

“Mindfulness, an open awareness needs to be taught to our young people who are the future leaders! When individuals develop the skill of relaxed attention they gain self- mastery in listening, thoughtful speech, creativity, risking, changing and building community. The world is rapidly changing and education is needed to include self mastery in order to embody the responsibility required in today’s world.”

Jeffrey Walker, (McIntire '77) Managing Partner, JP Morgan Partners

Mindfulness in Higher Education

Many faculty, staff and students have been working creatively and often quietly by themselves in their quest to create a compassionate pedagogy using *Mindfulness* practices in their curriculum and program designs. These initiatives employ the practical application of mindfulness practices to enhance teacher training, curriculum development and leadership skills. Internationally, our peers in higher education are working to establish a new direction in education. This movement is described as holistic, integrated, transformational, compassionate, inclusive, cross-cultural and dynamic incorporating among many things mindfulness. The improvement of teaching and learning in universities is an important matter. Its purpose is not only to provide students with a pleasant and rewarding educational experience, but to prepare them to take charge of their own learning and to embrace the joy in fully participating and creating a caring and cooperative society.

Dialogues for Mindfulness in Higher Education

Creating an opportunity for leaders in Mindfulness Education to connect is the charge of *The Dialogues for Mindfulness in Higher Education*. Universities are the finishing school of our future leaders providing them with distinct and experiential opportunities that will allow them to move forward and create a compassionate world.

Many individuals from various disciplines have begun work to create a new wave of *Mindfulness in Education*. These individuals whom I named “*Compassion Generators*” are working to develop mindfulness curriculum in all levels of education. We live in the world of relationship. Through the process of connecting in conversation and dialogue we can offer new possibilities for the future of education. Compassion Generators are people who are changing the way they look at the world and their enthusiasm is creating a wave of sustainable change in education that supports the mind, body and hearts of our children.

It makes for an interesting conversation when a Wall Street corporate executive, college professor, actor, and scientist sit down together with the intention of simply creating a better world for our children through education. If you want to be a part of this conversation contact me. We will begin meeting in October for brown bag lunch conversations the first Friday of each month at 12 noon @ Newcomb Hall- Kaleidoscope Room. (No meeting in January-June thru September) | marga@virginia.edu

“We must help students to find the meaning in daily life, to feel connected to other individuals and to their community—past, present and future; and to feel responsible for the consequences of their actions. We must help them to achieve the state of flow—the balance between skills and challenges—which motivates individuals to return to a pursuit time and again. Plato understood this, 2500 years ago when he stated, “Through education we need to help students find pleasure in what they have to learn.”

Howard Gardner, *An Education for the Future*

Planting the Seeds of Mindfulness

Undergraduate and Graduate education more than ever need the teaching of mindfulness, empathy and compassion in their curriculum. What is required in education today is creating the opportunity for diligence. By removing distractions, providing group connection and community support, allowing members to explore their ability to know one’s self, students are best able to practice the skills necessary to make choices in life and in their careers based on a deep connection with self as well as and interconnectedness of community. Introducing students to practices of mindfulness training enhances personal awareness and self-control, raising the value of self-respect and personal integrity, and providing a greater connection in relationships and community. When one hears of these practices there is a centered presence that has a resonating effect to others

As education leaders it is essential for us to plant the seeds of mindfulness and compassion in our work, schools and culture. Many disciplines in higher education, such as science, medicine, psychology, religious studies and the arts have tools that can assist in this intention because they help the individual recognize the calmness of mind and with keen awareness notice stress and shifting to calm make wise choices. They also contribute to the development and awareness of a spirit of community, where we understand how our behavior contributes for the benefit of the whole. They do not teach ethics per se; they teach self-awareness, self value, self mastery, and self regulation. Self-interest is the great motivator, and, if channeled with mindfulness and compassion, it will serve all, as well as self. Often misunderstood, compassion can actually be the energy that can transform. An interest in humanity brings meaning to life. Today we need to create a new normal – Compassion. People, who resonate this presence, have the power to transform their lives and the world. Compassionate leadership requires diligence, reflection, insight, creativity and a passion for the future. The mindful leaders of today will be the people behind the innovation of tomorrow.

“In class we mentioned being as open-minded as possible, hoping to be completely open-minded—free of all previous biases; while I cannot know what I will be fully impartial to the lessons taught and learned, I will honestly try, which is much more than I can say for just about every class I have taken at UVA. Most classes so far have simply taught at me, spitting out facts, formulas, procedures, methods, etc. For accomplishing a certain task, but this class goes much more at the means. I can appreciate that, for it is the means in today’s society that I feel are in some ways lacking. Having passion for what one does is unfortunately a rare trait and I think this class can, at least to some extent, instill passion and meaning.”

(Male UVA Student, from class Leading with Compassion)

The Wings of the Possible - Mindfulness & Compassion

Education that encourages connections, meaning and introspection gives relevance and provides students with the inspiration, enthusiasm and opportunities to create new possibilities. William James once said, “Genius is simply the ability to see the world from a different perspective.” Mindfulness is training the mind to be present in the moment. A keen and compassionate awareness. Focusing attention to the present brings increasing awareness, connection, and acceptance. Investigating and training the mind to culture a clear awareness is the cornerstone of mindfulness in higher education. Learning through experience and interaction is required not simply the memorization of theory or facts. Paying attention means listening deeply to ourselves (our thoughts, feelings, emotions and tendencies) as well as to others. It is important to cultivate compassion and listen with a gentle ear of self-acceptance. Not judging the self or others. Simply through acceptance and observation one can make room for new and different choices. As you step into an authentic life you understand that pain is a condition of life and your values of inner freedom, equanimity and community allow you the full expression of suffering as well as joy. Coming to know yourself fully you also come understand the absolute worth of every human being. Today’s young people more than ever need the education to train their minds in order to focus and create the future of their dreams.

“When we embody the sacredness of paying full attention- mindfulness, our lives are transformed knowing our creative power is simply being present.”

Marga Odahowski, Director of Studies for the International Residential College

The Radical Act of Simply Paying Attention

I have observed how simply paying attention can create tremendous shift towards authentic living, often characterized as fully expressive, dynamic and free: having a savoring contentment with each moment. The difficulty has been we are living in a culture which has a pervasive push towards distraction which can make it challenging for individuals to create for themselves the opportunity for the diligence required to refine attention. Creating these opportunities for teaching mindfulness in our curriculum is essential to the development of our students.

Teaching strategies that allow students to challenge themselves to explore inner resources that provide true freedom and personal power is the essence of mindful learning.

Excavating personal compassion requires introspection and reflection. Creating a learning community that is supportive, fosters introspection and reflection, asks questions through the practice of conversation and dialogue allows us to get to the heart of mindfulness-compassion.

Resources on Mindfulness and Education

University of Virginia Hospital Mindfulness Program

<http://www.uvamindfulnesscenter.org/>

Contemplative Mind in Society

<http://www.contemplativemind.org/about/>

Shambhala Institute for Authentic Leadership

<http://www.shambhalainstitute.org/>

National Study of College Students on Spirituality

<http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu/>

Berkana Institute

<http://www.berkana.org/>

Emotional Intelligence Consortium

<http://www.eiconsortium.org/index.htm>

Mind and Life

<http://www.mindandlife.org/>

Pioneers of Change

<http://www.pioneersofchange.net/>