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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.
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

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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
Recommendations

- 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?