

OVERCOMING BURNOUT: LIVENING UP YOUR TEACHING CAREER WITH SELF-INQUIRY AND MINDFULNESS FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

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ABSTRACT

The reality of teacher burnout has plagued the profession for decades; however, recent events have caused the problem to become increasingly worse. This paper briefly surveys some of the major reasons for teacher burnout and then focuses on two effective solutions: Self-inquiry and mindfulness. These two practices enhance personal and professional growth and efficiently combat and reduce teacher burnout. Both self-inquiry and mindfulness are very positive personal and professional practices, and they have been found to help individuals develop and maintain healthy lifestyles and cure those who are suffering from teacher burnout—a troubling reality that has become all too common in education. Self-inquiry and mindfulness are discussed, and the benefits of mindfulness for the mind, body, and soul are reviewed. Seven mindfulness practices that focus on the connections between the mind, the body, and the present moment are offered for teachers to implement inside and outside the classroom.

Keywords: amygdala, burnout, gray matter, hippocampus, immunoglobulin A, job dissatisfaction, mindfulness, mindfulness principles, observation, oneness, ripple effect, rumination, self-inquiry, self-knowledge, self-understanding, telomere

“Joy lies in the fight, in the attempt, in the suffering involved, not in the victory itself.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

INTRODUCTION

Have the recent world events significantly demotivated your sense of enthusiasm for learning and teaching? Do you feel that you are on the road to burnout, or do you find it difficult to pull yourself out of bed in the morning? If this is the case, you are not alone. The focus, then, of this article is to revitalize your spirit and inspire you to once again wake up with the passion to teach, learn, and live a life with purpose. This, according to Frankl (2006), is the essence of life—to find meaning in each waking hour and let that meaning shine with great energy and light.

I will first define “burnout” and then briefly survey some of the major causes of burnout that commonly plague teachers. Next, I look at how we can avoid burnout or correct the effects of burnout if one is already suffering from that condition. To accomplish this, I look at how self-inquiry and mindfulness can help us maintain a balanced life at home and at work. Here, I will examine self-inquiry and then turn to discuss mindfulness. I will highlight three of its core principles and review its benefits for the body and the brain, as well as its positive impact on spiritual and psychological health. Next, I will present seven easy-to-implement mindfulness practices. My intent, then, in presenting these specific ideas and activities is to reawaken my readers’ love for teaching, learning, and life.

DEFINING BURNOUT

The term “burnout” has various meanings, from no longer being interested in a particular subject or career to being physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. I will use the commonly accepted and basic definition of “burnout” which is the condition of emotional,

mental, spiritual, and physical fatigue that is caused by chronic exhaustion, stress, and anxiety. Burnout affects one's ability to maintain a balanced sense of physical and mental health, and it reduces the ability to focus, pay attention, and be aware of one's immediate surroundings. Moreover, it can cause various levels of depression and a general lack of interest in life.

The Main Causes of Burnout for Educators

The current burnout rate among educators is very high and has increased even more during the past few years. In fact, over 500,000 teachers in the United States leave their jobs each year (Campbell, 2023). Unfortunately, math, science, and language teachers lead these troubling statistics. English language teachers (ELTs)—both domestic and international—are also severely affected by burnout (Agyapong et al., 2022; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The English language teaching profession is indeed a daunting one. Class preparation, an intense teaching schedule, and grading consume vast amounts of time. In addition, there is added stress as many ELTs receive only yearly contracts. With respect to teachers in general, a vast number of educators feel that they do not have the emotional, financial, or professional support they need from their schools' administrators and even appreciation from their own students is a concern (Campbell, 2023). These are but a few of the reasons why teachers burnout.

The problem of teacher burnout becomes even more complex when we dig deeper and discover numerous issues within the profession. According to Anthony (2019), other major factors that contribute to burnout are (1) excessively long work hours which create a sense of constant fatigue; (2) a lack of quality sleep which negatively affects focus and concentration at work (also see Medina, 2009); (3) the lack of a social life which contributes to a sense of isolation and stress; and (4) irritated moods which cause issues both on the job and at home.

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) found that *job dissatisfaction* was yet another concern that generated teacher burnout. There seem to be five influential reasons why teachers are dissatisfied with their careers:

- (1) the constant demands of standardized testing;
- (2) the lack of support from school administrators and program directors;
- (3) the overbearing pressures that the profession requires;
- (4) low salaries; and
- (5) the limitations of career development and advancement.

In the end, each factor gives rise to a lack of control, causes a sense of uncertainty, and produces a lack of information about what one can and cannot do to fulfill their dreams as a teacher. All of the above issues are significant causes of stress and anxiety, as they push teachers deeper into states of frustration and hopelessness, and ultimately, they cause burnout and feelings of despair and angst.

HOW TO TURN BURNOUT AROUND: SELF-INQUIRY - EMPLOYING THE CONCEPT OF “KNOW THYSELF”

Although the teaching profession wishes that there was a magic pill to cure this spiritual epidemic of depression, stress, anxiety, and burnout, there is none. However, there are a vast number of very helpful, effective, and powerful practices that can and will solve this situation, and each of these is far better than any pill, for a prescribed pill is only an “external” and “temporary” remedy. The solutions I propose here come from “within” the mind and spirit; they are powerful cures for the human psyche because they run deep into the core of our human condition and flush out unwanted demons while ushering in peaceful breaths of joy and delight.

The solutions I propose will take time to nurture, as they cannot be rushed. They need to be developed over time and nourished on a daily basis. There is no harm in this; it merely takes dedication and focus. This idea of “good” taking time to foster the spirit was one of Gandhi’s primary teachings. According to his philosophy, “[g]ood travels at a snail’s pace. Those who want to do good are not selfish, they are not in a hurry, they know that to impregnate people with good requires a long time” (Gandhi, 1982, p. 41).

The first step, then, in this personal and professional development process, and perhaps the most important, is self-inquiry. The idea of self-inquiry is to investigate who and what we are in order to become spiritually balanced and fully functioning human beings—both in mind and body. The concept of “know thyself” is an idea that dates back to ancient Greek culture and is one of the famous inscriptions at Delphi. It is similar to Shakespeare’s famous quote from *Hamlet* (Act 1, Scene 3), “[t]o thine ownself be true.” That is, if we—as teachers—know who and what we are, if we journey on the path of self-inquiry, then we can better respond to the challenges that we encounter inside and outside the classroom. This will also help us better manage our stress and emotions and thus live a fulfilling and peaceful life.

Kabat-Zinn (2005), in his work, *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness*, wisely suggests, “[i]t is difficult to speak to the timeless beauty and richness of the present moment when things are moving so fast. But the faster things move, the more important it is for us to dip into or even inhabit the timeless” (p. 21). That is, we must step back and observe who we are and take in the simple wonder or delicate magic of the moment. If we do not, we take the chance of letting our entire life pass us by. In terms of our current topic of study—teacher burnout—if we do not take in the moment and observe ourselves and our life, we may get caught in deeper moments of rumination and deeper periods of depression and burnout.

In short, we must “inhabit the timeless,” find out who we are, and embrace “the timeless beauty and richness of the present moment when things are moving so fast.”

If we slow things down, we can observe them carefully and closely and perhaps be more objective. For instance, if we consider the five causes of job dissatisfaction, we can look at what can be controlled and what cannot. If there is a solution, it can be better solved with a calm mind than it can with a stressed or anxious mind. Perhaps working with special colleagues and a compassionate administrator to address an issue at school is a possible option. We cannot, however, close our eyes to these possibilities and judge them without being calm and mindful. This way of viewing life is likened to Rumi’s observation in his poem, *A Great Wagon*, in which he states “[t]he breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Don’t go back to sleep” (2004, p. 36). We must be observers of life and learn from each moment’s offering.

This notion of managing our thoughts and emotions and not succumbing to stress while additionally effectively observing our thoughts and emotions with a sense of compassion is a powerful concept embraced by modern applied neuroscience and mindfulness. According to Dr. Richard Chambers, “[t]he stress is not actually in the situation. Stress is in our relationship with the situation” (ABC Science, 2016, 18:24). That is, an actual event is void of any stress or anxiety. If stress or anxiety appears in a person, it is due to that person’s individual way of handling it or not handling it. That is, the stress is produced in the person according to how he/she relates to the event and not necessarily by the event itself. What is of interest is that this same idea was a core insight among the great Stoic philosophers. In his *Meditations* (7.2), Aurelius wrote, “[t]he things which are external to my mind have no relation at all to my mind.—Let this be the state of thy affects, and thou standest erect. To recover thy life is in thy power” (1880/2022, p. 48).

Such understanding of the human condition has come from a number of ancient cultures like the Stoics from the West and the Buddhists from the East. One of the main precepts of Buddhism is to be a *constant observer* of oneself and life. In doing so, we can get a good look at ourselves and our immediate surroundings, and we can observe the dynamics and connections of things in order to learn how and why we react to things inside and outside of our personal being (Hanson & Mendius, 2009). This precept of continual observation is the key to mindfulness which we will investigate further below.

In sum, in order for teachers to find a healthy balance, the first step is “knowing themselves” through inner reflection and realizing that the stress factor is a manageable entity. Instead of being controlled by stress, we can learn to control stress. Gandhi insightfully observed that “[a]bsolute calm is not the law of ocean. And it is the same with the ocean of life” (1982, p. 23). Consequently, we must be aware of our nature and how to deal with the intricacies of life and make the most of what it has to offer. For this to happen, however, we must know our unique self and observe who and what that self is. This, in the truest sense, is what Socrates meant by claiming “that the unexamined life is not worth living” (Plato, 399-387 BC/1982, p. 133). A key pathway to this self-knowledge or *the examined life* is the practice of mindfulness. Let us now examine what mindfulness is and how it can assist in reducing and perhaps even eliminating stress, anxiety, and burnout.

MINDFULNESS: A DEFINITION

The central questions, then, are:

- (1) How do we manage our minds and bodies to become balanced?
- (2) How do we overcome burnout? and
- (3) How do we limit the effects of daily stress and anxiety?

There are multiple possibilities and practices that meet these needs and are highly successful. Short daily yoga, mindfulness, or meditation sessions are very beneficial. For our purposes here, I will focus on mindfulness because its essence is employed as a fundamental and underlying concept in all three above-mentioned practices (i.e., yoga, mindfulness, and meditation).

The basic idea of *western mindfulness* is one that was developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn and is based on the Buddhist practices of being aware of and grateful for the moment. According to the core principles of Buddhism, the *present moment* is the truest link we have to reality and what is happening now—both within ourselves and in our immediate external surroundings. Kabat-Zinn (1994) focuses on three components in his definition of mindfulness. He states that “[m]indfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (1994, p. 4). Kabat-Zinn thus defines mindfulness as a practice where we are fully focused on what we are doing at the moment and being aware of our environment. We are also highly cognizant of our thoughts, actions, feelings, senses, and emotions. Mindfulness invites us to observe all of this without judging the process or the outcomes. We simply observe our thoughts, actions, feelings, senses, and emotions and see them as they are and not as we “think” they are (for more on this, see Eagleman, 2015). Kabat-Zinn (1994) believes that “[t]his kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality” (p. 4).

MINDFULNESS PRINCIPLES

The practice of mindfulness is based on nine fundamental principles (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; 2005). I will focus on three of these: (1) non-judging, (2) the beginner’s mind, and (3) gratitude. The other six principles—acceptance, generosity, letting go, non-striving, patience, and

trust—are also of importance, but I feel the three I will discuss below will give my readers a solid understanding of the foundational elements of mindfulness and how it can best be approached. Moreover, the other six principles are essentially variations of non-judging, the beginner’s mind, and gratitude.

Non-Judging

One of the basic principles of mindfulness, and the one that sets the tone for the practice, is *being non-judgmental*. This principle is to be followed both while practicing mindfulness and also while going about one’s day and doing one’s normal routine. Another way of looking at this concept is being fully aware and observing the mind and what it perceives without fabricating any additional thoughts. We simply observe and let the moment unfold. When practicing mindfulness, there is the temptation to let thoughts disturb us, and then we criticize our practice and ourselves. The idea behind non-judging, however, is to let those thoughts go and observe them without making any judgments or criticisms.

The more this is done, the less fleeting thoughts disturb us. Ultimately, this practice helps in formal meditations and in being less judgmental in our daily lives. This reduces rumination and is a key to fostering a healthy, peaceful, and stressless mind. Various thoughts might come and go, but the temptation of being controlled by these thoughts will be less powerful. Mindfulness will assist in exposing these thoughts as merely that—“thoughts.” They are not reality, and the mindfulness practitioner will realize this the more he/she practices. This idea of non-judging and letting thoughts go is what Nagarjuna focused on in his classic work, *The Precious Garland*. He wrote that “[r]ealising that ignorance, desire and hatred are defects, forsake them completely. Realise that non-desire, non-hatred and non-ignorance are virtues and so practise them with vigour” (Nagarjuna, 1975, p. 51).

The Beginner's Mind

The beginner's mind is equally important. This mindfulness principle encourages us to look at the world around us and make observations through “a child's eyes.” Instead of carrying around decades of preconceived ideas and mental baggage, this notion invites us to view ourselves and the world with a curious mind and hold the statement “I don't know” as a true gift that keeps the mind fresh and full of possibilities. As my readers can easily see, these first two principles—being non-judgmental and nurturing the beginner's mind—work hand in hand. Each one allows us to perceive things with a sense of novelty and maintain a healthy passion for inquiry. This, of course, goes back to our initial claim that “self-knowledge” or “self-understanding” is paramount to overcoming burnout or avoiding it altogether. The more we discover about ourselves, the more we can observe what it is that keeps us happy and balanced and the more we can let those things pass that cause frustration or stress. In short, the beginner's mind keeps each moment fresh and promotes a healthy sense of being. It encourages us to view the world in a unique and careful way, and this fosters feelings of gratitude and reverence for our existence.

Gratitude

Gratitude is perhaps the most important principle in mindfulness because it promotes the beginner's mind and supports the power of being non-judgmental. That is, being grateful for the present moment with a pure, silent, and observation-focused mind and looking at the world with the wonder of a child helps us appreciate the life we have and not take it or anyone for granted. Being grateful for the moment, our family, our body, our mind, our job, our students, and our ability to breathe all help us embrace the now and all the moments in the day. If we appreciate waking up in the morning and fully embracing the day, then all the moments during the day will

begin to shine and create a light inside our own bodies and souls. We will begin to see how fortunate we are to be alive and consequently experience the amazing activities of breathing and walking on the earth.

MINDFULNESS: THE BENEFITS

The beauty of mindfulness is that it can be practiced successfully with activities from the moment we wake up to the moment we sleep. Mindfulness is used not only to reduce stress and anxiety, but more importantly, mindfulness is employed to promote happiness and a greater awareness of life and all its captivating moments. That is, mindfulness benefits all aspects of our human condition—the mind, the brain, the body, our consciousness, the heart, our breath, and the spirit. It helps people embrace the beauty of the present and reawaken their love for enjoying life and appreciating the simple things that unfold during the day. This can, for example, be the magic of a student's sweet smile or how the sunlight hits your classroom in a certain way that creates momentary poetry on the desks and chairs before crawling out the window into the mystery of the afternoon. "Mindfulness provides a simple but powerful route for getting ourselves unstuck, back into touch with our own wisdom and vitality" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 5).

Benefits for the Body

Martinez-Borras et al. (2022) found that mindfulness greatly enhances our immune system and helps reduce burnout and other mental illnesses that plague the average person. Their study looked at how mindfulness increases immunoglobulin A (IgA). This particular protein is a key factor in reducing common illnesses and fatigue. IgA helps protect us against infectious microorganisms that can wreak havoc on our bodies. For instance, it helps combat possible problems in the stomach, the lungs, the air passage, and our urinary organs. In short, it is highly important for our overall health. In addition, mindfulness helps us sleep better at night and rest

our minds during the day while we work (Davis & Hayes, 2012; Sadhguru, 2016). This creates a happier and healthier sense of self during the day and improves attention and focus both at work and at home. It truly nurtures the union of the mind and the body in a positive, healthy, and peaceful way. Mindfulness practices have also been shown to increase longevity (Alda et al., 2016; Hoge et al., 2013). The loving-kindness meditation, which we will discuss below, protects our telomeres. Studies have discovered that the longer we nurture healthy telomeres, the longer we live, and mindfulness helps maintain healthy telomeres and counteracts stress which can damage these crucial regions in our chromosomes.

Benefits for the Brain

For decades now, research has shown that music affects almost every known area of the human brain (Budson, 2020; Levitin, 2007; Sacks, 2008; Medina, 2014; Sousa, 2010). Although research on mindfulness is still in its adolescence, I believe I can make the bold claim that mindfulness also affects all known areas of the brain. Whether one participates in short or long mindfulness activities, mindfulness significantly promotes the brain's health and improves the brain's performance (ABC Science, 2016; Cao Ho My, 2020; Garcia & Miralles, 2017; Randolph, 2018; Walton, 2015). Some mindfulness benefits for the brain that are particularly important for teachers include an increase in gray matter, an enhanced hippocampus, and a decrease in cells in the amygdala (Walton, 2015). Let us take a look at each one.

The benefit regarding gray matter is significant because gray matter helps the brain process both old and new information, and it is critical in making sound decisions. Our gray matter is also vital for creating and retaining memories. An increased thickness in the hippocampus is paramount to our cognitive health because the hippocampus is a major center for learning and memory. The stronger our hippocampus, the more we can learn and commit to

memory. What is of interest here is that moderate physical exercise can also increase the hippocampus and create neurogenesis; that is, it can create new neurons to help with learning and memory (Reynolds, 2012). Physical exercise and mindfulness, then, both promote an optimal system for learning and memory. As above, mindfulness practices decrease cells in the amygdala. This assists in balancing our emotions and maintains a sense of peace and calm. In short, mindfulness supports a healthy working brain by bolstering gray matter and the hippocampus, and it robustly reduces stress and anxiety by taming the power of the amygdala.

Benefits for Spiritual Health

Four major spiritual benefits of mindfulness are that it: (1) develops compassion; (2) increases an understanding of connectedness between oneself and others (this includes all living creatures in nature); (3) nurtures a deeper sense of self-respect; and (4) promotes an appreciation for one's life. Each of these is essential in fostering a healthy sense of self-understanding or self-inquiry. As we mentioned above, mindfulness is most often thought of and even marketed as a way to reduce stress and anxiety. Mindfulness most certainly does this. However, perhaps we can start looking at mindfulness as an “elicitor of happiness” or “promoter of blissful states.” This state of bliss will then naturally help reduce stress and anxiety. If we consider the four spiritual benefits of mindfulness, we can see that they have endless consequences. That is, one positive mindful activity can cause a ripple effect beyond conscious time and space. For instance, instead of succumbing to the usual thoughts that busy the mind while we walk, we can be mindful of the moment's unity of how our feet touch the earth, whether that be the grass or a sidewalk, and we can then feel the magnificent connection between the ground and our breath, flesh, bones, and blood. We can stop to give thanks for that moment as we walk. A smile might form and dance across our lips, and that smile might cause a feeling of reverence and mystical

awe. That same smile might be seen by a passerby and completely change that person's mood and open up a door of gratitude for him/her as well. That moment of mindfulness might wash away any anxious fears and leave everyone in a state of bliss. This healthy state I describe is based on the mindfulness tapestry of compassion, connectedness, self-respect, and appreciation for life.

Benefits for Psychological Health

In his seminal work on mindfulness, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, Kabat-Zinn (1994) discusses how mindfulness increases emotional calmness, reduces rumination, and decreases stress and anxious thoughts. Davis and Hayes (2012) have also supported these findings in their studies. For teachers' psychological well-being, these benefits are of utmost importance. Above, we discussed that job dissatisfaction was one of the main causes of teacher burnout (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This state of dissatisfaction is caused by being: (1) forced to teach to the test for certain standardized exams and thus limiting any creative teaching; (2) unsupported by school administrators; (3) overwhelmed by various pressures that push teachers into feeling helpless; (4) a recipient of low salaries; and (5) limited in terms of career advancement. As one can easily imagine, each of these issues can cause the amygdala to be overtaxed and consequently send a person into long periods of rumination and anxiety. Hence, mindfulness can help teachers put the above issues into perspective and think about the best way to proceed.

Again, instead of being controlled by these work-related issues, we can learn to control them via moments of mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn (1994) suggests mindfulness can be a genuine guide for us because “[i]t is simply a practical way to be more in touch with the fullness of your being through a systematic process of self-observation, self-inquiry, and mindful action” (p. 6).

Moreover, the more we are in touch with ourselves, the more we develop self-inquiry and the more we engage in the innately calming and healthy experience of *flow*—that is, doing what we love to do without effort and being completely absorbed in the process or the experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; 2013) This, of course, helps us find the optimal way to work and live while minimizing the things that might cause stress and anxiety.

7 EASY-TO-IMPLEMENT, ONE-MINUTE MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES

Recent research and case studies show that simple and short mindfulness practices are just as effective as long ones (Cao Ho My, 2020; Sadhguru, 2016). I would like, then, to offer seven basic practices that teachers can use daily to create a sense of joy or, if needed, a sense of rebirth, which will slowly rid the feelings of burnout. These activities can be done for one minute or longer. There is no time limit regarding the length needed for these activities. Let us explore, then, the ideas behind these fun and simple practices and see how they can make a difference in our physiological and psychological health.

A Note on the Mind's Busy Thoughts

It should be noted that for any of the following practices, whether you are sitting or standing in mindful meditation, thoughts will come and go. This is a natural occurrence during meditation. One very helpful method to lessen and even rid the conscious mind of these “busy” thoughts is to ask the following four questions while meditating or practicing mindfulness exercises:

- (1) Are there thoughts?
- (2) What are these thoughts?
- (3) Where have these thoughts come from?
- (4) Are the thoughts beneficial or useful for me?

At first glance, these questions may seem basic, but they are actually very powerful. I was introduced to two of these questions by fellow junior high school teachers while coaching and teaching in Toyosaka City, Niigata Prefecture, Japan. I later added two more questions as a result of my practice. I have found this four-question method to be a golden method for focusing my mind's awareness on the breath and letting my thoughts gradually lessen and disappear, and those students in my mindfulness seminars have found it effective as well.

Once you ask these four questions, the mind gradually becomes silent and lets you focus at a deeper level on the activity at hand. So, if you experience a whirlwind of thoughts during a standing or sitting meditation, simply ask these four questions, and you will be able to have a healthy and somewhat “quiet” meditation session. The thoughts might still come and go; however, they will no longer have control over you as they once did. Rather, you will find that you now have control over your thoughts.

It is often said that one can never have a completely “idealess,” “soundless,” or “empty” mind during meditation or while practicing mindfulness. Even the mindfulness instructors for my mindfulness and meditation teaching certificate program have frequently claimed in their seminars and workshops that such a mental state is rare. While this might be true for them and others, I think that following the four-question method will benefit my readers and help them relax their minds as they practice. The mental silence that this produces lays the foundation for a “oneness” with the moment and the immediate environment. While the thoughts fade, the concept of time and the feeling of space melt into the breath, and the breath melts into silent bliss. This is the state that Kabat-Zinn speaks of and finds so important for us to embrace; that state of being connected with “the timeless beauty and richness of the present moment” (2005, p. 21).

Waking Up with Mindfulness and Gratitude

This is a practice that entails waking up each morning, looking down at your body, and offering a few moments of gratitude (Randolph, 2019). You say, “thank you,” to your body, smile, and then get up. You can focus on different body parts as well; for example, you can thank your heart one day and your brain the following day. If this ritual is done each morning, it puts you in a positive and healthy state of mind. As your body is with you every minute of your life, it is important to show respect and offer a moment of reverence. Offering gratitude goes a long way, and the feeling of appreciation will take on various other healthy manifestations during the day. For more on this practice, please check out this short video on the topic:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/tyNKvpkBop4>.

The One-Minute Heart-Breath Practice

The idea of this short meditation is to foster body awareness, encourage gratitude towards the heart, and focus on the power of the breath (Randolph, 2023). For this practice, you put one hand over your heart and close your eyes so that you can fully concentrate. Next, breathe in slowly, and then release your breath in the same way. This is done three times. For each set of breaths, keep your hand over your heart so that you can feel its potent beat that offers you life. As noted above, this practice can be done for one minute or repeated for as long as you like. This is a short but very effective meditation that grounds the mind in the moment and helps us focus on the body in a simple way. For a demonstration of this, please go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/-PS116ky3wQ>.

Eating Mindfully

The basic eight-week mindfulness seminar will ask students to participate in a full mindfulness meal. However, eating mindfully is not, in any way, limited to a full meal. One can

mindfully eat a small piece of fruit or a nut, or one can mindfully drink a glass of water or sip a cup of tea. The idea is to enjoy the food or drink mindfully and try to use as many of the senses as possible. In addition, you can allow your emotions to be a part of the experience. And lastly, each bite or swallow you take should be done with a deep sense of gratitude. For instance, if you eat a slice of apple, then hold it between your fingers and bring it to the light. Watch how the sun sparkles off the red skin. Hold it to your nose and smell the sweetness; press on it and feel the texture between your fingers. Does it make a sound? Close your eyes now and taste it. Are there any memories that come to mind? Observe those. Then, think about who cultivated the apple, who picked it, who transported it to you, who priced it, who organized it in the store, and who the cashier was the day you bought it. This process develops compassion; a connectedness to the weather, nature, and the land; and it promotes a great sense of gratitude to and respect for those who helped bring the apple to you. For a brief demonstration on mindful eating, please watch this YouTube Short at: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/40wH18138jo>.

Mindful Body Scans

Body scans are also a basic practice in mindfulness programs. They are a way to find a sense of oneness and connection with your body and mind. You can also focus on one particular region of the body. For instance, you can do a “head scan” and focus on the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hair, skin, and brain. Spend a moment on each organ, feel its presence, and then give a moment of gratitude for each part and feel its importance in your life. Again, try to perceive or experience each part of your body as if you were a child. As you move from organ to organ, try to follow the connectedness of each one and how it helps you appreciate and make the most of each day. For an example of a body scan focused on the hands, see this video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/r52h93nmNYo>.

The Loving-Kindness Meditation

The loving-kindness meditation is as packed full of benefits as a king salmon dinner and quinoa dessert! Not only does this meditation increase compassion for oneself and others, but it also reduces stress and increases longevity (Hoge et al., 2013). This practice can be performed as a short one-minute meditation or longer. The meditation is based on love for and kindness to oneself and the people connected to that person. You simply repeat the following: “May I be healthy, may I be happy, may I embrace love and kindness. May I fill myself with a deep joy and peace.” Once you have focused on yourself, you can then include a loved one or even a special place that has meaning to you. With respect to the loved one, you focus on the family member or friend throughout the practice, visualize him/her in front of you, and repeat the guided meditation statements using his/her name. For a focused loving-kindness meditation on the self, please see the video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gez7f_1tnFk.

Breath-Pulse Meditation

The breath-pulse meditation focuses on the mind, body, and soul while offering gratitude to the pulse. The process is simple. First, focus on your breathing. Inhale and release with nice, slow, and calm breaths. Then, feel the pulse on your left wrist for five beats as you continue to focus on each breath. Next, feel the pulse on your right wrist for five counts. Continue this, paying attention to both your breath and your pulse. It is an effective way to ground your consciousness in the moment and offer gratitude to your body’s presence and the rhythmic beat of each pulse. This practice can be done sitting or standing. For a short demonstration of this breath-pulse mindfulness meditation, please see this YouTube Short at:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/5a5v2fVsI5w>.

Walking Mindfulness Meditations

Walking meditations are a relaxing way to observe the wonders around your immediate environment while simultaneously paying very close attention to *how* you walk. As with mindful eating, you can also incorporate the senses: sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing, balance, hunger, and thirst. For instance, as you walk, you can pay attention to how your feet touch the earth, you can look at all the colors in the trees, inhale the smells of the spring flowers, taste a cherry blossom that dropped from your nose to your lips, listen to the birds sing, and feel the afternoon breeze on your arms. Do you walk with a sense of balance? Are you hungry or thirsty? How does the ground feel under your feet? Is the sky a dark blue, or is it full of clouds? How does all this make you feel? In addition, you can do a body scan from your head to your toes as you walk. This will create a full experience of being aware of the body as it moves through the city streets or through a quiet park. Then, focus back on your feet. Are you walking slowly or quickly? Which do you prefer? Can you feel each toe touch the earth? For a sample of this meditation, go to 27:15 in the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVUya5I96kM>.

Bringing It All Together: Using Mindfulness in Everyday Actions

Now that we have familiarized ourselves with the above seven activities, I encourage my readers to practice these as much as possible on a daily basis. Then, after doing them several times, make the necessary adjustments; that is, add to them and make them your own. The key to a successful mindfulness practice is creativity. We must always work on new and better techniques for ourselves. As we change in our development, our practice will change as well.

The next step, then, is to start using mindfulness techniques and ideas in everyday actions and situations. For example, instead of making your morning coffee and thinking about your first class, make your morning coffee by “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the

present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.4). While driving to work, pay attention to your hands on the wheel; while walking to class, focus on your feet as they make contact with the floor; while you write on the blackboard or the whiteboard, pay attention to how your fingers hold the chalk or the whiteboard marker; while you talk to your students, focus on their facial expressions and moods—hold all this in the moment’s magic. Soon, the burned-out mind will retrain itself and begin to appreciate the *nowness of now* and the way of self-inquiry and mindfulness.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Teacher burnout is a serious problem in all parts of the world. However, the simple fact that the United States loses more than 500,000 teachers each year, and the additional fact that this costs the country 2.2 billion dollars, highlights the issues we are having in this country (Campbell, 2023). ELTs, unfortunately fall in one of the highest categories of burnout (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This does not, by any means, have to be the case. If teachers can take the initiative to “know themselves” and strive to practice mindfulness while acquiring new meditation and observation skills and ways to develop themselves as holistic individuals, then there is hope and a very good chance that we can turn this problem around. Studies in neuroscience and mindfulness have found that “[p]eople who practice mindfulness show better mental health than 70% of the population on average” (ABC Science, 2016, 12:36). Moreover, teachers who continue to learn new subjects like mindfulness and develop their craft are known to stay in the profession longer. If we revisit the words of Gandhi and reflect on his insight that “[j]oy lies in the fight, in the attempt, in the suffering involved, not in the victory itself,” then we can find strength and determination, peace and calm in the pursuit of practicing mindfulness to maintain our humanity and develop ourselves.

At the 2023 TESOL Convention, a day after one of my presentations on mindfulness, a participant came up to me and said, “I’ve been driving for 15 years. But yesterday, after your session, was the first time I mindfully felt the steering wheel in my hands and fingers. I felt the gas pedal and the brake pedal with special sensitivity. I was completely focused on what I was doing. I was aware of the moment like never before. If I can take that into my work and life, if I can learn new insights and skills like that, just think of the possibilities. Just think!” It is my hope, then, that readers of this article may find it as inspiring and motivating as that teacher who attended my session. Let it be said that there *is* hope for teachers. After all, learning is what we love to do and do best! We merely need to recall Shakespeare’s wise words as a guide: “[t]his above all: to thine ownself be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.”

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Patrick T. Randolph specializes in vocabulary acquisition, creative and academic writing, speech, and debate. Patrick has been awarded three “Best of TESOL Affiliates” (2015, 2018, and 2021). He has also received two “Best of CoTESOL Awards” for his 2017 and 2018 presentations on observation journals and creative writing, and he received the “Best Session Award” from MinneTESOL (2019-2021) for his research in neuroscience and his implementation of movement in the ELL classroom. Patrick has published *New Ways in Teaching with Creative Writing* (2020) with TESOL Press and is the author of over 100 articles, 200 poems, eight books, and one short story. He has given over 200 presentations on a variety of topics: language pedagogy, discoveries and applications of neuroscience, vocabulary acquisition, mindfulness and well-being, poetry, and philosophy. Patrick lives with his soul-uplifting wife, Gamze; insightful daughter, Aylene; wonderfully wise cat, Master Gable; and comical puppy, Bubbles, in the USA.

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