

Mindfulness – A Simple, Effective Practice for Special Education Teachers and Students

By Natalie Keefer, Ph.D.

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Managing stress, anxiety, and other negative emotions is an inevitable and sometimes helpful part of life, especially if negative emotions encourage you to take action to clarify healthy boundaries in relationships and strive towards greater work and life balance. Dealing with negative emotions constructively takes practice. I don't know anyone who skillfully manages their life and mental health without working at it. As a teacher, I believe modeling mindfulness is a gift I can share with my students to help them develop greater awareness of their emotions and constructive ways to deal with challenging situations. Mindfulness also helps me thoughtfully manage my interactions with students, parents, administrators, and colleagues. As such, mindfulness is an effective practice for classroom management.



Decades of research in the field of psychology indicate mindfulness practices can assist teachers and students with managing stress, anxiety, depression, and regulating emotions. Studies on children have also shown mindfulness improves cognitive performance (Campbell, 2014). Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, defines mindfulness as paying attention to the present moment in a nonjudgmental way (Mindful.org). There are many ways you can practice mindfulness by yourself and with your students, including mindful breathing, eating, visualizations, poetry, art, gardening, and movement. In Special Education classrooms, a “mindfulness curriculum is practical and safe, as the tools for this curriculum are internal, including breathing, imagery, reflection, acceptance, and movement” (Magaldi & Park-Taylor, 2016, p.6). However, Special Education teachers, with administrative support, must determine whether or not they feel comfortable integrating mindfulness into their classrooms. Please refer to the resources section at the end of this article for a non-exhaustive list of classroom-friendly resources I find helpful for beginning, and more experienced, mindfulness practitioners.

Mindful Minute: A Simple Mindfulness Practice

I would like to share a simple, short, and effective mindfulness practice – the Mindful Minute. I start all my classes with this practice, regardless of whether I am teaching elementary or secondary students, or preservice teachers in my college courses. I find this is a simple way to set a calm tone for class that day, and it allows students to notice how they are feeling - without judgement, of course. My students love this practice. They often enter my classroom eager to take a minute to “check in with themselves”. Follow the steps below to practice your own Mindful Minute. You can also read these steps to students to guide them through a Mindful Minute:

- Sit in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes or lower your gaze to the floor.
- Notice how you are feeling right now, without judgment. Simply be aware.
- Focus your attention to your breath and notice the sensation of your breath entering your body and filling your lungs.

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- Slowly exhale at your own pace.
- Continue to breathe at your natural pace.
- If thoughts enter your mind allow them to pass like clouds pass through the sky, then gently refocus your attention to your breath.
- Continue to focus on your breath for one minute.
- After one minute (or however long you like) take a deep breath in, then exhale. On your next breath, slowly open your eyes and bring your awareness back into the room.
- Pause for a second, and then begin class.

Mindfulness Resources: A Great Place to Start!

Campbell, E. (2014). Mindfulness in education research highlights. Retrieved from

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/mindfulness_in_education_research_highlights

Greater Good Magazine, published by the Greater Good Science Center at Berkley University. Retrieved from <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

Magaldi, D., Park-Taylor, J. (2016). Our students' minds matter: Integrating mindfulness practices into special education classrooms. The Journal of Special Education Apprenticeship, 5(20), 1-12. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9dfa/7b8019cc45e96ce9c61b328c52e7cb983a7d.pdf>

Mindful.org. (2017). Jon Kabat-Zinn: Defining mindfulness. Retrieved from <https://www.mindful.org/jon-kabat-zinn-defining-mindfulness/>

The Mindful Teacher. Retrieved from www.mindfulteacher.com

Stewart, W., Rippin, S. (2014). Meditation is an open sky: Mindfulness for kids. Chicago, IL: Albert Whitman & Company.

Zen Den Mindfulness Videos for Kids. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8snGkhBF7ngDp1oJtx5VcjwatzZn8xLK>

Southeastern ‘Lions Connected’ Earns National Honor

HAMMOND – Lions Connected, a Southeastern Louisiana University Department of Teaching and Learning program that provides personalized, post-secondary educational experiences for individuals with intellectual disabilities, has received national recognition.

A comprehensive transition and post-secondary program approved by the U.S. Department of Education, Lions Connected won the award for Exemplary Program for Vocational Training and Transition from the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES).

Dr. Gerlinde Beckers, program coordinator and associate professor of education at Southeastern, said Lions Connected works closely with on-campus inclusive vocational opportunities, community partnerships, parents and college-age peer mentors. Socialization with typical peers, independent living and self-advocacy, career development and experience, knowledge, personal health, skills and enrichment are some specific goals with the ultimate goal to increase the quality of life for students through a college experience, she added.

“Lions Connected serves five parishes in Southeast Louisiana, four of which meet rural population indicators,” said Beckers. “The program aims to address students from high poverty, rural parishes

with limited resources and opportunities. I am thrilled Lions Connected received this award. So many people at Southeastern have worked very hard for Lions Connected to become a program worthy of being considered ‘exemplary.’”

Southeastern middle school special education/social studies major Emma Beckers has been working with Lions Connected since she was a high school student. “I have been involved with Lions Connected since its first year through high school service learning. It only seemed natural for me to become a peer mentor when I started at Southeastern last fall,” she said. “Being involved with Lions Connected is like having a very diverse second family, where we all belong and help each other succeed.”

Now in its third year, Lions Connected is certified by the Department of Education and must meet student academic progress goals set according to the federal standards in the areas of class attendance, class participation, assignment completion, and life skills curriculum.

Theresa Danos, mother of Lions Connected charter member Adam Danos, said her son completed the program and has now moved on to employment.

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CEC Members: This Could Be You At Our Next Super Conference!!!!

Mini-Grant Winners from Super Conference 38 Poster Showcase



Snapshots from Super Conference 38

LATI- Camping Theme



Presenters



Families Helping Families



Hank Holland



Lions Connected



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“Adam is on the autism spectrum and although he functions at a very high level, he would not have been successful attending a traditional college program. Adam really expressed a desire to attend college, and the program provided him with this avenue. We are thrilled!”

Danos added that the inclusive vocational opportunity is a vital part of the program.

“Having the students leave with job skills and experience will benefit them for the rest of their lives,” she said. “So many individuals with learning issues end up unemployed, and we are so happy to support a program that provides hope and life-long learning skills.”

For more information on Lions Connected, contact Beckers at gerlinde.beckers@southeastern.edu.



From left are Chair of American Council on Rural Special Education Dr. Tina Hudson, Lions Connected Program Coordinator and Associate Professor of Education Dr. Gerlinde Beckers, Southeastern middle school special education/social studies major Emma Beckers, and Southeastern Teaching and Learning Department Head Dr. Colleen Klein-Ezell.

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Spring 2019 LIFE Graduates



LIFE, *Learning is for Everyone* - post secondary education program, at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette College of Education graduated four students on May 17, 2019. Melanie Jankower, Oneil Legendre IV, and Matthew Molaison completed the four year program. Caroline Laborde completed the two year program. Congratulations to all four! The LIFE Program Project director, Caroline Jurisich, also earned her doctorate degree from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette on May 17, 2019.

The LIFE program will be admitting its largest freshman class ever in the Fall 2019 - 8 new freshman. The program will also be offering on campus housing in the fall 2019 semester. With the growth of the program in student numbers, classes, activities, and services - our space was shrinking. The program will move into its new facilities this summer and hope to have an open house for the community at the beginning of the fall semester.

CEC 2019 Board Election Results

Sarah Dubois Lemaire will serve as the new CEC Secretary.

Leslie Ortiz will serve as the new CEC Vice President.

Your passion and dedication to CEC is Exceptional! Thank You!

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**AND look for
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- CEC Business Award
- CEC Parent Advocate Award
- Special Education Leadership Professional of the Year Award
- Higher Education Professional of the Year Award
- Call for Papers