

Does a brief mindfulness practice in Chemistry and Principles of Teaching & Learning lectures affect the experience of flow?



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Introduction

Higher education has seen a growing interest in mindfulness,⁽³⁻⁶⁾ in form of a contemplative practice in contemplative pedagogy and transformative learning, well-being, and academic performance. The intention of the project is to make a contemplative practice and space to the student in the lecture available, and to generate evidence of the students experience using the Flow Short Scale⁽¹⁾. A state of flow is defined as “optimal state of consciousness where we feel our best and perform our best.”⁽²⁾ Mindfulness might guide an intentional attention of presence in a context of learning, social-emotional development and civic identities.

1. Method

- Brief (1 min) guided mindfulness practice at beginning of level-1 Chemistry lectures; Followed by an invitation to write down an intention for the learning.
- Flow Short Scale questionnaire: 1st lecture (no intervention), 2nd and final 8th lecture. Data analysis: In progress.
- Feedback form with open-ended questions after final lecture.
- Semi - structured interviews with course participants.
- A coding process of interview transcripts, reflection on the data as a whole: In progress.
- Up-coming 2nd cohort: Principles of Teaching & Learning course.

2. Feedback from level-1 chemistry students

Please describe how this activity has influenced your learning.

17 students (70%) returned the feedback from after the final class.

“...It helped to stop thinking about other things as well.”

“I pay more attention to why I am in the lecture at all.”

“I feel so much more focussed and I actually feel a huge difference to how much I am taking in from the lecture.”

“This activity has not influenced my learning very much if anything it has reduced the time available to learn in.”

“Makes me think at what I want to achieve at the end of the lecture.”

3. Outlook

Should we acknowledge the current hype surrounding mindfulness in education? Or is the historic and contemporary presence of the contemplative and transformative in education an essential aspect of who we are and how we teach and learn?⁽⁷⁾ The question arising is what mindfulness in education is for. Is an increasing emphasis on engagement, well-being and the self and its feelings about life and the world a distraction from academic subjects?⁽⁸⁾ Alternatively, if we accept a learning culture supported by mindfulness, does mindfulness in education offer an opportunity to reorient education away from narrowly conceived instrumental ends towards broader ethical and socially-engaged ones?⁽⁹⁾ Following this, perhaps we might consider the experience of higher education as a space where we are invited to discover contemplative practices and capacities within ourselves and our own cultures to deepening connection through authenticity⁽⁹⁾ within the pursuit of knowledge.

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