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<thead>
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Introducing Contemplative Pedagogy to the Classroom: Implementation, Experience and Effects on Concentration

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Dublin, Ireland
While there is no single theory or praxis of contemplative pedagogy (Coburn, 2011), there is a wide spectrum of Mindfulness Meditation Practices (MMPs) being used in the classroom at a growing number of institutions.

- Aimed at reducing stress, reflection, expressing empathy, appreciating diversity, reducing absenteeism and more.

- Some of these practices also hold promise to possibly improve cognition, concentration and memory capabilities.
Aim

- This paper explores the experience of implementing a one-pointedness MMP in the classroom at an Irish higher education institution.

- The focus is on:
  - simplicity of implementation
  - minimal disruption
  - student engagement with the practice
  - any positive effects this may bring to the concentration/attention abilities of students.
Several minute one-pointedness exercise (‘meditation’) introduced at beginning of one module for treatment group

Same cohort\(^1\), different module with no meditation served as control group

All other (controllable) factors were made as similar as possible (classroom, teaching methodology, etc.)

\(^1\)~65 Second-Year BSc in IT students, College of Computer Training, Dublin
Measures of effect:
* Questionnaire (Qual/Quant)
  * 6 question Likert
* Focus group (Qual)
  * Single group
* Concentration test (Quant) also taken by control module
  * Wilkins’ Counting Test (modified)
Q1: I felt that doing the one-pointedness meditation helped me focus better in class.
Q2: I felt that doing the meditation helped my ability to concentrate.
Q3: I enjoyed doing the 'counting test'.
Q4: I enjoyed the one-pointedness meditation in class.
Q5: I would like to do more meditation/relaxation activities as part of my learning.
Q6: I am planning on doing more meditation as part of my studies or in other areas of my life.
Focus Group

- results from the discussion group show a clear relationship with the formal results of the questionnaire
- nobody suggested removing meditation – most enjoyed it
- positive appetite for further MMP, including workshops/class sessions
Wilkins’ Concentration Test

* 200 numbers flashed on screen one by one
  * 500ms intervals
  * 20 ‘target’ numbers randomly placed
  * Student strikes any key when target appears
    * Correct – within 500ms of target appearing (while on screen)
    * False – any other time
    * Missed – target shown with no key press
## Effects on Concentration

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Treatment had:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage perfect tests</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>More perfect tests (3.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean total correct time (ms)</td>
<td>6756, SD = 1510</td>
<td>7051, SD = 1193</td>
<td>Shorter reaction time $t(302) = 1.95$, $p = .05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean missed key presses per test</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>Fewer missed targets (0.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean false key presses per test</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>Fewer false key presses (0.44)</td>
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Conclusions

* Introduction of MMP in classes was minimally disruptive, and fairly simple/straight-forward

* Students positively engaged with mindfulness

* Students expressed willingness and often eagerness in continuing mindfulness in their education

* Effect on student concentration is positive, with borderline statistical significance
  * Further study necessary
Measuring MMP benefits can be very subjective and interpretive

Willingness to embrace the qualitative, intangible, aspects of this type of research

Buy-in from facilitators required for success (mindfulness champions)

Sufficient induction on MMP’s for target group for acceptance and understanding

Slow-building methodology – allow feedback to emerge over time
Thank you

Any Questions?