

Integrating Mindfulness in Education: A working model for developing an effective mindfulness training program for high-school students

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As the evidence base for the beneficial effects of mindfulness grows, there is increasing interest in how the practice can be incorporated into mainstream education. Yet despite accumulating research into the benefits of mindfulness, there remains a lack of clarity regarding how mindfulness can be most effectively taught to youth. With the support of the U.S. Dept. of Education, we are using an iterative and empirical design process to discover the optimal ways to teach mindfulness to high school students. We have developed a digital mindfulness course built on a theory of change that proposes that effective programs must (1) cultivate an appreciation for the value of training attention, (2) support a growth mindset in students, (3) build a strong motivation to practice, and (4) give students a strong sense of self-efficacy in their ability to make progress. These foundational elements can, in turn, support a regular mindfulness practice that enhances attentional control and facilitates other benefits. Yet accomplishing these goals with high school students—many of whom begin with little interest in mindfulness—is a design challenge requiring innovation and ongoing research. Preliminary results from research with over 200 students are beginning to reveal strategies for the effective design of digital mindfulness training for youth.