

TEACHER WELL-BEING



Photo by M. Lee Freedman

“Teachers work hard and love the work they do. But there are far greater demands on them in terms of students’ needs and behaviour than ever before.”

Sam Hammond, President, Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO)

TEACHER STRESS IS A MAJOR CONCERN

The work of teachers is more demanding than ever before. Mental health issues in children and youth are on the rise. Teacher workload is intense and recommendations for improving student achievement continually change. All the while, teachers are scrutinized for their ability to improve student success. This all adds up to a lot of stress in the classroom, which can take its toll on the health and wellness of teachers and other education professionals.

In a 2012 survey conducted for the ETFO by James Matsui Research, 77 per cent of presidents of ETFO locals identified mental stress in the workplace as a “great” or “major” concern affecting teachers.

MINDFULNESS REDUCES STRESS

Studies show mindfulness reduces anxiety, depression and stress.¹

A 2013 study conducted at the University of Wisconsin – Madison Waisman Center found that teachers who practice mindfulness are better able to reduce their own levels of stress and even prevent burnout. The study also found those who received mindfulness training displayed improvements in classroom organization and increases in self-compassion.²

“The teaching profession contributes more to the future of our society than any other single profession.”

John Wooden

¹ Khoury et al, “Mindfulness-Based Therapy: a comprehensive meta-analysis,” *Clinical Psychology Review*, (6), August 2013, pages 763-71. See also Walsh and Shapiro 2006, Tang et al. 2007, Teasdale et al. 2000.

² Lisa Flook et al. “Mindfulness for Teachers: A Pilot Study to Assess Effects on Stress, Burnout, and Teaching Efficacy,” *Mind, Brain, and Education*, Vol 7, Issue 3, September 2013, pages 182-195.

NEUROPLASTICITY

Until recently, scientists believed our brain structure was essentially fixed once we reach adulthood. Now we know our brains actually change throughout our lives as a result of experience. This is known as neuroplasticity.³

Mindfulness training has been shown to change our brains in positive ways. It increases grey matter, increases cortical thickness in areas related to paying attention, and increases volume in areas related to emotion regulation, positive emotions and self-control.⁴ It also increases activations of the left prefrontal cortex, which is correlated with improved mood.⁵

EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

Research over the past two decades has consistently found that mindfulness increases empathy and compassion, for others and for oneself.⁶

CLASSROOM BENEFITS

A 2013 report published in *School Psychology Quarterly* found that teachers who participated in a mindfulness program were better able to manage their classes and build relationships with students. More than 90 percent reported improvements in self-awareness and well-being, 77 percent felt they were “better able to manage classroom behaviours effectively and compassionately,” and 83 percent believed it

improved their relationships with students.⁷

A 2012 meta-analysis showed mindfulness “can increase teachers’ sense of well-being and teaching self-efficacy, as well as their ability to manage classroom behaviour and establish and maintain supportive relationships with students.”⁸

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is a training in attention and positive habits of mind. It is a powerful form of social and emotional learning (SEL). Mindfulness provides an increased capacity to recognize our emotions and habits of mind and respond intelligently to the moment rather than react to it. That’s why mindfulness is the “how of SEL.”

See our “What is Mindfulness” fact sheet for more information.

Discover Mindfulness is an Ontario-based, non-profit whose mission is to be a hub for information and a catalyst for the integration of mindfulness into education as a means to overall well-being for educators, students, families and society.

To see other Fact Sheets, please go to discovermindfulness.ca/tool-kit.

To see the detailed studies, please visit discovermindfulness.ca/evidence.

³ Kendra Cherry, “What Is Brain Plasticity,” <http://psychology.about.com/od/biopsychology/f/brain-plasticity.htm>

⁴ Emma M. Seppala, “20 Scientific Reasons to Start Meditating Today,” *Psychology Today*, Sept. 11, 2013

⁵ Richard J. Davidson, “Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation,” 2003, *Psychosomatic Medicine* 65:564–570.

⁶ Shapiro, “Does Mindfulness Make You More Compassionate?” Greater Good Science Center, February 27, 2013

⁷ Jennings, Patricia A., Frank, Jennifer L., Snowberg, Karin E., Coccia, Michael A., Greenberg, Mark T., “Improving classroom learning environments by Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE): Results of a randomized controlled trial,” *School Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 28 (4), December 2013, pages 374-390.

⁸ Meiklejohn, et al, “Integrating Mindfulness Training into K-12 Education: Fostering the Resilience of Teachers and Students,” *Mindfulness*, Vol 1 Number 1, March 14, 2012.