**An ASCD Study Guide for Mindfulness in the Classroom: Strategies for Promoting Concentration, Compassion, and Calm**

This ASCD Study Guide is designed to enhance your understanding and application of the information contained in *Mindfulness in the Classroom: Strategies for Promoting Concentration, Compassion, and Calm*, an ASCD book written by Thomas Armstrong and published in July 2019.

You can use the study guide before or after you have read the book, or as you finish each chapter. The study questions provided are not meant to cover all aspects of the book, but, rather, to address specific ideas that might warrant further reflection.

Most of the questions contained in this study guide are ones you can think about on your own, but you might consider pairing with a colleague or forming a study group with others who have read (or are reading) *Mindfulness in the Classroom: Strategies for Promoting Concentration, Compassion, and Calm*.

**Chapter 1. Joining the Quiet Revolution**

1. How would you rank your classroom or school with regard to stress levels on a scale of 1 (lowest stress) to 10 (highest stress)? If you came up with a low score, think about the factors that contributed to this outcome. Similarly, if you had a high score, what elements in your class and school were involved in creating high stress levels? Finally, if you had a high score, what sorts of social and emotional interventions do you believe would lead to a lowering of stress levels? After reflection, share your thoughts with your colleagues.
2. How convinced are you about the effectiveness of mindfulness in helping students learn self-regulation and other important social and emotional skills? Which source of data is more convincing to you regarding its effectiveness: (a) formal research studies; (b) qualitative; (c) evidence from the students themselves (e.g. testimonials); or (d) all of these? Reflect on your answers and share your thoughts with others.
3. Which existing programs in your school or district are compatible with mindfulness practices (e.g., UDL, SEL, PBIS)? How can you most effectively align mindfulness with one or more of these initiatives so that mindfulness is not regarded as an addition to your own or other teachers' workloads?

**Chapter 2. Reviewing Evidence from Neuroscience**

1. What aspects of the neuroscience of mindfulness intrigues you most? What questions do brain research studies leave unanswered?
2. Develop a plan to explain the brain research that supports mindfulness to a fellow teacher or colleague. If you work with older students (4th grade and above), how would you explain the brain friendly benefits of mindfulness to them? What is your opinion about teaching the neuroscience of mindfulness to younger kids?
3. Compare the dangers of our ancestors living in prehistoric times [before recorded or written history] when stress response was necessary to the dangers of living during our time. Select a student in your classroom (or school) and write a narrative that describes the stressors in her life. Afterward, compare her stresses to those that might have existed if she lived 20,000 years ago.

**Chapter 3. Understanding the Basics**

1. Practice sitting silently in a quiet room and concentrating on your breath for five minutes. On a scale of 1 to 10, how busy was your mind (1 quiet; 10 very busy)? List as many interruptions as you can remember. Then identify whether they were thoughts, feelings, sensations (in your body), or perceptions (of or from the outside world). Do another five minute session and repeat the process. What have you learned about how your mind works?
2. Select an activity you do in your school or home life (e.g. lecturing, washing dishes, attending a faculty meeting, taking out the garbage) and practice being mindful while doing it. What effect does this informal practice have upon the activity? Ask your students to select their own informal activity to be mindful about, and discuss the results with them.
3. Try all five of the informal practices described in this chapter with your students (mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful eating, body scan, and mindful stretching). Which practices do your students prefer doing? Which ones don't work as well? Use student feedback to schedule practices that you will emphasize in the classroom.

**Chapter 4. Practicing Self-Care as a Teacher**

1. Use Teacher Burnout Checklist (Figure 4.1) with a group of your colleagues and compare your answers, if appropriate. Discuss with your colleagues how school stress affects their teaching (or working life) and how and if it finds its way into their home life. Discuss the effects that mindfulness could have on their stress levels.
2. If you are just beginning a mindfulness practice, decide how you wish to proceed. Which practice do you want to start with (e.g., mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful sitting, mindful body scan, or mindful stretching)? Do you want to practice at home or school (or both)? How long do you want to practice for each session? Write your plan and begin. You may wish to connect with a colleague who is also beginning mindful practices so that you can encourage each other.
3. Select one or more mindfulness resources, whether a book, a video or audio program, a retreat, or training program, and use it or them to support your mindfulness practice

**Chapter 5. Teaching Kindness and Compassion**

1. Evaluate the kindness of your students toward each other on a scale of 1 (very self-centered) to 10 (very compassionate). What factors do you think contributed to how you ranked them? What strategies can you implement in your classroom (or at your school) that will develop greater levels of kindness and compassion?
2. Visit the website <LINK URL="https://self-compassion.org/">www.selfcompassion.org</LINK> (the site of a leading researcher of self-compassion, Kristin Neff). Select one of the self-compassion exercises described there to do with your class or at your school. Discuss with students what it feels like to have greater levels of compassion toward oneself and how that level affects their feelings and behaviors at school and at home.
3. Plan a schoolwide kindness event (e.g., fair, display, festival, service project) and evaluate how it affects the levels of compassion that students have toward each other.

**Chapter 6. Adapting to Students' Developmental Levels**

1. If you teach early childhood or kindergarten, download the <LINK URL="https://centerhealthyminds.org/join-the-movement/sign-up-to-receive-the-kindness-curriculum">Kindness Curriculum</LINK> from the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and use it with your students. If you work with older students, determine how you could adapt the curriculum to fit their developmental level. Evaluate the effects of the program on your students' mindfulness and kindness levels.
2. Take some of the ideas and metaphors described in this chapter that explain mindfulness to students (e.g., the mouse hole, thought parade, and moods as weather), and determine which seem to work best with your students. Create a mind jar (a jar with glitter—instructions are available at <LINK URL="https://heartmindkids.com/how-to-make-a-glitter-jar-for-mindfulness/">https://heartmindkids.com/how-to-make-a-glitter-jar-for-mindfulness/</LINK>) and use it as a resource for explaining how thoughts can get stirred up by life events and settle down when practicing mindfulness.
3. Develop a mini-curriculum for presenting the idea of mindfulness to older students (4th grade and above) using movie stars, musicians, and professional athletes as inspirational role models. Discuss your ideas and potential effects on your students with a colleague.

**Chapter 7. Applying in the Content Areas**

1. Select a content area (reading, math, science, or social studies) and develop a series of lessons that integrates mindfulness into the content area. For example, teach mindful reading by helping students become aware of the process of reading and the flow of their minds as they read. To what extent does this help support the mindfulness practices of your students? To what extent does it help students read more deeply or more effectively?
2. Use the simple mindful test-taking routine described in Figure 7.1 (or one adapted for your use), and teach students to practice it before taking a test. How does this affect the test results? Do some students benefit more than others?
3. Have a dialogue with a colleague who feels that mindfulness is just another fad, burden, or distraction from the work of being a teacher. Explain some of the benefits of using mindfulness to help boost academic skills (described in the beginning of this chapter). Be sure to keep an open mind when listening to your colleague's concerns.

**Chapter 8. Expanding Schoolwide**

1. Devote an area of your classroom or school to a mindful space or chill-out room where students can go when they are overwhelmed by their feelings. Students should be able to use the space when they feel unable to participate meaningfully in the class activities and need time to regroup and practice a mindful strategy. The space should allow encouragement from a teacher or older student and give them the opportunity to rejoin the class in a better state of mind. Evaluate the results by examining data related to principal referrals, suspensions, and expulsions, and by collecting evaluations from the students themselves. Present and discuss the results at a faculty meeting.
2. Plan a schoolwide mindfulness campaign in your school, perhaps by including an assembly, mindfulness sessions via intercom, t-shirts, and older students teaching younger ones. After several weeks of the campaign, evaluate the results in terms of the effectiveness in creating a positive school climate.
3. How mindful are your school and district leaders? If you are a leader yourself, how would you evaluate your own mindfulness on the job? Set up a time when teachers and administrators can join together to practice mindfulness (e.g., before or after a faculty meeting), and then discuss the effects of mindfulness—and lack of mindfulness—on their stress levels and their ability to function optimally during the school day.

**Chapter 9. Respecting the First Amendment**

1. Soon after initiating a mindfulness program in your classroom, at your school, or in your district, schedule a time when parents can come to the school and learn about mindfulness, practice a little mindful breathing, learn about the science behind mindfulness, and air their questions and concerns. Evaluate the results of this parent involvement. Develop other ways of communicating with parents about the school-based mindfulness program.
2. If there are faith-based concerns from the broader community about the practice of mindfulness at your school or district, have a public forum where these issues can be discussed in an open and friendly manner. Plan to forge links with faith-based leaders in the community who can and will support the mindfulness efforts of your school and students.
3. Do an inventory of the ways in which your (public) school or school district is implementing mindfulness practices, and eliminate or modify any element in the program that has religious or spiritual connotations. Have a faculty discussion on the issue of the separation of church and state and answer any questions or concerns that teachers may have about this issue.

**Chapter 10. Anticipating Future Challenges**

1. Have a discussion with your colleagues about developing a 'critical' mindfulness attitude, where the practices are viewed within a broader social context. For example, do you work at a school where a largely white group of teachers are implementing mindfulness practices with a primarily minority population? If so, how does this situation invite possible abuses of majority power over minorities? How can such a situation be balanced by providing a significant voice to the student population, and/or by taking on the broader social issue of racial and economic inequities within society?
2. Discuss with teachers the potential abuse of mindfulness practices as a means of classroom control. How can such abuses be recognized and eliminated so that mindful practices can be free of overt or subtle coercion?
3. Have a conversation with teachers regarding the extent to which mindfulness in your school or district represents a way of pacifying them against the real issues of teachers' low pay, loss of control over significant teaching choices, accountability for test scores, and other stress-inducing job concerns. How can mindfulness proactively contribute toward an amelioration of these types of vocational hot-button issues?

*Mindfulness in the Classroom: Strategies for Promoting Concentration, Compassion, and Calm* was written by Thomas Armstrong. This 156-page, 6″ × 9″ book (Stock #120018; ISBN-13: 978-1-4166-2794-4) is available from ASCD. Copyright © 2019 by Thomas Armstrong. To order a copy, visit [ASCD's Online Store](https://shop.ascd.org/default.aspx).