus on the present moment and/or by refusing to acknowledge a thought, emotion, motivation, or perceived object (Schonert-Reichl, 2010). Often people just go through the motions without being conscious of their being. Developing the capacity to recognize emotions, thoughts and motivations generates awareness that makes it possible to cultivate relationships that are based on mutual exchange and growth.

By extension, awareness of perceptions and attachments “allows you to align your emotional patterns and your actions with your current understanding and needs” (Schoeberien, 2009, p. 6). Mindfulness emphasizes acknowledging both one’s self and others with cultivation of empathy and compassion as the goal. Not only does practicing mindfulness make one more compassionate toward others it also makes it possible to gauge body sensations, thoughts, and emotional stress. It gives practitioners the necessary tools to release these tensions through breathing exercises, practicing yoga, etc. (Flook, 2013, p. 183).

Mindfulness is not about being distracting from emotions. Rather, it is about becoming aware of them because anxiety, anger and fear are all distractions. When we are not aware of these they take us away from the present moment. To be truly free from emotional volatility one must develop the ability to be aware of one's subjective conscious experience. In other words, "This ability to be present with whatever was happening moment to moment, paradoxically enough, is associated with relief from stress and suffering" (Jennings, 2012, p. 375). Human beings are capable of disrupting disruptive behavioral patterns and emotional responses when they become aware and present.

According to Hassad (2013), practicing mindfulness daily hardwires the brain to respond in new ways. Similarly, Meiklejohn (2012) writes, "due to the brains neuroplastic nature, individuals can actively change their brain structure in ways that promote brain health and improve the quality of one's life" (p. 5). Through mindfulness practices one can literally change their brain structure. Through breathing, meditation, greater awareness and other practices people are reshaping and creating healthier brains. Mindfulness supports self-regulatory processes that can protect one from psychological distress.

A recent study by Dr. David Richardson found that adults who participated in mindfulness training had a shift in brain activity from the right hemisphere to the left. This effect lasted for up to three months and correlated with increased concentration, personal insights, and ability to recognize and regulate emotions (Jennings, 2012). Neuroscience is now discovering how and why mindfulness is affecting the brain. Interest in the plasticity of the brain and the ability of the brain to produce more neurons

and connections across the lifespan has prompted an increase in research about the brain (Jennings, 2012).

Mindfulness in the classroom has the same benefits for teachers, students, and the school community. Students that have been in a mindful classroom environment have displayed decreased negative emotions and increased feelings of calmness and relaxation (Jennings, 2012). In the classroom, mindfulness is not used as religious practices but as pedagogical strategies for learning through refined attention. Research suggests that these practices can offset the constant distractions of our multitasking, multimedia culture (Jennings, 2012). Accordingly, intentional teaching strategies that integrate mindfulness creatively meet the particular needs of today's students. Consistent mindfulness practice "trains attention, promotes emotional balance, fosters a sense of well-being, and thus leads to physiological and anatomical changes in brain associated with these experiences" (Schoeberien, 2009, p. 8). Not only does mindfulness help students emotionally, but studies have indicate that an ongoing mindfulness practice improves immunity, helps with stress-management, and lessens exposure to stress hormones (Schoeberien, 2009).

One in five children are experiencing mental health problems severe enough for mental health services. Yet, less than 20% of children are getting the services they need. (Schonert-Reichl, 2010). Mindfulness in the classroom cannot replace mental health services. However, it can provide children a space to express their emotions. Regular practice of mindfulness improves student's capacity to regulate emotions and attention. Students target inner and outer experiences by way of "focused attention on breath and sensory experiences; awareness of thoughts and emotions; movement practices and caring or kindness practices" (Meiklejohn, 2012, p. 10). Mindfulness practices in the



classroom have had a statistically meaningful impact on problematic coping responses. Students have been better able to manage their emotions, impulsivity, and negative thinking and have reported engaging in more meditative and reflective thinking (Jennings, 2012).

Teacher's benefit from mindfulness in a number of ways, including practicing self-care, improving classroom management, being present and aware of the student's needs. Teachers are managing a great deal of stress, and they bring this into the classroom. Teachers who practice mindfulness foster a *psychological space* this helps them "recognize and effectively manage their own emotional responses so they can make conscious choices about how to respond appropriately rather than reacting unconsciously to provocative behaviors" (Jennings, 2012, p. 377). Teachers, like students, bring their own thoughts, emotions and past experiences into the classroom. Not being aware of these can affect student outcomes, classroom culture, and relationships with students. Mindfulness helps teachers become more proactive rather than reactive.

Teachers who practice mindfulness are better at regulating their own emotions. When a teacher is able to regulate their own emotions, it prevents burnout and exhaustion that regularly happens with teachers. Teachers with a sense of "self-efficacy and connectedness with students and fellow colleagues have been identified as important elements linked to teaching engagement and less emotional exhaustion and psychological distress" (Flook, 2013, p. 182). Therefore, teachers who are mindful are able to build and sustain meaningful relationships with each other and students. Relationships built on awareness, empathy and compassion can be fostered through mindfulness practices.

Teachers who are aware and present in their classrooms are able to recognize the needs of their students and can create teachable moments in times of frustration or in response to interesting conversations or questions that arise from students. This awareness and flexibility are cultivated in mindfulness practice. It gives teachers time for indirect learning approaches. Mindfulness in the classroom should be taught through a combination of direct and indirect experiences (Meiklejohn, 2012). Mindfulness creates learning environments that have low levels of disruptive behavior and teachers who are more supportive of individual needs of students and also aware of their differences.

Teachers who cultivate a mindfulness practice and have been given the tools for self-care have increased effectiveness in their classrooms. However, teachers need support to thrive both professionally and personally. Teachers, just like students, need to be looked at holistically. Because teachers are under much pressure and stress in public schools today, “there is an evident need for innovative, cost-effective ways for school systems to train and better to support the resilience of their teachers (Meiklejohn, 2012, p. 5). If schools are to succeed and students to flourish, it is imperative to invest in the teachers who are the life’s blood of them. Support, in the form of professional development in mindfulness, is essential in creating happy teachers and successful students.

### **Summary**

Education needs to encompass all it means to be human. Research shows that when children are in touch with all aspects of themselves they learn better. Both sides of our brain work together in all things that we do, but we educate children as if they are separate. When children are aware of their emotions and given tools to manage and

understand them, they have more space to learn, imagine, and build relationships.

Relationships with peers and adults are essential for children to feel safe and supported.

This sense of belonging and being cared for encourages children to learn and question.

Mindfulness allows teachers and students to relate better to each other and the material that they are teaching and learning. Being present for both students and teachers is an opportunity for teachable moments and learning. When we are aware of each other, we are more open to the spontaneity of learning and teaching. Being aware of our bodies, breathing, and emotions creates an atmosphere that embodies mindfulness and connection. Research emphasizes the plasticity of our brains and its ability to create new connections. Practicing mindfulness facilitates emotional regulation and allows brains to make new connections. Creating a space for mindfulness and social emotional learning will make schools a place where the whole child is recognized.

## CHAPTER III THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

### **Description of Project**

Social emotional learning and mindfulness are learned through practice. In other words, creating a learning environment where students are mindful and develop awareness of their social emotional learning starts with the teacher. Teachers must be mindful themselves and have an understanding of their emotional intelligence in order to model it for students. Young children first learn indirectly through social cues and observation. They also respond to how they interpret the energy from their teacher.

Teachers are in need professional development dedicated to mindfulness and social emotional learning. This mindfulness workshop provides opportunities for teachers to develop mindfulness practices in their personal lives and, subsequently, integrate them into their classrooms. This workshop focuses on providing a day of rejuvenation and reflection. Teachers will have time throughout the workshop to evaluate themselves and their classroom practices to identify ways they become more mindful. The workshop primarily focuses on:

- Completing an emotional intelligence assessment;
- One hour of yoga;
- Breathing techniques;
- Mindful listening practices; and
- Other mindful and social emotional learning activities.

## Development of the Project

I am compassionate and sensitive and have always had a strong belief in the oneness of humankind. I believe we are in a time in history where we are losing our humanness. Technology, money, and power seem to be the most influencing forces of our generation. We are losing our uniqueness as individuals and also our capacity to build and sustain community. So many people are more focused on their cellphones than nurturing relationships. People are not *present*. I believe this lack of awareness is impacting our relationships, sense of self, and our physical health. Awareness needs to be restored to our culture. Society is in a race and the race is truly going nowhere. This race is affecting children as well. Even children in kindergarten are already being focused on preparing college and technology is taking away from relationships and play. I want to change this. I truly want to create a shift in the consciousness of our culture. I believe this starts with children.

I was fortunate enough to get an opportunity to work at The Nueva School. Nueva is a gorgeous school on acres of land in Hillsborough. Students that attend must be gifted, and the price tag for this enchanted school experience is upwards of \$30,000 a year. I saw an opportunity while I was there. I wanted to learn as much as I could about social emotional learning and mindfulness and one day bring it to all children. Nueva is an amazing school that is focused on-hands on project-based learning and social emotional learning. It was my first time working at a school, and I was still trying to figure what I was passionate about. The social emotional learning piece was the most powerful part of the school's curriculum. Students were being taught how to communicate with each

other, given tools to deal with uncomfortable emotions and put a name to them, and given opportunities to share their feelings with teachers and each other. I learned so much about myself through many of the lessons. I acquired tools to communicate with others.

Most importantly, I realized that social emotional learning is an essential piece of education that is missing from most schools. The growth these children made was amazing. Their ability to recognize emotions in others and themselves and resolve conflict was beautiful. The empathy that these kindergartners had for each other and the earth was powerful. I felt like I found my passion and calling. I want social emotional learning and mindfulness to be part of every child's school day. I want all children to feel cared for and supported in their classrooms. I want children to have a space to share their feelings and needs in the classroom. I want to give all children an opportunity that my students at Nueva had. I believe I am going to change education and make schools more holistic. Children need to be looked at holistically. All parts of a child need to be nurtured in order for them to truly learn, investigate, and grow. Creating this workshop for teachers is the first step in changing education today. Emotional intelligence is not considered as significant as IQ. However, EQ is more important and affects more areas of our lives and relationships. Strong and supportive relationships between students and teachers are necessary for a student's growth both academically and emotionally. We must help teachers build their EQ and mindfulness practices in order to help children develop theirs.

I believe we must embrace what it means to be human. I want to shift our consciousness that embraces all life. I believe it starts with children and the teachers that

are creating the next generation. We must be the change. I practice mindfulness in my life. My mantra is to stay present. I want to appreciate every day. Sometimes in life we become constantly preoccupied by the what ifs or whens, but it is important to stay present and aware that the present moment is the only thing that truly exists. I am a yoga teacher and practice yoga almost every day. Yoga helps me stay present and aware of my body and breathing. I mediate as often as possible. I simply sit and focus on my breathing for 15minutes a day. Mindfulness is a practice, and every day I learn more. I try to live my life aware of others and myself. I believe that thoughts become action or inaction. What we choose to practice or think creates our world. I believe that staying present is essential to a mindful existence.

### **The Project**

The project can be found in the Appendix.

## CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Conclusions**

Teachers' classrooms are a reflection of the culture that exists in the US. It is a culture that is often mediated by a focus on individuality and ultimately disconnection from others and the natural world. We are struggling to maintain our humanness and empathy. In other words, society has "accidentally left this moral tradition behind. Over the last several decades, we've lost this language, this way of organizing life. We're not bad. But we are morally inarticulate" (Brooks, 2015, p. 15). Many of us have forgotten how or never learned to communicate and empathize with each other. Our society, through institutions like the media, education system, etc., emphasizes how different people are rather than the ways they are similar. There are so many more distractions that are pulling us away from the oneness that we are. Introducing social emotional learning (SEL), emotional intelligence (EQ), and mindfulness into classrooms provides a significant opportunity to refocus on our interconnection and interdependence.

Teachers are an indispensable part of their students' learning and development. The student-teacher relationship is essential for bolstering support and inspiring students and teachers to foster different ways of knowing that are complimentary to developing awareness of one's self and others. In this respect, a teacher has the capacity to humanize or dehumanize their students. Teachers' power in the classroom affects each student and their ability to learn, question, and investigate. Through practicing mindfulness, the human brain has the ability to adapt, increase decision-making, stay focused, and respond to emotional triggers.



Being present and aware of ourselves and others must be learned and practiced. Thinking positively, being present, and caring about others requires humility. Teachers must be aware of their own thoughts and motivations in order to proactively model these practices in their classrooms (Brookes, 2015). Mindfulness silences internal commotion and focuses on the *present* moment. It also reduces stress levels, improves attention, and results in emotional regulation and an increased capacity for compassion and empathy.

The practice of mindfulness, as a teaching strategy, was the focus of my project. As emphasized in my project, SEL, EQ, and mindfulness are powerful practices that need to be implemented into our classrooms. Teachers need tools to encourage their own mindfulness practice and knowledge of SEL and EQ to implement these into their classrooms. This allows students to learn the fundamental building blocks of what it means to be human and how to communicate, empathize, investigate and explore.

### **Recommendations**

Implementing SEL, EQ, and mindfulness in classrooms has to be done in an innovative way. Teachers cannot rely on directed lessons with students. Instead, they need to create a culture of mindfulness in the classroom. Teachers need to be present and focus on teachable moments in the classroom. To accomplish this, teachers need to have professional development time that is solely dedicated to their own emotional needs and mindfulness practices. Teachers have an imperative role in creating their classroom culture so it is essential their EQ be developed.

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APPENDIX

Social Emotional Learning and Mindfulness:

Learning to be Human

# Mindfulness Workshop

*Practicing being present.  
Be here and now.*



9am- 9:45am

## Teachers take EQ Assessment from SixSeconds

SixSeconds is global network supporting people to create positive change - everywhere, all the time. SixSeconds teaches the skills of emotional intelligence to fill the "missing link" needed for people to become more aware, intentional, and purposeful.

### **SEI Leadership Assessment + Debrief**

The latest-generation EQ assessment is rigorous, practical, and actionable providing a clear picture of your EQ as a leader and an extensive customized development plan. The only tool based on Six Seconds' model, the SEI-LR provides a clear picture of your emotional intelligence and how to develop these competencies to improve leadership. Statistically valid self-assessment comes with over 40 pages of interpretation and development suggestions. It builds on the five components of EQ popularized by Daniel Goleman in his 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence*, which endorses Six Seconds' EQ curriculum, *Self-Science*. The model integrates leading thinking on this emerging science into a practical, usable, memorable structure. The SEI was developed and researched around the world providing a truly global perspective.

The SEI measures eight fundamentals of EQ, including emotional literacy, emotional management, and empathy. The SEI is the only tool measuring the Six Seconds Model of Emotional Intelligence

This assessment was retrieved from:

<http://www.6seconds.org/newstore/products/sei-leadership-assessment-debrief/>

(District/School will have to pay for teacher's assessment costs)

9:45-10:00am

## Introduction and Schedule for Day

What is mindfulness and why is it important for teachers to practice it?

Mindfulness is about being present and aware. Mindfulness reminds us to be accepting and that our perception is based on how we choose to see things around us. Mindfulness is about non-attachment and letting go. Mindfulness,

“is within us is connecting with what we are observing. Thus,

connectedness, or unity, goes hand in hand with learning mindfully”

(Hassad, 2013, p. 9). Mindfulness is about creating unity and learning in a way that promotes this. Mindfulness encompasses a number of different practices, it is not merely meditation, but a way to live with awareness.

Mindfulness is a purposeful way of tuning into what and who is around us.

Being mindful creates balance and focus in our lives.

## Schedule for Day

(This sheet printed out and passed out to teachers)

10:15-11:15am

## Beginners Vinyasa Flow Yoga Class



Yoga is a form of active mindfulness and enhances our emotional well-being. Yoga draws our focus from the world outside us and transfers focus into the mind, brain and body. Teachers will start their day getting in touch with their body and breathing.

11:15-12:00pm

## Mindful Listening Activity

Mindful listening is a healthy activity. Studies show that when we listen our heart rate and oxygen consumption are reduced and blood pressure decreases. Mindful listening allows us to do more than take in people's words; it helps us better understand the how and why of their views.

Mindful Listening is...

Being *present*

Hearing beyond spoken words to their essence and to the feelings behind them

Bring your awareness to the *present* moment so the mind is not cluttered with past judgments or thoughts of the future

Simply letting the feelings and sounds affect you.

Letting go of beliefs and prejudices

Activity

(Read aloud by facilitator)

*(Finding an outside space if accessible would be best for this listening activity)*

The noise in your mind and the noises in the world around you both form an invisible backdrop to your entire life.

Stop and notice all the sounds around you right now. The sound of the wind rustling the leaves, the cars driving past, the sound of your breath. All of these sounds present you with an opportunity to be *present*.

Just listen. You might find your mind wandering off, but bring your awareness back to the *present* moment. Let the sounds anchor you into the present moment. Just listen, observe and experience them. Notice the feelings that are coming up and just allow them, but do not react to them.

Just sit here for 10 minutes and listen. Feel free to doodle whatever you feel or here, but stay *present*. Be here now.

Stay with the Sounds.

Listen intently, but without straining.

Be *here and now*, this is the only thing that truly exists.

After 10 minutes teachers will have an opportunity to discuss their feelings during the mindful listening activity. Teacher will be prompted to share thoughts and emotions that came up during activity and how they feel after.

12:00-1:00pm

## Lunch Break with Mindful Listening

Teachers will be released for lunch, but asked to sit with someone or a group of people that they do not usually sit with.

The group or duo will each be given a quote to read and reflect on. Teachers will practice mindful listening while others share their reflections.

### Sample Quotes

“Our present course endangers one of our nation’s most precious institutions: our public schools. Surely they need improvement, but they don’t need a wrecking ball. Our policymakers’ obsession with standardized testing has proven to be wrong; not only does it lack scientific validation, but any parent or teacher could have told the policymakers that a heavy reliance on multiple-choice tests crushes originality, innovation, and creativity” Diane Ravitch

“A human being is part of a whole, called by us the ‘Universe’ —a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts, and feelings, as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task

must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” Albert Einstein

“Be empty of worrying.  
Think of who created thought!

Why do you stay in prison  
When the door is so wide open?”

Rumi

1:00-2:00pm

## Mindfulness Art Activities Four Choices

Teachers will be able to choice between four mindfulness art activities. May be able to do up to two.

### Ally Guided Meditation and Drawing

Lay down on your back.  
Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.  
Let go of where you are and just be.  
Picture yourself walking down a dirt path.  
The path is leading you into the woods. Feel the air against your skin. Hear the ground under your feet.  
You follow this path into shady trees that hang over the path.  
Take a deep breath.

*How does it smell? What color are the leaves? How does the air feel? How does your body feel?*

You come out of the trees and see you small body of water.

The water looks still and clear. You walk up to the water and look  
into it.

You see your reflection in the water.

You take a deep breath.

A second image appears in the water next to you.

*Who is it?*

*How do you know them?*

This is your ally.

You and your ally walk up the path together. You do not speak.

You climb up a hill.

When you get to the top of the hill you reach a small cave.

The sunlight creeps into the cave. Beams of sunshine through the  
rocks are all around you.

You both sit.

You ask your ally questions.

*What are the questions?*

*What are the answers?*

You both walk down the path to the water again.

When you reach the water you look in to see only your reflection  
once again.

You turn around and walk back through the trees and down the  
path.

*Who was your ally?*

*Why?*

*How do you feel about your ally?*

*Now draw your ally.*

## Sculpting Emotions

Teachers will reflect on an emotion that they experience quite often.  
Teachers will ask themselves the following questions-

*What is an emotion I feel often?*

*How does that emotion make my body react?*

*What do I do when I feel this emotion?*

Teachers will be provided with clay and asked to make a physical manifestation of this emotion in their life.

## Emotions and Colors

Teachers will match colors to their emotions. Colors can evoke a wide-range of emotions and responses. Teachers will choose different colors to represent different emotions that they feel. They will also share what they need when they are feeling that emotion. If the color is red and it represents anger then the teacher must create tools or responses to the emotion. If someone is in the 'red zone' they may need space or to take deep breathes.

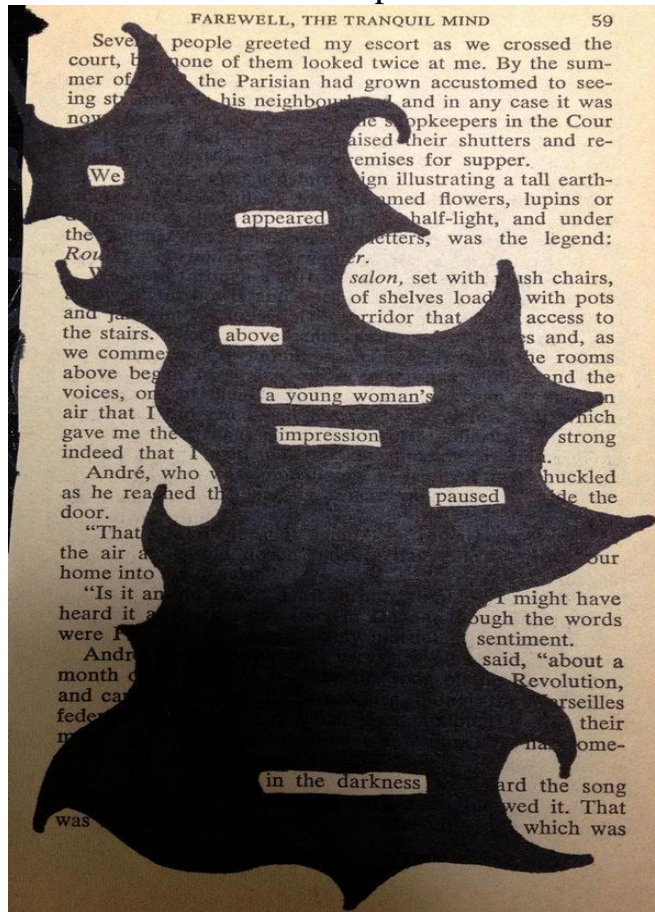
This is a great activity to do with children. Students can do this individually or the class can create a map of colors and the emotions that correlate with them. Creating Zones for the colors can offer students a name for their emotion and tools for dealing with these emotions as they rise.

This creates a classroom language and culture around emotions and tools to cope with them.

## Black out Poetry

Using books or pages that have been printed from random books teachers create a poem by finding words and blacking out the rest.

Example:



2:00-2:30pm  
Breathing Techniques

**Proper Breathing**

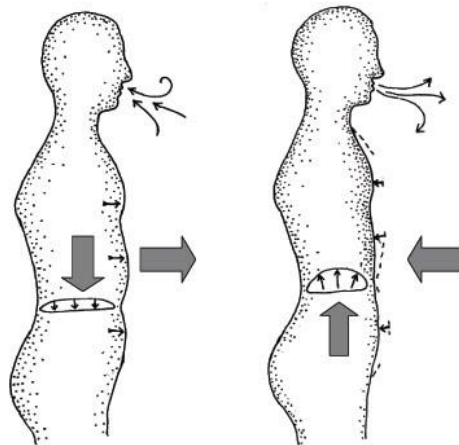
©ICS, Inc. 2011

**Inhale**

Belly expands  
to take in air

**Exhale**

Belly contracts  
to expel air



Mindful breathing is essential to a mindfulness practice. Breathing is something that we do all the time, but something we do not bring our awareness to often. By focusing on our breath we can ground ourselves in the *present* moment and calm our bodies and mind.

*Preparation*

Sit or lie in a comfortable position. You may choose to close your eyes or keep them open.

*The Breath*

Begin by gently moving your attention onto the process of breathing. Simply observe each breath as it happens, whether you focus on the rise and fall of your chest or abdomen, or on the sensation of the breath at the nostrils. Really feel what it is like to breath, without feeling the need to alter your breath, just observing it as it happens. Breathe in through your nose and imagine your breath move into your throat, into your lungs and travel in to your abdomen. Hold breath there for five seconds. Then slowly feel your breath travel up through your abdomen, into lungs, out through throat and mouth.

As you engage in this exercise you may find that your mind wanders. When you notice that this happens, know that this is okay, and simply notice the distraction but gently bring your attention back to the breath.

### *Ending the exercise*

Take a few moments to yourself, just to really feel connected with the present moment. Expand your awareness from the breath into the room around you, and as you feel comfortable to do so, open your eyes and bring the exercise to a close.

2:30-3:00pm

## Reflection

To end our Mindfulness Workshop teachers will each have time to reflect as a whole group on their experiences from the day.

Participants can share how they felt, what they learned, what they would love to bring back into their classrooms or anything else about their day.

Teachers will also have time to write three things they are grateful for in their lives. This is a mindfulness exercise that brings awareness to the positive things in our lives. Studies have shown that writing a gratitude list regularly has a host of physical, psychological and social benefits. Statistics show greater immunity, higher levels of positive emotion, feeling more awake and joyful, having greater compassionate and feeling less isolated.

After teachers write their thankful list they will share one with the whole group.



This exercise will conclude our Mindfulness Workshop and hopefully only be the beginning of participant's mindfulness practice.

Namaste.

