

**Using Mindfulness Exercises in the Classroom to Improve Learning  
by George Medelinskas**

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## Introduction

Ellen Langer, a Psychology Professor from Harvard, has researched Mindfulness in general. She has also researched Mindfulness specifically within the classroom. The work I used for a major part of my project is by her and entitled, The Power of Mindful Learning.

I have always felt that something large but hard to pinpoint had been lacking in my college teaching. Classes have always gone well; students seemed to like me; I liked most of what I was doing; my evaluations were always good. But I had core feeling, often hidden, that something was wrong with my approach to teaching college students. Langer touched an education nerve deep within me.

She spoke about myths that undermined real learning, destroy creativity, hinder student questioning, and lower self-esteem. Unfortunately, I could identify these myths in my teaching practice.

## The Myths

The myths are:

1. Basic units of learning have to be learned down to the core so they became second nature to the student.
2. Paying attention is basically being focused on one thing at a time.
3. It is important to delay gratification.
4. Education has to include some sort of rote memorization.
5. Forgetting is not good.
6. Intelligence is knowing "what's out there."
7. There are right and wrong answers.

During this project, I have looked at the very basics of what I do in the classroom through the lens of these myths with the hope of becoming a better and a more complete teacher.

## What is Mindfulness?

To start it is important to have some sort of conceptual understanding of mindfulness. For an activity to be mindful it needs to include the following:

1. ability to create new categories
2. openness to new information
3. implicit awareness of more than one perspective on what we encounter

To further understand this concept of mindfulness, it might be helpful to look at what characterizes mind~~less~~ness:

1. entrapment by old categories
2. auto-pilot preventing responses to new signals
3. action based on only one perspective.

Unfortunately, I believe that I had fallen into the mindlessness trap with regards to most of my teaching. This became obvious to me this semester as I developed an online course that mindlessly followed my face to face course. As I look honestly and critically at what I am doing in my regular classroom, I am afraid I have acted more mindlessly than I have mindfully.

## **My Project**

This project is my attempt to develop a more mindful approach to what I do in the classroom so that students will be able to learn mindfully. I see this affecting assignments (more open ended), teaching (engaging students rather than following lecture notes), and basic responses to students both in and out of the classroom.

## **When Practice Makes Imperfect**

We, as teachers, want a better world. Our students' worlds are profoundly different than our world. For them to be effective problem solvers they will need to take what we teach them and apply it creatively to their problems. This is our only hope for the future. Yet things like grades, MCAS, our experiences in school, and teaching loads tend to prevent us from engaging in this sort of teaching. Instead we resort to a tried and true teaching pedagogy which leads not only to mindless learning, but also mindless teaching.

Remember the story of the lamplighter from *The Little Prince*. He continues to light and unlight the lamp despite the fact that the rotation of the planet has increased over time which means he is constantly turning the lights on and off. His instructions had not changed when they needed to. This story is similar to teaching in a computer age where teachers are still using old instructions.

Historically, educational theory says to learn a skill we must practice it until we can do it without thinking. Everyone seems to agree that this is how we should teach the basics. This is very bizarre. Why would we want to learn anything to the point where we no longer need our mind to perform the task? Is this a goal of human learning? It sounds more robotic than human.

Think about it with a sports analogy. When little leaguers are taught how to hold a bat they are all taught the same way. But when you look at the experts (major leaguers) each of them have their own truly unique style.

In our teaching we fall prey to the same thinking. We learn as lecturers the ability to take lots of information and condense it into bite-size chunks for the students to digest. This becomes second nature to us. We even think we are doing the students a favor by breaking difficult concepts down into more digestible parts, forgetting that some things can only be understood in their entirety (e.g. teaching the rowing stroke). We then present the

“prepared” lecture to the class oblivious to whether the students are “getting it”. We make “covering” the prepared material the goal instead of mindful learning.

For students, note taking can fall into the same thing. I was a good note taker in college but sometimes would look at my notes and have no idea what they meant or why I wrote “that” down. I was a mindless note taker.

In learning something new (remember at this point this is the time we know least about the subject), it makes little sense to over learn it (freeze our understanding of the skill) before we get to try it out in different contexts. This may actually hinder us from making adjustments in later stages based on new experiences.

Learning the basics in a rote manner insures mediocrity (MCAS). Practicing a skill mindlessly prevents us from owning the skill. Learn the basics mindlessly prevents us from varying them as the context changes, which it inevitably does.

We foster mindful learning of the basics by teaching them in a conditional way that leaves room for doubt. This helps the student be aware of context. This method also helps the teacher be more mindful. By presenting the material from more than 1 perspective we allow and encourage the student to manipulate the basics more creatively.

How can we actually do this? Rather than use “THIS IS A...” use “THIS COULD BE...” We could use phrases like “IN MOST CASES...”, “THIS MAY INCLUDE...”, “THIS MAY ON OCCASION...”

Students taught conditionally are more creative. We can present data and purposely mislead students by mislabeling 2 columns, so they see how their explanations can vary. Girls actually learn better unconditionally...they are taught to “be good little girls”, to do as you are told, whereas boys are taught that real boys don’t listen to what they are told - “boys will be boys” - to explore, to get dirty, etc. Girls therefore learn the basics more absolutely and more mindlessly.

This also explains why girls do well in math until a point where math becomes more conditional.

Mindful learning involves:

1. openness to novelty
2. alertness to distinctions
3. sensitivity to different contexts
4. awareness of multiple perspectives
5. orientation to the present

Teachers who “pre-sliced” knowledge to make it more easily accessible to students do the students a disservice by actually preventing opportunities for mindful awareness and more inventive transformations of the routine.

## Creative Distraction

When we first started school, we were told to “PAY ATTENTION”. Slowly, through reprimands and behavior modification we learn that paying attention means being still and focusing on the matter at hand.

We are labeled “bad” when we are distracted. But what does it really mean to be “distracted”? It means to be paying attention to something else. This is usually because that something else is more attractive. Being mindful here means seeing what is so attractive about the other stimulus. What does this mean for the thing we are trying to attend to? Maybe if we can find a way to think about the thing in front of us differently, we will be able to more easily pay attention to it.

There are many things during the day that we have no trouble paying attention to. Maybe the problem is not ours but rather something about the situation that makes it hard or impossible to pay attention. As teachers we tend to believe that paying attention means fixing our minds on something and then not letting them wander. We rarely look deeply into what paying attention might mean. When a group of teachers were asked what paying attention was, the overwhelming answer centered around “holding a picture still” rather than “varying the picture” in the mind.

But we now know that when we attend to something it actually appears to change. This applies whether we stare at a finger or try to hold an idea in our minds. In meditation, as the meditator tries to hold a mantra in their mind, their minds are usually overwhelmed with other thoughts that seem very unrelated.

Is it simply natural and necessary for the mind to seek novelty? Maybe we need the image we are focusing on to be changed for us if we are going to successfully pay attention to it for any significant amount of time. In a poll of Harvard students, 84% of them said that paying attention for them was “looking at the professor” or “writing down whatever the professor said”. This is a sad commentary on the state of education.

A key to looking at this problem of attending is to look at our “play”. Most of us have little trouble focusing on “play”. Novelty aids us in noticing different aspects of things. Making a change in our perspective (seeing the problem from another point of view) or changing the context can help us notice novelty in the situation and therefore to attend to it better. We can enhance novelty in what we want students to attend to by simple things like asking students to notice different or novel things about what they are attending to. Studies show that when students are asked to perform in this more mindful way, they not only perform better, but they also report that the task was less frustrating and actually required less attention and effort. Students asked to read a story from different perspectives, to vary 3-6 aspects of the story performed much better than the control group despite the fact that they had more to think about as they read. As teachers we need to engage our students in ways that get them to explore novelty and interest in what we teach. Interestingly, when these types of tests are done in Montessori schools, where continuous activity is expected, it was found that doing more sit-still activities had greater success. This would indicate

that when we mindfully vary the activity's perspective in almost any way, it helps students to pay attention.

In summary, there are many things each day that we have no trouble paying attention to. Maybe there is something unnatural about schools where the predominant activity centers around holding an image or an idea still in our minds. Maybe as teachers, our job is to show students how to look for novelty in what they are learning.

## **The Myth of Delayed Gratification**

All through life we are told things like...

- If you study hard, you will get into a good college.
- If you graduate high in your class, you will get a good job.
- If you save your money now you will have a good retirement.

What are the consequences for this presumption for learning?

Is it any coincidence that most typical college courses are centered around pressure, deadlines, tests, failure, fatigue, no choice, preset goals, and drudgery? Play seems like just the opposite - energizing, freely chosen, relaxing and fun. Work and study seem like the opposite. They are so unpleasant that we put them off as long as possible - thus the need for deadlines. With play, there is no mindset of drudgery to overcome. We simply enter into the fray willingly.

We need to remember that sometimes the work (or play) is better than the reward. Someone remodeling their house may enjoy the process of knocking down a wall and rebuilding a room more than actually having the new room. Rewards found in the present are certain. Rewards in the future are not. Total involvement or mindfulness in most work transforms it into play, providing its own gratification.

Educators and parents usually have 2 approaches to encourage students and children to work hard.

1. rewards (grades) or punishment for not doing it
2. add fun aspects to hard task

In both cases, not only is the reward not part of the task, but also we end up reinforcing kids' presumptions that the task is hard and painful (teacher who tells the 3<sup>rd</sup> graders that if they behave themselves this morning, they will have an extra recess in the afternoon instead of "math" actually causes a very negative attitude about math to be triggered in the students).

The whole idea that we should forgo present pleasures and invest ourselves in "hard" activities for future benefit, assumes the world is orderly, predictable, and just. But this also supports the extremely debilitating idea of blaming the victim. ("If I get cancer it must be my own fault.")

How can we turn work into play? Giving extrinsic rewards can actually cause the intrinsic value of the activity to be overlooked (e.g. rewarding the student who has the most entries on a discussion board with a prize). Even tasks we initially enjoy can become burdensome because of over-repetition. Making someone do something, fear of evaluation, or letting outcome (winning the race) become more important than the process can actually make play become work. The fear of negative evaluation colors the learning experience for most students (especially black students).

Most tasks are neither pleasant nor unpleasant. It is the attitude we bring to it that makes it so. (e.g. some people like to shovel!) When students approach a task as play they learn more than students who approach it as work. When we “play around” with something, we approach it “non-evaluatively” and get more involved with it. We especially enjoy activities where we go from not knowing to knowing. It is even better if we come up with several solutions and choose one. When we are involved in something in a mindful way, we get pleasure from drawing distinctions and noticing interesting things.

In school, most work tasks offer us little chance and freedom to attend to distinctions we might draw. This actually teaches the student to not even bother. School work tends to be rigidly prescribed. (e.g. “What were the 3 causes of the Civil War?” rather than “How do you think a southerner (slave, northerner, parent of both a southerner and northerner) felt about going to war?”)

Almost any work can be made more pleasurable if we bring a better attitude towards it. Even something as simple as telling students you are going to ask them to find 3-6 novel or interesting things about today’s class can change their mindset (e.g. Jon asked 8 questions, or the teacher became really excited when he talked about rowing). When we are asked to be more mindful by drawing distinctions or noticing interesting things, we end up liking the activity better. It also has an added benefit - students who draw novel distinctions are less likely to conform and more confident of their opinions. Also, drawing distinctions can advantage students in making career choices. Instead of waiting for some field to “grab” them, students need to somehow “engage” themselves in it and make a more active role in determining their preferences.

## **Hazards of Rote Memory**

Most test learning is done by rote. Students resort to memorization when trying to learn material that has no personal meaning to them. Education traditionally doles out packages of information that are mostly context free. Even when context is provided, students are still encouraged to process that information mindlessly.

Why is memorization encouraged by teachers?

1. easy to grade questions that require memorization
2. belief that certain basics must be learned before we advance to other areas

3. the notion that there are basic truths in the world that everyone accepts creates order and stability
4. it is basically the way we have been taught

An alternative to memorization is mindful learning that allows for test passing and using information creatively in the future (Parker Palmer's medical students). Making the information relevant is a key. As teachers we can shape ideas so they relate to student lives and interests. But there is an even better way, namely, teaching the students to make the material meaningful to themselves (sort of the way actors learn scripts - getting engaged). Another approach is to have students draw distinctions about the material. In doing this, students create new categories, open themselves to new information, and see different perspectives. Basically, they create their own working definitions.

An easy way to approach this is to present material from the point of view of "THIS COULD BE..." rather than "THIS IS..."

## **A New Look at Forgetting**

Having a fresh view of things is invigorating. Forgetting allows us to re-experience. It is always easier to learn something the first time than to have to unlearn something to learn it differently (e.g. Object Oriented Programming is actually harder to learn for the student experienced in Structured Programming).

When we mindlessly memorize things, it is harder to understand new complexities that arise. Experiments have proven that showing students examples of how to do something limits their creativity in doing something similar. Mindless memory can actually be dangerous. When we learn mindlessly we are less able to notice the present or to be sensitive to context.

Think about a teacher's lecture notes. They tend to become the script for the class. They tend to reflect the teacher's "old" thinking. The teacher becomes "tied" to them. There is less excitement. By having very sparse notes or even no notes at all, the teacher is forced to reinvent the lecture. It tends to be fresher and new ways are found for delivering the concepts. Surprise connections can reveal themselves. The teacher feels more masterful.

Forgetting helps because new solutions based on more experience and the present context must be found. The benefits of forgetting are evident when we realize we have forgotten something we need. To get to a solution, we are forced into the present and get a chance to rediscover or reinvent what we need to know. This brings about mindfulness. Memorization keeps us in the past - forgetting brings us into the present moment. Interestingly enough, if we actually learned the thing mindfully in the first place, we really don't have to worry about forgetting it.

Be wary of premature cognitive commitments. Often when we hear an idea for the first time, we make an immediate commitment to it (sometimes based on who had the idea). When we do this we process the idea unconditionally. Unfortunately the recent trend for

college students seems to have them spending a great deal more energy defending their mindless opinions than in considering all sides of an issue. It becomes an accepted fact and therefore never even enters our mind again for reconsideration. We all have rigid mindsets that we got from past experiences. These mindsets actually limit our present abilities. One mindset is about old age. It is a mindset that we took on at a time that was irrelevant to the present. It then becomes fixed in our minds.

## **Mindfulness and Intelligence**

We think we know a lot about life. There is a great Chinese story where seemingly bad things keep happening to someone and he is dismayed. His father, however, keeps responding to these bad experiences, by saying “What makes you think this isn’t a blessing?” Eventually the son sees that he is actually saved because of these seeming “bad” events.

We look at the world and somehow equate intelligence with “knowing what is out there”. We want to believe in some sort of absolute reality. This is NOT how mindfulness theory sees intelligence. Essentially it is described by Langer as follows: “...individuals may always define their relationship to their environment in several ways, essentially creating the reality that is out there. What is out there is shaped by how we view it.” (p. 100) The view we have of intelligence today comes from a 19<sup>th</sup> century model. Intelligence is graded by how well an individual’s perceptions correspond to the world as we “know” it.

Langer contrasts the differences between intelligence and mindfulness in this way:

<b>INTELLIGENCE</b>	<b>MINDFULNESS</b>
Optimum fit between individual and environment	Control reality by identifying different perspectives
Move linearly from problem to solution as rapidly as you can	Step back from both the perceived problems and solutions to see novelty in both
Way to get desired outcomes	Giving meaning to outcomes
Observer focusing on stable categories	Actor experiencing personal control by shifting perspective
Relies on remembered facts and learned skills in context that is sometimes seen as novel	Relies on fluidity of knowledge and skills and sees both advantages and disadvantages in each

Intelligence theory sees an ambiguous situation as a problem, always trying to identify the perspective that is most like reality. Mindfulness causes one to always stay open to more than one way of seeing the situation. Newly arrived at information is always available to a

mindful learner. Basically, to be a mindful problem solver requires us to be “intelligently ignorant”. The mindful problem solver sees that unsuccessful attempts to solve problems when seen from other perspectives may effectively solve different problems. They can adapt easily. In a mindful school these solutions will be considered correct where in most school settings the student is just viewed as wrong.

Mindful people realize that in any specific situation there is not just one best action available. Mindful people do not just make a best choice among several options. Instead, they create new options.

## **The Illusion of Right Answers**

Humans want to get the “right” answer. The belief in a single “right” answer comes from our views of intelligence and expert authority. We, especially in education, are hobbled by OUTCOMES. We believe education should help students achieve very specific, desirable outcomes. However, the capacity to achieve an outcome is NOT the same as our ability to explore our world and understand our experiences. As teachers, we even specify the “prescribed” method to solve the problem we give to students. This limits our student’s abilities to look at the world and to test new, different or even bizarre ideas.

As teachers, we mindlessly lead students to achieving knowledge we have deemed worthy. We then supply the students with the steps to mindlessly succeed. It is like painting-by-numbers.

A major question is at the core of this inquiry. What is more important?

→ freedom to define the process

or

→ achieving an outcome deemed by us to be important in our little slice of academia

Teachers basically teach specific skills or learning-to-learn skills. We tend to value the latter over the former. But learning-to-learn is based on traditional interpretations of intelligence - the ability to go from here to there quickly. By doing so, we deny our students the chance to choose their own objectives. We even prevent them from using processes outside our own set of skills

What is the difference between mindfulness and intelligence? Mindfulness allows the student to test a hypothesis by applying it to their own experience or behavior. Decision making then becomes a process of self-definition. Mindfulness encourages views from more than one perspective, thereby increasing options.

What about uncertainty? Uncertainty is important in mindfulness. It creates a space and a freedom to discover meaning. We actually need uncertainty in order to have personal control. If everything is certain, there are no real meaningful choices (free will) to make. But we teach in just the opposite manner. We teach students to view facts as TRUTH,

immutable and unconditional. When we can see facts as inherently unstable, as ambiguous, we necessarily become more observant.

When we see the world as ever-changing and when we can see more than one perspective, we actually become more “open” to seeing. Education tries to do this. Critical thinking is usually taught by having students list the pros and cons of some idea. In so doing, we mindlessly fail to see that a benefit can also be a liability and vice versa. When students give us off-the-wall comments, we tolerate their mistakes but fail to see that their answers are not mistakes, but responses to a different context - one that we don't even look for and therefore never see.

e.g. We teach “the shortest distance between 2 points is a straight line” without a shred of doubt. It is the truth. But if I try to get from my house to my school by going in a straight line, I would probably never get there, or get killed trying.

Teaching mindfully means that we see wrong answers as right in another context. By seeing the answer from the student's view, we begin to understand them and even ourselves better. We may then even begin to truly listen to their questions and discover new ideas.

In education, we put great stock in understanding and playing to a student's strengths. This could actually be harmful to the student's development. It causes students to value subjects they do well in and devalue others that might be initially hard for them. By doing so, we ignore the other perspectives. (At my college, there is always a battle between the C and E buildings as we each promote and protect our scholastic domains.) When we learn mindfully we and even our environment change in some way. Solving any kind of problem mindfully means we are learning and growing. Evaluating one type of problem over another is needless. When we are mindful and we realize that we failed in one task we also realize that we succeeded in another. There is no reason for negative evaluation.

None of us see the world as it really is, but we all firmly believe that we do. Mindfulness helps us see that our construct of the world is only ours and that there are many valid constructs for that world. By paying attention to our students' and our own questions, we increase the chances for mindful learning.

## **Mindfulness from a Buddhist Perspective**

Mindfulness is prevalent in much of Buddhist literature and it seems reasonable that a look at this would be helpful in understanding Mindfulness in learning.

From a Buddhist perspective, mindfulness is pre-symbolic. It is not bound by logical thinking. It needs to be experienced. Words can be used to describe it but they are not the best representation. Mindfulness may lead us to words but it must be remembered that the words are not the reality, but only a shadow of that reality. Words explaining it do not make perfect sense. Mindfulness requires soft attention. It is usually a brief moment. We

then spend inordinate amounts of time and effort somehow trying to categorize and explain the awareness. We then tend to lose the original mindfulness we experienced.

Extending mindfulness for longer moments is possible and can be learned. As you become more mindful, you begin to see more interesting aspects of learning. With mindfulness, we should always strive for reality - what is happening - and we should look at it without judgment or bias. By being even-keeled in how we look at phenomena we have a much better chance to see things more clearly. By being unbiased, the mindful learner is able to see issues from truly different perspectives. Mindfulness is awareness without thinking, without categorizing. It is like observing something for the very first time. This implies a freshness without any hint of any kind of prejudice. Mindfulness stays in the present moment always. Things are seen without the idea of "me" or "mine". It is seeing what is without distortion of any sort. "In mindfulness, one is an unbiased observer whose sole job is to keep track of the constantly passing show of the universe within". (Gunaratana - 153)

Mindfulness should always bring us back to exactly what we are supposed to be doing. If we are in a classroom learning economics, we should not be thinking about last night's date. It means not getting stuck in thought patterns, like "I'm not good enough" or "I'm smarter than everyone else"; we have built many habits around this condition. Mindfulness tends to be light, playful, clear and full of energy. Conscious thought, on the other hand, tends to be work, heavy, prejudiced and ever burdensome.

Mindfulness is being focused, alert, and ready. It requires a calm heart and extreme self-control. It is a way to master and restore or recreate ourselves.

Mindfulness sees things as they really are, adding and subtracting nothing from the experience. It sees to the core of the experience, its true nature. Mindfulness sees that everything is in a state of change. Nothing is permanent. Even though mindfulness is a process, it cannot be broken into steps. It must be experienced holistically. When we are mindful of what is happening in our own minds, we are truly sane. When we are not mindful, we automatically strive for more pleasantness and avoid unpleasantness. We constantly judge things as good or bad. We fail to see things as both good **AND** bad. When this happens we tend to get greedy, jealous, and even hateful.

## **Mindfulness and Concentration**

These concepts go together but are very different from each other. Concentration deals with keeping the mind focused on one point. It is basically a forced activity. Mindfulness is a more subtle and refined activity. Mindfulness notices the object of attention, while concentration holds our attention fixed on the object. Mindfulness can not be forced. It requires a gentle effort and quiet persistence. Mindfulness brings true understanding and wisdom. Concentration has certain requirements which pertain to a classroom setting. There should be little noise and no interruptions. There should be no emotional distractions also. These are not easily attained in a classroom setting today. In fact, we are sometimes not even aware of the emotional distractions present in our classrooms.

Mindfulness is inclusive while concentration is exclusive. Mindfulness does not react to what it observes. It sees things dispassionately. Mindfulness wants to accept, not deny. It is patient. It has no time table. It is independent of any emotional or mental state.

## **Practicing Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is something we can practice daily in many small ways. For example, we can do the dishes mindfully by concentrating on what we are doing and being completely aware of all the sensations involved in the task. An interesting question to consider is do we wash the dishes to have clean dishes or do we wash the dishes just to wash the dishes. This would easily relate to school by relating it to a student's task like reading a chapter for Friday. Does the student read the chapter to do well on the test or does the reading of the chapter have enough intrinsic value that the student reads the chapter just to read the chapter. We can practice and therefore improve our mindfulness when driving a car by focusing on the road conditions, the cars around us, the performance of our car, and our attention to the experience. The more we practice mindfulness, the more mindful we become in general.

As far as what this has to do with the classroom, there are many areas we can attend to. First of all, it is important that the students find themselves in the classroom they are in at the time they are in it. For example, when in English class, the student should not be thinking of what happened in Math class 2 hours earlier, or what will be happening at work in the afternoon. Also, when the teacher is covering MLA documentation in English task, the student should not be focusing on a title for their paper. This is a lot harder to accomplish than it seems. It is hard to "BE HERE NOW". But there are ways as teachers we can help bring students into the present moment. A brief 4-5 minute centering exercise at the beginning of class can help. Engaging the students in the discussions from different perspectives is also of help. Asking students to list 3 or 4 novel things about the class at the end of the period not only encourages students to make different connections, it helps them to be aware of things we may not even be aware of, like the teacher asking males more questions than females.

We can now know our own minds in a very simple and straight forward way - by observing and recognizing all things about it. To do so, we cannot just do it in a meditation session. We must do it daily in all our everyday, mundane activities. We do this by recognizing the thoughts that arise in our minds constantly. As a teacher, this has a direct bearing on my craft. Many things arise in my mind during each and every class. To be better at my craft, I need to be aware of these things. In doing so, it is important that I not judge thoughts arising as "good" or "evil". By not doing so, I have a much better chance at looking at these thoughts honestly and openly, with no bias on my part.

## **Conclusions**

This project has led me to some new discoveries. It has helped me identify aspects of my teaching that I was uncomfortable with but that were difficult for me to express in words. I believe that my misgivings about college teaching are shared by a very high percentage of other teachers. There is something wrong with higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are not off to a great start. Those in higher education who want to focus on improving teaching and therefore learning are in the minority. Real economic concerns and a lack of resources have greatly affected higher education. College basketball coaches make more money than college presidents. Student lounges get more money than student labs. Programs of study that are hard and under enrolled get cut. Grade inflation has allowed students to get a degree with the shallowest of understanding and a minimal effort. Student learning, although verbally addressed, is not really studied.

As a society, we need to be mindful of what our commitment to higher education is presently and what it should be as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But more than that, we have to look honestly and with great mindfulness at what is actually taking place not only in the classroom but also at on-line courses. As educators, our first concern should always be what our students are learning. We must not fall into the trap of measuring that by simply measuring outcomes. Outcomes hurt when we make create within the mindset of what can be measured. The most important insights for a student at college are probably not measurable or even easily definable.

Our job as teachers is to connect students to the subject matter presented in a way that is meaningful for the students. This requires mindfulness on our part about our teaching. It also requires mindfulness on the student part about their learning. Neither of these goals is easy to attain. We live in a society that encourages mind**LESS**ness. Mindful learning is not even on the radar screen of most colleges or teachers. Both goals are essential if we actually want to improve education, enrich students' lives, and produce students who can solve the problems our world faces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Mindfulness is essential to both. Students have to stop sleepwalking through their college careers. Teachers have to stop sleepwalking through their semesters. Becoming mindful is an essential but difficult step for both.

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