

# 'Mindful Moments in Education' – Notes & News

*...supporting and sharing: a personal practice, student lessons, and our community*

*(Sponsored by the [Grand Rapids Center for Mindfulness](#))*

February 2016



## February Theme: Inquiry

“Deep winter, when only the bone structure of the landscape is visible, teaches us to look deeply at our own lives. The Celts honored the goddess of sacred fire at this time. Waldorf schools celebrate this mid-way point to spring as Candlemas. We also know this holiday as Groundhog Day --the time for peeking our heads out of our wintery dens in search of the first light of spring.”



--Chelsea True, JoyfulMindProject.org

*Disclaimer: I have to admit that I am not a blogger or a writer of any sort, in fact writing can be a rather painful experience for me, a laborious endeavor. But, I am a great scavenger of others writings. All of my newsletters are patch quilts of others thoughts and ramblings and hopefully, they will provide you with ideas and resources that support mindfulness in our community. –Patti Ward*

While spring is a few months off for us in Michigan, we can all use this short month to delve into inquiry and deep reflection. Here is a suggestion, again from Chelsea True:

**Personal Practice:** “Try writing or painting the sentence, “Are you sure?” and hanging it in a visible spot at home. If this question doesn’t resonate with your family or the youth with which you work, drop your own question into your practice this month. What is that thing, that barely recognizable feeling, that’s always there with you? Practice looking at your feelings with clarity and kindness. What are you holding deep within yourself? What seeds are just beneath your surface, ready to bloom?”

(Chelsea’s beautiful website with lots of great resources: <http://joyfulmindproject.org/>)

I loved this article about,

### Seeing Space

I believe that a person does not choose to be a teacher because it is just a job. Teaching demands too much of the mind and body and heart to be just a job. It is not something you do where you go into work, punch a clock, sit at a table, turn on a machine, then turn it off, leave the job and go home and forget it. Teaching demands you to be with it for the time that you are doing it and then often for most of the rest of the day as well.

When most teachers get up in the morning, they are thinking about that one class that is not so well put together yet, or about that one kid you has not come around, or about the

assignment that needs to be posted on the website, or about the adult learner who clearly needs some support, or about the deadlines for course content, or about the process of learning and who is and who isn't and why. All of this takes over the space of the mind until planning mind dominates and there is nothing else. Teachers give all of themselves to this most of the time of the day.

Recently, a teacher attending one of my weekend retreats told me that she does not have time in the day to go to the bathroom or to get a cup of tea. She eats her lunch in her elementary school classroom with the kids and when she goes home, there is always more to do. A university professor told me some time ago that it always looks like the academic calendar is a great way to work and to have a lot of vacations. But in truth, she actually spends a lot of her time not teaching in the classroom - say during the summer - researching what she needs to have in place for the next course she will teach in the fall. Or she is reading and writing about the topics she teaches in order to publish them and maintain her position. Finally, another teacher just wrote to me to say that she was not sure she could take an online course on mindfulness for teachers. Her response said, "Ironically, most teachers are so stressed that they do not have the time to do anything for themselves to work with the stress, even if it is not a lot of time." There is the sense that there is no time; no time for self-care and no time for the space and grace that leads and inspires a teacher.

What teachers need to know is that in truth, there is all the space and time in the world available to them. All they need to do is to stop and step back and to see a bit more clearly both inside their own minds and bodies, and then perhaps inside the minds and bodies of their students.

There is a notion in early Chinese painting that what is important in the painting is not the objects in it but the space from which the objects emerge. The painter sees and draws the space as clearly and as importantly as she draws the objects. The space is always there - it is what we walk through, it is the air we breathe, it is all that is invisible that surrounds us every moment of our waking lives.

We can learn to stop and to see the space rather than the objects, but it takes some time and it takes a strong intention to incline the mind in that new direction. But it is truly possible. Right now, wherever you are, just look at what is around you. And now, take a moment to focus your eyes on the edges of things, on the contours. See the place where the object ends and where space begins. Then move to yourself and feel your whole body sitting in whatever position it is in. Then feel the sense of the contours of the body and feel where the body ends and where the space around it begins.

When you start to look at the world from this perspective, you can see that there is infinitely more space than there are objects in it. And if you do this exercise outside, you will notice that the air and the sky go on beyond where you can even see until there is much more space, truly infinite space that surrounds our planet and is in between this planet and the next one. They measure that space in light years.

In physics, there is a principle that goes something like this: when there is more space, there is more time.

Try this:

The next time you are teaching a class, simply see what is happening from the angle of space rather than from the angle of what is going on or even the people in it. If you fix your gaze to a bigger, wider space, your mind will naturally open up to a slower and perhaps gentler responding to what is happening. From the perspective of space, there is no need for reaction, and there is much more time for compassion. Seeing the space may even open up our innate lovingkindness and compassion. Pay attention when you practice seeing the space and notice the quality of the mind. Notice what your relationship is to time and to space right then and there. Perhaps you will see love and compassion present in the here and now.

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### **Student Lesson Ideas:**

This one is from Susan Kaiser Greenland's book, *The Mindful Child: What's Inside the Box*, p. 64-65

Take an empty box of Quaker Oats and put something fun inside. For example, a set of colorful jacks, a toy car, or Legos. Place it in the middle of the circle of children, or on a table with your own children, and ask them to guess what, beside cereal, could possibly be inside the tall cylindrical box. I've heard guesses that ranged from "oatmeal" to "lizards." After everyone has had a turn guessing, ask the kids questions about what it feels like not to know what's in the box. Do they want to know? Have there been times in their lives when something was going on and they didn't know what it was? What was that like? How does it feel to be really curious and eager to discover? Sit with the kids and pay attention to what it feels like not to know something. Ask them how their bodies feel when they don't know what is going to happen next. Is it comfortable? Is it uncomfortable? Does anyone feel excited? Ask them if it feels like they have butterflies in their stomachs. See if you and the kids can feel the energy and thrill of not knowing fill the room. If you can, just sit there and breathe, taking it all in. Now they can look inside the box!

### **Community Sharing and Caring**

(Please let me know what you are doing to teach Mindfulness in your community and I will share it here.)

I hope to see everyone at the Dan Siegel event:

*Mindfulness, Mindsight and the Integrated Brain: What is the Mind and Mental Health?*

Friday, February 26, 2016 9 am – 4 pm Registration at: [Grand Rapids Center for Mindfulness](#)

Cheryl Blackington, Middle School Teacher Forest Hills Public Schools

- Beginning an 8-week evening class for high school students using the .b curriculum. (see [Grand Rapids Center for Mindfulness](#) for details).
- Teaching a free 15-minute class after school to middle schoolers.