

Mindfulness-Based Self Inquiry (MBSI) in the classroom

Modified Proposal for Participants to Review

Goals/objectives:

Participants should be able to:

- 1) Assess the utility of mindfulness meditation as a teaching tool
- 2) Experience the value of affective domain instruction
- 3) Design a topic-specific MBSI module
- 4) Justify bringing mindfulness meditation into the classroom

Meditation and mindfulness exercises are well-established in clinical and therapeutic settings, two prominent methods being mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT). However, adoption of these forms of mental training and self-reflection in education has been relatively slow. This may be due to the large, and in some disciplines exclusive, emphasis on externally directed cognition. However, internally directed cognition, which involves attending to thoughts, memories, feelings and mental imagery, is a powerful modality with benefits that cannot be realized through externally directed cognition. Direct experience of this form of learning is likely the most effective way to create advocates and promote adoption. In that regard, it is important to note that this approach can be used in the classroom or in either synchronous or asynchronous online delivery modes.

Building capacity and resilience in others: Meditation and mindfulness practices build both increased capacity for awareness and presence, as well as emotional resilience. These claims are supported by the psychological and biomedical literature on MBSR, MBCT, transcendental meditation, and other forms of self-inquiry, not to mention centuries of writings and teachings in the inner contemplative traditions. In this session, the participants will learn how they (and subsequently their students) can gain increased capacity simply by virtue of owning and integrating the value of past experiences. Resilience is a function of both surviving and learning from past experiences, as well as receiving current support from individuals and community. Ultimately, however, unshakable resilience comes from knowing one's self – a process that can only happen, not surprisingly, from self-inquiry.

Relevant research and scholarship: I have provided select references from the affective and interpersonal neuroscience, psychology, and social science literature regarding the relationships between memory, cognition, stress, and emotion/motivation as influenced by meditation/mindfulness practices. This list should provide a jumping off point for further reading and literature exploration for those so interested.

Insights regarding changes in teaching and learning: One challenge to adopting this and other forms of active, collaborative, or experiential learning is the perception of losing crucial time for content coverage. This is particularly true within an information-dense curriculum like medical school! However, with the increased usage of flipped classroom approaches, and the provision of recorded lecture materials either before or after the session, this concern can be mitigated. In addition, as supported by the literature and my own experience, 5 min of settling and relaxing can put the students in a much more receptive learning space. Another insight regarding this approach is that one has to be willing to honor affective/attitudinal modes of learning instead of only cognitive modes of learning. An advantage of doing so is validating for students the importance of their personal history as felt experiences.

Relationship to the conference theme: In terms of vision, I see a continued evolution towards integrated teaching pedagogies that blend all three learning domains – cognitive, affective, and physical. In academia, teaching in the cognitive and physical/skills domains is well-established, while, apart from some humanities, the affective domain receives less attention. This is unfortunately true in K-12 education as well. It is hoped that the MBSI approach, and continuing development and utilization of similar methods, will influence instructors to consider this important human domain in their teaching. In turn, by modeling slowing down and the use of inner reflection, instructors will positively influence students to relax and honor their thoughts *and* feelings.

Serve as a model for colleagues: By incorporating mindfulness meditation into the workshop, participants can have a direct experience to assess potential benefits. In providing this instruction, I hope to model three important attributes, which in turn, participants can model for their students. These interrelated attributes are vulnerability, trust and courage. For many, instructors and students alike, meditation sounds good but is silly or ridiculous in practice. Simply sitting with eyes closed in front of an audience, whether in silent or guided meditation, is physically vulnerable and requires trust. In other words, it requires some degree of courage. Despite the solid evidence of benefit, to actually implement this kind of practice in a course, curriculum, or program that is traditionally focused on the cognitive domain may appear daunting – both personally and professionally. As sociologist Brené Brown writes, “Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change.”

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