

CREATING THE CONDITIONS  
TO HELP GIFTED KIDS

planting

TO FLOURISH

seeds

AND BLOOM

of

INTELLECTUALLY, EMOTIONALLY,  
AND SPIRITUALLY

mindfulness

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## Foreword by Linda Silverman

This book touched me deeply. Just as its title promised, it did, in fact, plant seeds of mindfulness in me. As I read the last chapter on peace building, unbidden tears formed in the corners of my eyes. My soul yearned for me to heed the message—to become more peaceful and overcome my reactivity. I have said for years that I wanted to take a course on mindfulness. Action has not followed. Now I *know* I need to bring more mindfulness into my life.

One of the many concepts I learned from this book is that mindfulness must be wedded to compassion. We can be mindful (completely present) and totally focused on our work at the expense of the needs of others around us. This is not true mindfulness. It is more like hyperfocusing—a special talent of gifted people with Attention Deficit Disorder. “Compassion results from seeing someone suffering and deciding to do something to help...” A study on compassion concluded that the pressure to hurry robs individuals of their innate capacity to be morally sensitive. “Stress and busyness...make us focus more on ourselves and less on the needs of other people.” Guilty!

*Planting Seeds of Mindfulness* overflows with simple, practical, powerful ideas. I love the advice of Thich Nhat Hanh that we should vow to bring joy to one person in the morning and to relieve the suffering of another in the afternoon. “Ask yourself, ‘Who can I make smile this morning?’ This is the art of creating happiness.”

I loved the practical ideas for teachers and homeschoolers in Chapter Five. And I love the Virtues Project by Linda Popov, outlined in Chapter Six. “How can I make difference in the lives of my students? ...What can I do when a student

pushes my buttons?” Ouch! That one hit way too close to home.

Susan Picard, a gifted teacher of the gifted in Grand Prairie, Alberta, and her sister Christine Ayling introduced me to the Virtues Project. When Susan told me that Grande Prairie is known as “Peace Country,” I knew I had to experience it. Susan’s dissertation thesis was composed in song. One of her songs, “Dark Side of the Road,” changed my life. Susan described that in her first year of teaching, she felt emotionally beaten up by a few bullies in her high school. One of the bullies died in a car accident while drinking.

And I never cared enough to ask anyone about his  
circumstance

I never set aside my fears long enough to ever give him  
a second chance

And I never gave a thought to what he carried in his load

I just watched him move into the shadows on the dark  
side of the road.

When Susan sang that song at a Dabrowski Congress, tears streamed down my face. It opened a secret cave of forgiveness in my heart that I hadn’t known was there. Afterward, I embraced someone I had considered my tormentor and asked his forgiveness. I learned a great lesson that day. We *are* capable of changing, of forgiving, of letting go of past wounds. While reading *Planting Seeds of Mindfulness*, I could not help thinking of all the people I have changed my mind about and become friends with, when my initial reaction to them was negative. It was a good exercise. Try it!

A beautiful philosophy of education undergirds the book. “In a class where mistakes are welcomed and celebrated, then risk taking will certainly follow.” While practicing

mindfulness meditations, adults are encouraged to think out loud. “When a teacher, parent, or caregiver describes his or her personal practice, then the children will begin to understand that it is impossible to do it wrong.” “When students exhibit frustration over their inability to solve a math equation correctly, a mindful practitioner can help them remember other times of frustration and later success.”

Teachers will find many excellent, practical ideas for creating harmony in their classrooms, such as labyrinths, gratitude walls, and calming exercises. “Crafting quiet zones or chill spots for introverted students can generate oases of calm.” “Designating a peace corner or space for working through disagreements can send a message that such occurrences are part of the classroom culture, and resolution of conflict is encouraged and supported.” The stories of gifted students who made a difference are heart-warming. Many schools for the gifted have Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula or peace agendas, such as The Nueva School in Hillsborough, California, Mackintosh Academy in Boulder, Colorado, and of course the Roeper School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

Every chapter has a section titled “What Parents and Caregivers Can Do.” Describing service learning, “One family with small children makes bag lunches together and drops them off at the local homeless shelter. Even the youngest child in the family participates by adding a piece of fruit to each lunch bag.” The “Read On, Log On, Reflect On” sections at the end of each chapter enable readers to locate relevant resources easily.

“Searching for daily experiences of awe is a powerful means of developing mindfulness.” I was in awe of the many agencies, resources, initiatives, and gifted people I learned about who are doing wonderful work to promote inner peace and peace in the world.

I am grateful to the authors for writing this important book.  
May it inspire all of us to become more peaceful and to bring  
mindfulness to our families and classrooms.

With gratitude,  
Linda Silverman



# Acknowledgments

## **Dorothy Sisk gives special thanks to:**

Tom Kemnitz, who believes in gifted children and youth and has served as a staunch supporter of gifted education, both nationally and internationally.

Paul Jose and Anij Mangalathu Raj, Lamar University graduate student assistants who found elusive research studies and articles, knew just the right image to convey an idea, and patiently entered multiple drafts of chapters on their way to being and becoming.

Jeffrey Sisk, my son, who helped me learn more about what it means to be gifted and listened as I read sections of chapters to him that I thought were particularly meaningful, and who listened to numerous tapes of Thich Nhat Hanh with me and incorporated gathas in our gratitude for meals, as well as prepared lunches and dinners so that I could continue to read and write.

Robin Latimer, a professor and colleague at Lamar University who made frequent stops to my office to check on how the book was coming along and wants to organize a book signing at Barnes and Noble.



**Michele Kane gives special thanks to:**

Friends and colleagues from the Columbus Group, who continuously support the idea of personal growth from the inside out.

My children and grandchildren, who provide an endless stream of opportunities to practice mindfulness and to be fully present, and my mother, whose gentle strength is enduring.

My heart's friend Dan, who has been unwavering in his support of my many projects and who inspires all who cross his path with his personal practice of mindfulness.

Myles Bosack, a creative son whose cover design captures the essence of mindfulness.

## Dedication

This book is dedicated to Annemarie Roeper, who captured the essence of mindfulness in her life and work with gifted children and adults—ever attentive, fully present, aware, and curious.

Annemarie and her husband George founded the Roeper School, which is celebrating its seventy-fifth year. The school is based on self-actualization and universal interdependence. Its mission is to support the growth of the individual and responsible membership in the world community.

# Introduction

Practicing mindfulness is a conscious, purposeful way of tuning into what's happening in and around you. *Planting the Seeds of Mindfulness* offers you an invitation to take a journey of discovery to find ways of becoming more aware of yourself and more attuned to your children or students. Teaching mindfulness directly to students complements the effects of the teacher's presence by coaching students to exercise simple, practical, and universal attention skills themselves. Mindful teaching nurtures students who flourish academically, emotionally, and socially (Schoeberlein, 2009; Rechtschaffen, 2014), and we would add spiritually.

Attention and awareness are dynamic skills, and we can improve and enhance them; one of the most powerful ways to do this for yourself and your students and children is by developing your mindfulness.

## **Benefits of Mindfulness**

The benefits of mindfulness for children and students are substantial, particularly for young children. The mindfulness Pre-K programs described in this book showed increases in attention and concentration, improved classroom participation by developing impulse control, and enhanced academic performance. Benefits for middle school students included reduced anxiety before testing and increases in readiness to learn, as well as increases in pro-social behaviors. In addition, teachers report that mindfulness strategies enhance their classroom climate and increase their responsiveness to their students' needs.

Mindfulness encourages children, youth, teachers, parents, and caregivers to stretch themselves. This book provides a foundation in the art and science of mindfulness, but most

important are numerous suggestions on ways to weave mindfulness into classroom activities, particularly for gifted students who already have a rich inner life. Once school districts recognize the benefits of mindfulness, they may decide, as a school district in New Jersey did, to incorporate it district-wide for all students. Fortunately, mindfulness involves the exercise of simple, practical, and universal skills accessible to all children. Mindful teaching nurtures students academically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

The introductory chapter of this book, “The Science of Mindfulness,” provides a brief survey of the research on mindfulness, with the effects of mindfulness on psychological well-being and well-being in body and mind, including aging and mindfulness. We also provide an exploration of the research on mindfulness and education, focusing on improvement and transformation in well-being, self-awareness, self-regulation, and reflective capacities.

Chapter Two, “Art and the Practice of Mindfulness,” focuses on the contribution of Thich Nhat Hanh in viewing mindfulness meditation and practices as an art that can enhance mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellness. It also details the effects of mindfulness practices on the mind, heart, and body.

In Chapter Three, “Mindfulness and Compassion,” we lay out the definition of compassion, the importance of compassion, and the connection between mindfulness and compassion. We also examine the theories that we are born with compassion and that compassion can be cultivated. The chapter also chronicles the work of the Greater Good and CCARE in building an understanding of compassion.

Chapter Four, “Being, Belonging, and Becoming: Social-Emotional Learning,” focuses on the three concepts of being, belonging, and becoming and provides strategies

to develop these concepts. It then traces the development of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) from the perspective of neurosurgeon Daniel Siegel, Linda Lantieri, and Daniel Goleman. It also has a discussion of the concept of social intelligence, which expands SEL with emphasis on situational awareness and social skill behaviors.

Chapter Five, “Exploring Self-Affirmations and Students’ Sense of Identity,” offers an explanation of a self model developed by Dorothy Sisk and Doris Shallcross based on Rollo May’s theory. The model includes the component parts of self: sensory perception, interpretive thought, emotions, desires, intentions, wills, actions, and behaviors. The chapter has a discussion of the drive for reaching one’s ideal self, the importance of self-affirmations, and how to become aware of one’s gifts and talents in a sense of identity.

Chapter Six, “Helping Students Find Their Purpose, Make Connections, and Model Caring,” focuses on questions of the meaning of life by exploring big ideas, including the Virtues Project of Linda Popov, the Positive Psychology Center of Martin Seligman, and Dacher Keltner’s cultivation of positive emotions like awe. It also offers an introduction to the work of Ellen Langer, the Mother of Mindfulness, Tal Ben-Shahar’s mindful way to happiness with small steps, and the work of William Damon on connecting to self with introspection to find purpose.

Chapter Seven, “Mindfulness and Self-Regulation,” is about ways to regulate your focus and the quality of your attention through practices of mindfulness. Included are self-regulation, its importance for gifted students, how it functions, and how it fits into the broader context of gifted education.

Chapter Eight, “Paths to Developing a Caring School Culture,” centers on developing a caring school climate where mindful

teaching can evolve. It explores the difference between school culture and school climate, mindful teaching versus teaching mindfulness, and a framework designed by Purkey and Novak for creating classrooms aimed at promoting care, enthusiasm, and joy, called Invitational Learning. Saltzman's mindfulness program, *A Still Quiet Place*, is presented, along with Laurie Frank's community-building model, brain strategies of Judy Willis, and the work of Martin Seligman in his book *The Optimistic Child*. The chapter also contains a discussion of the importance of intentionality and attending to physical space.

Chapter Nine, "Strategies for Implementing Mindfulness in the Classroom," introduces two model frameworks to help both novice and experienced practitioners build understanding and implement mindfulness programs. The Willard Model of Teaching and Learning Mindfulness and the model of Rechtschaffen, with its five realms of mindfulness, emphasize learning about mindfulness from the inside out. This chapter will help parents, caregivers, and teachers use mindful practices and strategies to ease students' burden of being gifted and enable them to develop their gifts to bring not only themselves but society greater happiness.

Chapter Ten, "Peace Building and Peace Education for Inner Peace and Tranquility," presents a discussion of peace building and peace education and the need for both inner and outer tranquility. We list the people who have been designated as Peace Heroes, as well as the people who are building peace around the world. The chapter also provides examples of programs that are working with students to empower them to be peace activists (Peace Boat, Seeds of Peace, and the City Montessori School), peace-building regional institutes and networks sponsored by non-governmental agencies, and a unique effort by the American Bar Association's Section on Dispute Resolution.

# Chapter One

## The Science of Mindfulness

Dorothy Sisk

*Now I become myself. It's taken  
time, many years and places;  
I have been dissolved and shaken,  
Worn other people's faces....*

- Max Sarton

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In this chapter, we examine the science of mindfulness. According to the *Mindful Research Guide* (2013), the number of scientific literature articles published on mindfulness has grown significantly in the last 30 years, moving from one study in 1982 to 477 studies in 2012.

Daniel Rechtschaffen, in *The Way of Mindful Education* (2014), said that when Jon Kabat-Zinn—one of the foremost leaders in mindfulness—started the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Clinic at the Massachusetts Medical Center in 1979, the word *mindfulness* was nowhere in the medical lexicon. Kate Pickert, in her 2014 article “The Mindful Revolution,” said that Kabat-Zinn, as the father of MBSR, didn’t look like the kind of person to be selling meditation and mindfulness to America’s fast-paced, stressed-out masses. She described Kabat-Zinn as being dressed more like the professor he trained to become than the mindfulness guru he is. Today there are nearly 1,000 certified MBSR instructors teaching mindfulness techniques such as meditation, and these instructors are in nearly every state and in more than 30 countries.