



Workshop Brief

Mindfulness and Learning Research Symposium (2013-2015)

<p>PI: Nettie Legters, Ph.D.* Research Scientist Center for Social Organization of Schools JHU School of Education *Now at Education Northwest in Portland, OR.</p>	<p>Co-Investigators: Erica Sibinga, M.D., M.H.S. Associate Professor Pediatrics JHU School of Medicine</p>	<p>Tamar Mendelson, Ph.D. Associate Professor Mental Health JHU School of Public Health</p>
--	---	---

Workshop Question: What is the current state of research on mindfulness related to learning?

Interdisciplinary Approach: This workshop aims to share current research on the state of mindfulness and learning from the standpoint of brain imaging, cognitive science, and the learners' experiences, as well as to encourage interdisciplinary research partnerships.

Potential Implications of Workshop: The workshop provided an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to share ideas and learn from each other, and develop networks and potential collaborations.

Mindfulness practices—which intentionally cultivate moment-by-moment, non-judgmental attention and awareness of one's own thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and environment—have spread from initial Western applications in medicine to other fields, including education. Pre-K-12 educators are increasingly interested in the potential of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) to promote more effective teaching and learning. While the mechanism of effect remains unclear, a growing body of research from the fields of neuroscience, developmental psychology, public health, medicine, and education points to the promising effects of MBIs on cognitive, behavioral, health-related, and socio-emotional capacities essential to pro-social behavior, self-regulation, and academic success. The incorporation of MBIs in education typically includes the integration of both formal mindfulness practices, such as sustained focus on breath or sound, and age-appropriate exercises illustrating mindfulness concepts.

Despite the growing interest, rigorous implementation and evaluation of MBIs in school settings are rare. Some of the most advanced research programs in the country are currently underway at Johns Hopkins University (JHU). For instance, Drs. Tamar Mendelson and Jacinda Dariotis (now at the University of Cincinnati) in the Bloomberg School of Public Health and Dr. Erica Sibinga in the School of Medicine are among a select group of researchers conducting randomized trials on the efficacy of school-based MBIs. Further, MBIs also are being implemented and evaluated across a number of educational and clinical settings at JHU.

The Mindfulness and Learning Symposium was developed to share current inter-disciplinary research on mindfulness and learning, as well as to enhance and encourage multi-disciplinary collaborations. The Symposium was very successful, drawing internationally-renowned mindfulness speakers and researchers Jon Kabat-Zinn and Richard Davidson, among others. Although our initial estimate was for 80 attendees, approximately 475 people attended, consisting of mindfulness researchers, instructors, educators, and practitioners from across the United States. Funding from the Science of Learning Institute was augmented by generous contributions from the Zanvyl and Isabelle Krieger Fund, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, to accommodate the high level of interest and large number of symposium registrants. The Symposium generated very positive feedback from presenters and audience members alike. A number of important themes emerged:

1. Mindfulness in learning can be conceptualized in a number of different ways, from developmental, cognitive, brain, and experiential perspectives.
2. There are a variety of programs being used to provide mindfulness instruction for students and teachers in school settings.
3. There is variability in mindfulness in education program evaluations.
4. There is a need for better understanding of what outcomes are likely to be affected by school-based mindfulness and how best to measure these outcomes.
5. Mindfulness instructors provide valuable insight regarding content and process of instruction.
6. There is significant interest in researcher-community-practitioner connection and the use of multidisciplinary perspectives to advance the science and practice of mindfulness approaches in education.

The Symposium generated conversations about ways to connect and sustain Baltimore-area researchers, practitioners, and educators with interest in mindfulness-based approaches, which continue to unfold.