



The Three R's of Mindfulness in Education

By Daniel Rechtschaffen

Regulation

Bringing a distressed nervous system into an optimal zone. Calming and emotional regulation practices for fostering inner equilibrium and ongoing stability. Many practices are aimed at up-regulating or down-regulating our energy so that we can find an optimal zone of operation. Often we need to begin here for students and adults with chronic stress and personal and collective trauma. Before connecting to difficult emotions, first the individual system needs to feel secure and safe.

Resilience

Developing a compassionate awareness towards dysregulated emotions and experiences to strengthen the capacity to be with difficulty. Here we work with internal and external resources to help individuals and groups face struggles with compassionate presence and perseverance. We need to be sensitive here with trauma and systems of power so that we are empowering people to face problems together, rather than just having them accept injustice as it is.

Realization

Opening the metacognitive heart and mind for higher order thinking skills and social relating from an awareness of interconnectedness. Liberating the mind from bias and assumptions and relating to the world with compassion, clarity and commitment. This type of perspective taking is always beneficial, but when built upon regulation and resilience this type of awareness can truly blossom.

Starting With Ourselves

The first step in teaching mindfulness to students is learning our own practice of inner regulation, resilience, and realization. We need to be able to discern within ourselves and get support to understand which of these R's of mindfulness we need to begin with. We all need some level of regulation, which we also could consider attachment security. There are many beautiful mindfulness practices, as well as therapeutic techniques to cultivate a greater sense of inner security and wellbeing. We also all need some resilience to be able to be more fully present with our own stress and emotional discord as well as opening our hearts and minds to the pain in our lives, schools, and world. We need each other as a community to be compassionately present with the real struggles we face as a society. And we all need to continue the realization practice of opening our mental and emotional view, to look past our own assumptions to see ourselves and our world with greater clarity and care. With our own insight and the support of community we can discern what inner development is most indicated.

For The Kids

As we cultivate these inner capacities we simultaneously can become more attuned to the needs of our students and colleagues. The simple capacity of really seeing and skillfully responding to our students is the greatest mindfulness gift we can give them. When we are able to attune to our students needs we begin to see which mindfulness practices are appropriate for them. Many students need to begin with regulation and may need to stay with those practices for an extended period of time. Resilience practices necessitate utilizing resources to be present with difficulty. Before we offer these practices we need to make sure the inner and outer resources are strong enough to fully support the student in opening to those experiences. Eventually we do want to develop the regulation enough so students can find resilience, as this is an empowerment to be present and respond to the life they live.

For The World

It is important to remember that mindfulness practices, in their essence, are aimed at realization. The regulating of our inner system and resilience to the full spectrum of experience are developed so that the individual and community can realize the nature of reality itself. Once we see through our assumptions about the world, an open minded and open hearted view is meant to be held individually and collectively. Mindfulness is a life long practice, of which mindful regulation practices are a crucial part, but really just the beginning. Mindfulness practice is aimed at opening a compassionate awareness for everyone, so that our world can find balance and peace.