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

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Mindfulness Meditation Practices

- * 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

Methodology

- * Several minute one-pointedness exercise ('meditation') introduced at beginning of one module for treatment group
- * Same cohort¹, different module with no meditation served as control group
- * All other (controllable) factors were made as similar as possible (classroom, teaching methodology, etc.)

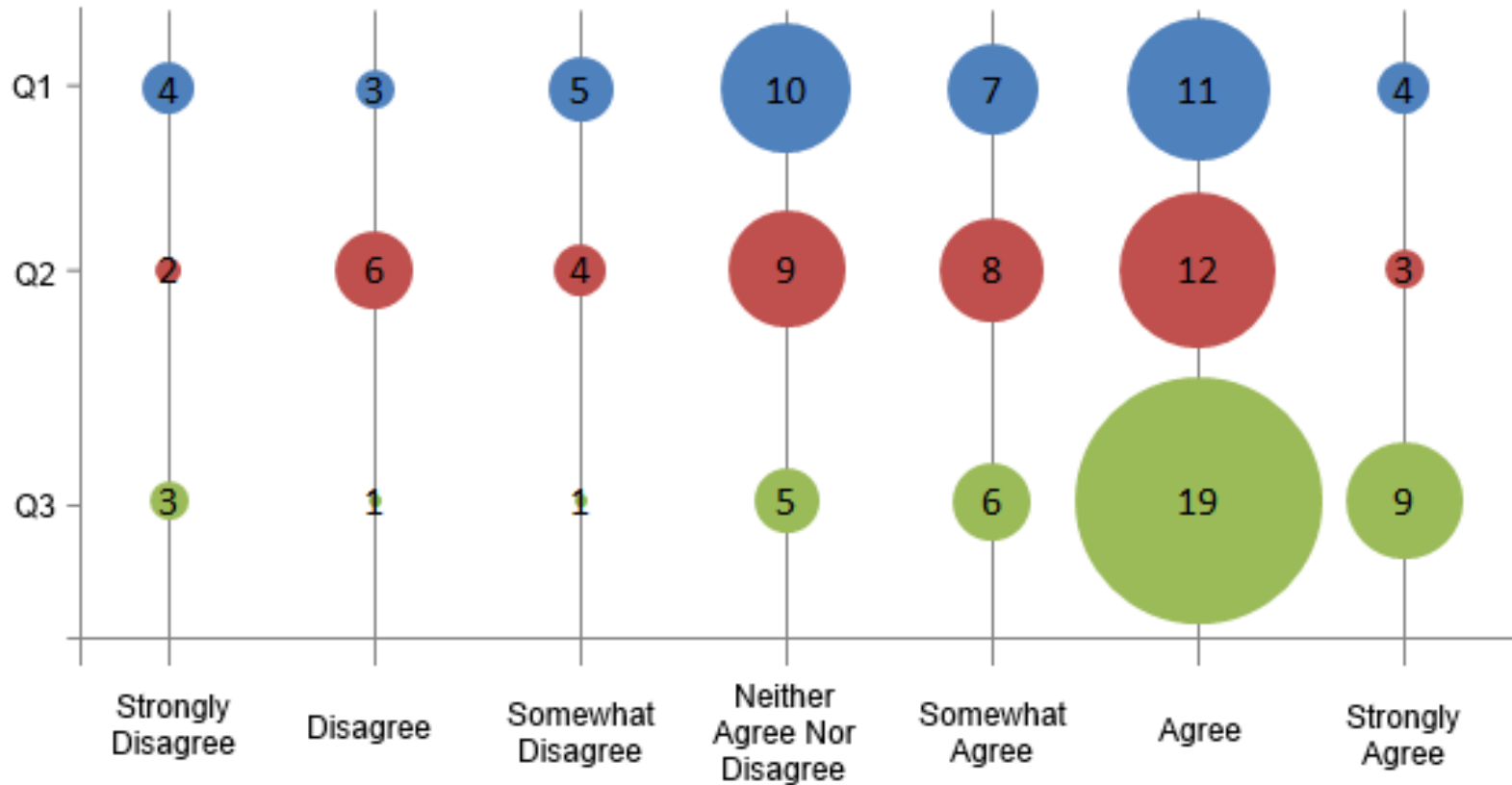
¹ ~65 Second-Year BSc in IT students, College of Computer Training, Dublin

Measures

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)

Survey

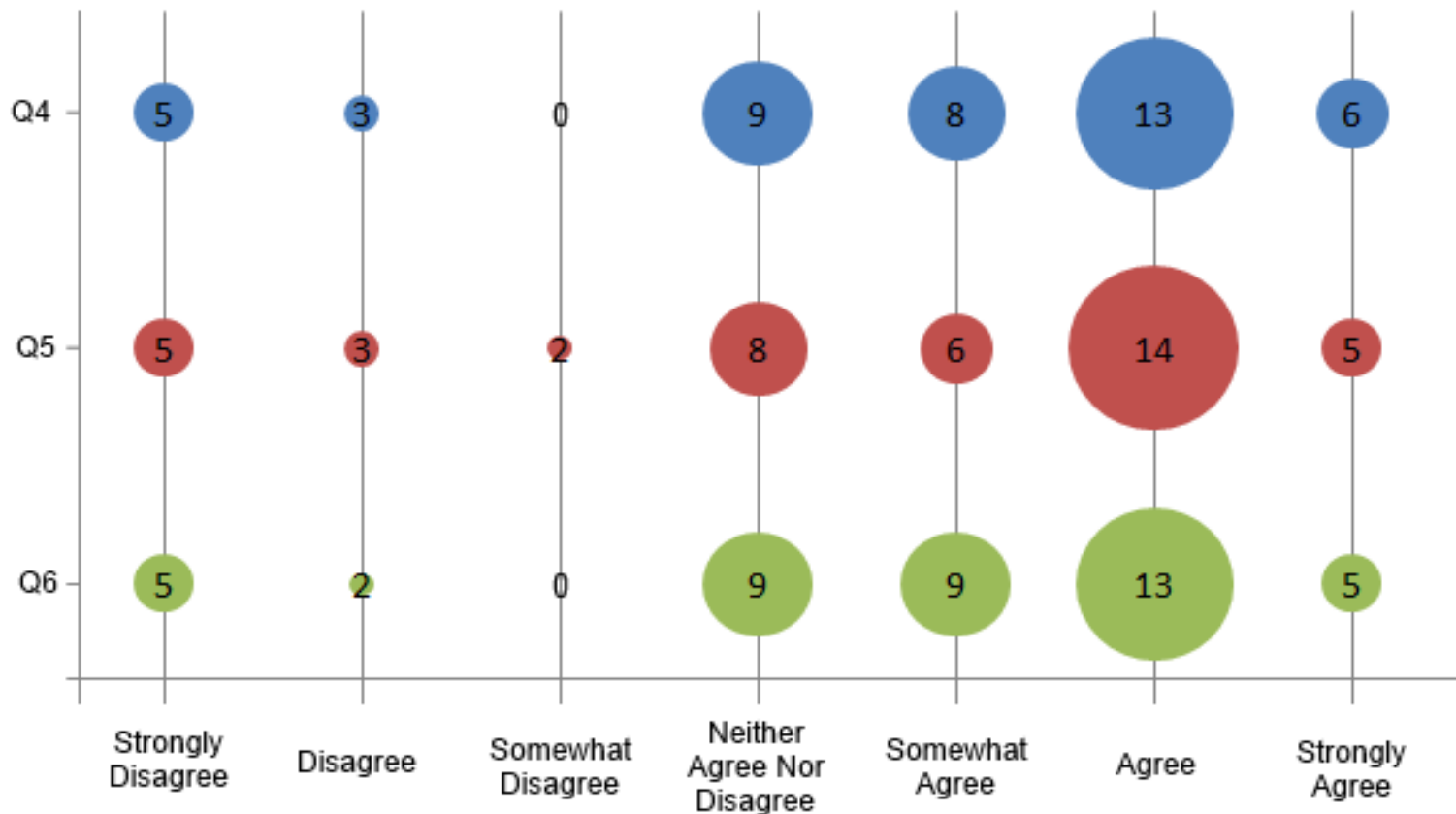


Q1: *I felt that doing the one-pointedness meditation helped me focus better in class.*

Q2: *I felt that doing the meditation helped my ability to concentrate.*

Q3: *I enjoyed doing the 'counting test'.*

Survey



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

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

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?