

## REVIEW OF RESEARCH

# MINDFULNESS AT WORK: A MUST FOR TEACHER'S PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING



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### Abstract :

This paper attempts to explain how mindfulness is necessary for psychological wellbeing of a teacher. It starts with explain general well being followed by psychological wellbeing, then importance of psychological wellbeing at school, especially for a teacher. Then mindfulness has been explained in terms of intentional, accepting and non-judgmental focus of one's attention on the emotions, thoughts and sensations occurring in the present moment. It may be considered as a trait, state or practice i.e. method or technique of being mindful. Mindfulness has been discussed in terms of its constructs – paying attention “on the purpose”, “in the purpose”, and “out of purpose”. Paying attention on the purpose is full awareness of the work in which we are engaged, in the purpose implies one should be fully engrossed in the work at hand at the moment and out of the purpose means remaining neutral and observing the self thoughts as a witness without reacting to it. Author suggests how these three can be achieved by a teacher in teaching. Finally paper ends with concluding that mindfulness is nothing but a sincere effort by a teacher to do his service with intention, attention and submission to his reality. Mindfulness at work will definitely bring wellbeing for a teacher.

**Key Words:** Mindfulness, Wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, Teacher, teaching

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### INTRODUCTION

### PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING

Achieving well-being has been the concern of philosophers since Aristotle, and is, in many respects the essence of human existence. Well-being is most usefully thought of as the dynamic process that gives people a sense of how their lives are going, through the interaction between their circumstances, activities and psychological resources or 'mental capital'. The 2008 UK Government Foresight Project drew on key thinking to define well-being in similar terms. Because of this dynamic nature, high levels of well-being mean that we are more able to respond to difficult circumstances, to innovate and constructively engage with other people and the world around us. As well as representing a highly effective way of bringing about good outcomes in many different areas our lives, there is also a strong case for regarding well-being as an ultimate goal of human endeavor. In terms of components it can be categorized in to physical, Social, Economic, Environmental and Psychological wellbeing. All the forms of wellbeing affect all other forms both positively as well as negatively, but psychological wellbeing has strongest impact on all other forms of wellbeing. That is why it has been made the subject of the paper. Psychological well-being is usually conceptualized as some combination of positive affective states such as happiness (the hedonic perspective) and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life (the eudaemonic perspective) (Deci & Ryan 2008). As summarized by Huppert (2009, p.137): Psychological well-being is about lives going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. By definition therefore, people with high PW report feeling happy, capable, well supported, satisfied with life, and so on; Huppert's (2009) review also claims the consequences of PW to include better physical health, mediated possibly by brain activation patterns, neurochemical effects and genetic factors. Ryff (1995) included six factors as constructs of psychological wellbeing-Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life and Self-Acceptance.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AND SCHOOL:** in present times work situations have change drastically for teachers. It is more stressful, more demanding, more competitive and out put oriented. This may be attributed to the factors like market forces, globalization, quality consciousness of customer, and the like. In some situations conditions of work are same but views and values of both teacher and customer has changed hugely. Accountability has entered in teaching in a big way even when service conditions are not adequate. This creates stressful conditions and hence disturbs our psychological wellbeing. One should remember that quality of work & quality at work and psychological wellbeing affect each other reciprocally. It has been observed that some teachers can maintain their wellbeing even in worse situation. How come this? When we study their characteristics in relation to their working style and reactions to work and mental orientation, we find they are mindful at work. This means being mindful is equivalent to promoting one's wellbeing. But what is this mindfulness? Let's find it out.

### WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

It is intentional, accepting and non-judgmental focus of one's attention on the emotions, thoughts and sensations occurring in the present moment, which can be trained by practice, some may say by meditation. The term "mindfulness" is derived from the Pali-term sati and in Sanskrit counterpart Samrti, which is an essential element of Buddhist practice, anapanasati. The word sati derives from a root meaning 'to remember,' but as a mental factor it signifies presence of mind, attentiveness to the present, rather than the faculty of memory regarding the past or wandering in the future which is yet to happen. It has the characteristic of not wobbling, i.e. not floating away from the object. It amounts to absence of confusion and consciousness of what is happening now and here. The concept of Mindfulness has been popularized in the West by Jon Kabat-Zinn with his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. Mindfulness is also an attribute of consciousness as conceived by religious preachers and yoga followers claim to promote well-being. Over time, mindfulness brings about long-term changes in moods, value preferences, reactions to change etc. all in positive sense, thus promote wellbeing. Scientific studies have shown that mindfulness not only prevents depression, but that it also positively affects the brain patterns underlying day-to-day anxiety, stress, depression and irritability so that when they arise, they dissolve away again more easily. Other studies have shown that regular meditators see their doctors less often and spend fewer days in hospital. Memory improves, creativity increases and reaction times become faster.

Mindfulness at work is something like developing awareness of our own thoughts, emotions, and physiology and their interaction with one another. Mindfulness is also about being aware of your surroundings, helping you better understand the needs of those around you, it may be students and colleagues when comes to teaching. The quality of work hugely depends upon your state of mind, its working style and how it interacts with its living and non living environment. Mindfulness is a blissful state of mind which in any way has no relation whatsoever with religion, an ism or any political or social order. Although it is similar to somewhat contentment which usually believed to be associated with religious people, but even an atheist, or any other person can be mindful without being religious. Thus concept is purely psychological, everybody needs it irrespective of one's beliefs or identity characteristics.

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### NATURE OF MINDFULNESS

According to Brown, Ryan, and Creswell, definitions of mindfulness are typically selectively interpreted based on who is studying it and how it is applied. Some have viewed mindfulness as a mental state, while others have viewed it as a set of skills and techniques. A distinction can also be made between the state of mindfulness and the trait of mindfulness. According to David S. Black, whereas 'mindfulness' originally was associated with esoteric beliefs and religion, and 'a capacity attainable only by certain people'; scientific researchers have translated the term into measurable terms, providing a valid operational definition of mindfulness. Black mentions three possible domains: Trait, state and practice.

**Trait-** Qualities of consciousness manifest in, but not isomorphic with, the activities through which it is enhanced.

**State-** A kind of non elaborative, nonjudgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is.

**Practice-** Mindfulness is a way of paying attention that originated in Eastern meditation practices. Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. It is about bringing one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis.

### CONSTRUCTS OF THE CONCEPT 'MINDFULNESS'

#### A) PAYING ATTENTION "ON THE PURPOSE"

First of all, mindfulness involves paying attention "on purpose". Mindfulness involves a conscious direction of our awareness. We use terms "mindfulness" and "awareness" as if they were interchangeable which is not. I am aware that I am angry at the moment, but that does not mean I am really aware (mindful) of my being angry. In order to be mindful I have to be intentionally aware of my physiology, thoughts and actions, and not just undefined and casually aware. Knowing that you are eating is not the same, as eating mindfully. It is something similar to the situation- hearing is not listening. Let's further probe this example as an experiment in which you need to eat a biscuit in duration of five minutes. It means the process of eating will be too slow and we will be able to experience consciously each and every moment of eating. Probably we will be able to feel the sensations of saliva, crushed food travelling down the food pipe, and other juices involved in the process. We notice thoughts are taking us away from the process of eating, but we need to bring them back focused on eating only. We have tendency to move away as we consider this as too small and too simple a job does not need our attention. These habits exaggerate and we start ignoring even the big tasks like teaching. It means we pay a divided attention on the purpose i.e. work we are engaged in. In daily life it starts with TV watching and doing too many things like eating, reading newspaper, talking on phone etc. all done with diffused attention, all with mindlessness. Researches have shown that food taken without engaging mind is more or less like putting it in a dustbin rather than stomach, defeat the very purpose of eating. As we are only casually aware of our thoughts, they wander, are uncontrolled, unfocused and hence go wayward and turn negative as well. If there is no intention, no purpose, hence no focus and no destination. Thus purposefulness is a very important part of mindfulness. Having the purpose of staying with our experience, whether that's the breath, or an emotion, or something as simple as eating, means that we are actively shaping the mind.

#### B) PAYING ATTENTION "IN THE PURPOSE"

Mindfulness is being in the present, the now and not in past or future. It is observed that our all negative thoughts are actually related to past or future. We may express anger; revenge, regret, annoyance, depression, self-pity, and the like are consequence of our bitter past or insecurities we imagine in unseen future. As we indulge in these kinds of thoughts we reinforce those emotions in our mind and cause ourselves to suffer and damage our psychological wellbeing. The past no longer exists and future is just a fantasy until it happens, but present is here calling for our attention. The one moment we actually can experience is our present which is the one we seem to miss most of the times. If we advocate being in present, it does never mean we are not allowed to think the past or future, but when we do so we do so mindfully, so that we're aware that right now we're thinking about the past or future. When we focus our all psychic energy at present, withdrawn from present or future, we are actually lessening the impact of both past and future on our present. A teacher can not teach well while he is cherishing how well he or his students have performed in the past, rather he needs to perform through learners present in the class. It also fits for the teachers who keep on repenting; they wanted to do something interesting, even after even entering in the profession. Thus we need to be in the purpose for being mindfulness in the purpose.

#### C) PAYING ATTENTION "OUT OF PURPOSE"



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Being mindfulness is being 'non-judgmental'. Mindfulness is an emotionally non-reactive, neutral or zero state. As we usually describe a man is in the state of heavenly bliss if he remains same in happier as well as sad times, it is something similar can be said about mindfulness. The man needs to be some one outsider (which is actually true), a witness or a reference only and let the all positive and negative thoughts arise, pass through and vanish. Whether it's a pleasant or a painful experience we treat it the same way. We just need to recognize that I am not my thoughts; these are only by virtue of my existence. We know we forget even the bitterest experience after a reasonable time span; whereas mindfulness forces it to happen immediately. Cognitively, mindfulness is of being aware that some experiences are pleasant and others are unpleasant, but on emotional level we simply don't react. Once we are aware of our thoughts both positive and negative, our rational mind will direct us to execute only the positive ones. In fact being non-judgmental is like becoming a saint who detaches oneself from material things, biases, and attachments etc. which are origin of negative thoughts. In a way it is about controlling the affect by intellect. If we are neutral, non-judgmental only then we can decide about good or not good or bad. The non-judgmental component makes us pious, justice loving and creative personality. In teaching this component is very important for becoming better judge of needs and talents of the learners. It is vital in teaching that teacher should not be biased and prejudice ridden towards students at emotional level, thus need to be out of purpose, i.e. not only think like a teacher rather also think like a parent.

### WHY WE NEED TO BE MINDFUL AT TEACHING?

- ❖ Enhance teacher self-regulation of thoughts, emotions and behaviors and make them more resilient to face challenges.
- ❖ Helps to build positive relations with learners and co-workers.
- ❖ Helps to develop positive strategies to deal stressful environments and performance pressures
- ❖ Enables teacher to deal with complexity of task.
- ❖ Finally improves responsiveness, proficiency, efficiency and hence effectiveness.

### WAYS TO BE MORE MINDFUL AT TEACHING

The discussion again follows the three prong strategy-be on the purpose, in the purpose and out of purpose. There are some suggestions for developing work habits which automatically turn a teacher mindful at teaching.

#### HOW TO BE 'ON THE PURPOSE'

- ❖ **PLAN THE TEACHING IN ADVANCE:** when we plan our work, it makes things easier for concentrating on execution, monitoring and evaluation. When we do not plan things, there is possibility of creating mess and need much more effort to accomplish the task. In fact planning is substance for being mindful at work.
- ❖ **BE AWARE OF AROUND YOU AND IN YOU:** we should be aware of what is going on around us and what is going on inside us, former is consideration of others and latter consideration of ours. We need to be concerned about others and also watch our own thought process. A teacher needs to be aware of the learning and other needs of students. If a teacher think he has identity needs, besides salary and perks, (which is only possible if he is observing his thoughts) then it is equally applicable to the learners. Teacher must understand his work is not only to teach, it is much more, beyond it, is a service not a job only.
- ❖ **WELL BEGUN IS HALF DONE:** we should start the work consciously even if it means slow, it will pay off at the end of the day. Slow working itself gives a chance to be reflective and be calm while working thus remains on the task which is condition of mindfulness. In a classroom teacher must build a rapport and hence a platform on which learner's can express freely and fearlessly. This will solve all problems of indiscipline, confusion, communication and the like.
- ❖ **CONNECT WITH YOUR SENSES:** one need to connect with senses rather than getting lost in the trains of thoughts when teaching. Senses are channels of receiving information and feedback as well. Connecting to the senses would mean coordination of senses by mind, which determines quality of information received. Absentmindedness on the other hand is sign of disconnection of mind with senses. While teaching you do not afford a disconnection as it will break the communication which is vital for teaching effectively.

#### HOW TO BE 'IN THE PURPOSE'

- ❖ **BE UNI-TASKER:** there is problem of mismatch between our brain and body as we see in case of processor of computer and other hardware, the former works at much higher speed than the latter. In other words brain is like a parallel processor in existence and multitasking in function. In contrast human body is unitasking in nature. It is suggested that we need to consciously slow down the speed of brain by turning it from parallel processing to sequential

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processing and multitasking to unitasking. This simply means while teaching tasks need to be linearly placed to be attended in a sequence as per the priority.

❖ **USE LITTLE REMINDERS:** being mindful is being conscious about what is going on outside and inside. In a way we need to remember it, thus some minor reminders will be helpful. These reminders may be in the form of silent self-talk, some written words, associating with high frequency event, even a short alarm on the mobile and the like that reminds you to be mindful. In meditation mentor suggest keeping watch on you breath coming in going out, and then shift on to thoughts and so and so on. All teachers' bad behaviors inside the classroom can be eliminated by practice, reminding oneself not to repeat.

❖ **SHORT MINDFUL EXERCISES:** if we fall prey of repeating a circle, get lost in the way, progress of the lesson is stalled, we need to understand we are lacking mindfulness. We need to apply simple exercise like taking time out, deep breathing, closing eyes to concentrate and the like. In outside class situation simple meditation techniques are quite helpful.

❖ **SLOW DOWN TO SPEED UP:** whenever we feel lack of progress, we need to slow down study the facts and faults and try to regain the composure for progression. Slowing down is again amounts to regaining mindfulness which will automatically increase the speed later on. It is something like for cutting a log of wood sharpness of axe is more important than power we apply to cut the wood. Slowing down in purposeful to gather the energy and techniques to be located for accomplishing the task.

### HOW TO BE 'OUT OF PURPOSE'

❖ **SEE POSITIVES IN NEGATIVES:** being mindful is being neutral and serving as a reference, being witness to our thoughts. For becoming non-judgmental we need to accept both positive and negatives which really will guide us how to turn negatives in to positives. For instance stress may be considered as positive as it pushes us to work, increases heart beat, increasing breathing rate and thus more oxygen to the body. Teacher when feels eustress (stress we feel when our ability is greater than demanded by the task) for performance, he is bound to perform well.

❖ **FEEL GRATITUDE:** human beings have natural inclination for regretting on lacks rather than feeling humble for what has been endowed with. One should have a habit of expressing gratitude towards people, institutions, country and above all God for whatever we have received by virtue of association with them. A humble human being is neutral and can be non-judgmental which makes him mindful. A teacher need to be thankful that parents have faith in him i.e. why have sent their wards to him for learning. He needs to be thankful to the authorities, school, above all god that he is given a chance to be in this noble profession.

❖ **CULTIVATE HUMILITY:** as explained earlier mindfulness is about accepting yourself just as you are, and being open to listening to and learning from others. There are number of persons in our life who have helped in many ways, sometimes in crisis too, never forget those faces. In similar way you might have helped others, never try to remember that, this is sign of humility. Appreciate other's contribution and value other's opinion, this will further push your mindfulness. As a teacher these others are colleagues, principle and most importantly students. Thank to those first batch students who sacrificed their learning for your training, you might have ruined some student's interest in the subject. There are lot many thanks due which we are not being mentioned here.

❖ **ACCEPT THE FACT YOU CAN'T CHANGE EVERY THING:** many of our biases and negativities are not due to our nature rather due to the fact that things don't work as we want. In our organizations we suffer from 'intellectual discomfort' as we are not given free hand to implement our ideas, or people at the helm of affairs are incapable to understand this. But this is our 'reaction' rather than 'response' to the situation. Response in our intellectual (mental) response to the situation whereas reaction is our body response instead. We should take responsibility to improve the situation as 'Responsibility' is actually 'ability to respond' this is really mindfulness. Self acceptance is a powerful tool to have in your work-life toolkit and a possible starting point of self-improvement. When you accept yourself, and even missteps at work may teach you some very important lesson, this is what we call mindfulness. If you can accept yourself why not others, this helps being mindful at work. Teacher needs to accept students, colleagues and principal as they are then see the mindfulness will come inevitably.

❖ **ADOPT GROWTH MINDSET:** this is another very important issue for our mental life and attitude building. People with growth mindset believe in plasticity of intelligence and believe in its ever-growing nature against the belief of its fixed nature. A person with growth mindset can discover something in negative feedback which helps him to accept new challenges, sees it as opportunity for inner growth. There is possibility of incremental growth of our intellect which encourage us to believe ultimately we can win, work can be accomplished. As a teacher he needs to

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believe in the growth of intelligence both his own and his students, this will fill our workspace with mindfulness.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS:

When we say body mind your work, we actually mean that one should be mindful while at work. If a person can maintain good rapport with one's work in terms of 'on the work', 'in the work' and 'out of work' there is no reason one can not have good mental health and promote his psychological wellbeing. It is not necessary that it all depends on the person concerned, environment and working conditions do effect, but we can reduce their effect. This reduction can only be achieved through being mindful at work, thus achieve the psychological wellbeing. One should not take it as an entity, to be achieved and forgotten; rather it is dynamic state which keeps on improving its targets and level of satisfaction. This refinement is the aim of human life to be achieved through wellbeing. A teacher with adequate psychological wellbeing teacher is asset to an institution and students as well.

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