A person in a white shirt and dark pants is sweeping a path through a dense thicket of colorful scribbles. The scribbles are made of orange, green, and blue lines, creating a complex, maze-like environment. The person is positioned in the upper right quadrant, moving towards the center. The background is a light teal color.

# THE BURNOUT CURE

Learning to Love  
Teaching Again

**CHASE MIELKE**

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1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA  
 Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400  
 Website: [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org) • E-mail: [member@ascd.org](mailto:member@ascd.org)  
 Author guidelines: [www.ascd.org/write](http://www.ascd.org/write)

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To Bob

*For giving me the permission and support to take risks*



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# 1

## Awareness: Becoming a Goodness Curator

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*The greatest weapon against stress is our ability  
to choose one thought over another.*

—William James

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*Surprockets* (n): the surprise items left in your pocket at the end of a day of teaching. Examples include broken pencils, dry erase markers, rubber bands, fidget spinners, stickers, glitter, paper clips, trendy tiny toys, sticky notes with reminders you forgot to follow up on.

My wife once pulled a human tooth from her pocket. For a split-second, I thought she was about to murder me after revealing her second life as a serial killer. Then I remembered that a child's tooth is not an uncommon thing for a 2nd grade teacher to have in her pocket. Thankfully it was in a plastic bag and she knew which kid had lost it.

We spend our days as educators collecting things from our classrooms and students, but we also spend our days collecting experiences, observations, and memories. While the tangible things weigh down our pockets, the intangible collections can either weigh down our minds and hearts or enlighten us with a sense of accomplishment and hope.

A question that is critical to our well-being is this: What observations and memories do we spend our days collecting?

Each day we make decisions about what experiences we carry with us. Sometimes we bring home the good things— stories of student resilience, recognition of our self-worth, affirmation that what we do matters. But more often it seems we collect the heavy things— memories of student misbehavior, rumination about things beyond our control, fixation on failures.

If we collect too much of the negative and carry it too often, our work can feel heavy and hopeless. At the end of the day, the burdens we carry may leave us with a discontent that disrupts our mind as we try to sleep and taints our morning as we wake up.

The way we frame our awareness each day can have a profound impact on our well-being, engagement, and sense of purpose. I say this from experience. I've had moments—days, weeks, entire school years—when I collected the negatives to the point of almost giving up this job I love. In those times, however, it was helpful to know about the human brain—how awareness patterns can be built and broken, how memory is fallible, and most of all, how the reality I was seeing as a teacher was just a tainted *version* of reality.

Understanding how the brain works can help us understand how to collect more positive experiences, which makes us more resilient teachers without losing the high standards and critical-thinking skills that make us effective in our jobs. In this chapter we'll look at the impact of becoming “goodness curators,” sifting through the many versions of reality to collect the memories and experiences that help us thrive personally and professionally. Goodness curation involves two simple steps: choosing to focus on the good things and savoring these good things more frequently and deeply.

## **Why Memory Collection Matters**

Here's a happiness question: Did you have a good day? Take a moment to think about your answer. Then go deeper. On what did

you base your answer? Chances are, your answer hinged upon two things: your current mood and whether you recalled pleasant or unpleasant memories.

Consider the relationship between mood and memory as analogous to a thriving (or languishing) garden. Our mood is the quality of the soil and the weather. We can make choices that influence our mood, like going for a walk (Miller & Krizan, 2016) or listening to some good music (Schäfer, Sedlmeier, Städtler, & Huron, 2013). But to some extent, mood shifts are beyond our control. Mood will fluctuate based on things like our hormones and our circadian rhythms.

In gardening, we can prepare for the weather and adjust to it, but we can't control it. Our memories, though, are like the seeds and our actions are like watering the garden. We actually *do* have a lot of influence over our memories. We can decide what things we focus our attention on. We can influence how they replay in our minds (and how often we replay them). In other words, we can choose to plant good seeds and to put our energy into tending them.

The seeds we collect and tend matter because to a large extent we base our life satisfaction on our memories. The *intensity* of the positive memory or emotion isn't the deciding factor. Two factors are more important: *frequency* and *recency*.

## **Frequency Matters More Than Intensity**

Although we remember significant events, many social psychologists argue that our subjective well-being is based more on how often we have positive experiences than on how intense they are (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 2009). Thankfully, then, we don't have to have the most euphoric day of teaching to say we're in a good place. Instead, having a handful of good experiences might matter more.

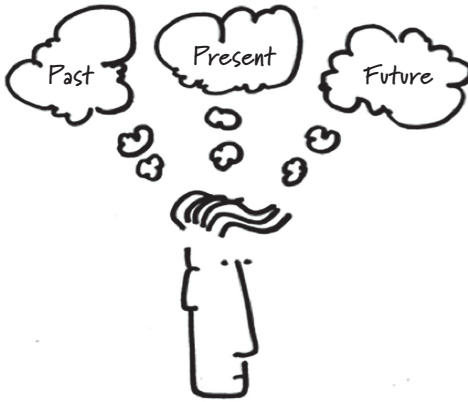
## Recency Matters More Than History

Before you take out that tally sheet and start counting memories, consider that recency matters more than history. Studies have found that we base our subjective well-being on the most recent three months of memories (Suh, Diener, & Fujita, 1996). Additionally, the most recent memories we recall can skew our view of our well-being (Kahneman, 2010). In psychology this phenomenon is known as the “peak-end rule.” I call this the “final-class effect.” If my last class or lesson of the day goes well, I leave my classroom thinking, “Today was solid.” If, however, I end my day with classroom chaos, I go home sulking and feeling terrible—regardless of whether every other class period or lesson went well. Recency and resolution matter for our satisfaction.

## Memories: The Ghosts of Past, Present, and Future

We can also understand the relationship between memory curation and well-being through our thoughts of the past, the present, and the future. Obviously, our past is our collection of memories. But what we recently focused on or experienced can also affect our present thoughts and awareness. For example, consider the “bad-lesson-hangover effect”: if we bomb a lesson, even if it ended in the past, we may still be ruminating about it in the present. Past experiences can inform our present emotional state, even if the connection is only implicit (Hersher, 2017).

Additionally, when we consider our future possibilities, we touch up our past memories, basing our optimism or pessimism to some extent on our memory bank (Seligman & Tierney, 2017). If we find out our boss is going to observe us tomorrow, our expectations hinge upon the memories we’ve curated. If we’ve built memories that see observation as a source of helpful feedback, we look forward to tomorrow. If we’ve built memories of feeling criticized, we dread it.



Chapter 2 includes more strategies for influencing our awareness of the present, and Chapter 5 offers a more in-depth look at optimism or pessimism regarding our future. For now, realize that the memories you curate—the narrative of your past—also affect your present and future well-being.

So, how often do we, in our role as educators, find ourselves curating the bad—concentrating only on what’s wrong with our students, our schools, our society? Before you groan at the thought that what follows is going to be another one of those false-optimism, “pretend life is always glowing” sort of approaches, take a deep breath. Shifting our focus to positives doesn’t mean ignoring the negatives entirely. A good gardener doesn’t ignore weeds, but he also doesn’t spend the whole day pulling them at the expense of watering and tending the good seeds. We don’t have to ignore the fact that education has unpleasant aspects, but we don’t have to carry the ugliness with us.

## Principles of Awareness

It’s possible to curate more positive experiences, especially if we know some key principles of how our awareness shapes our well-being.

## **Principle #1: Subjective Reality— Our Reality Is What We Make It**

One of the first things that struck me when I started studying positive psychology was the focus on “subjective” well-being rather than “objective” well-being. I wondered why the emphasis wasn’t more on the objective. For physical health, we use objective measures such as blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Surely we could simplify the study of happiness and use objective measures such as wealth and physical health metrics.

It didn’t take me long to see that both research and life experience show that well-being really is more subjective than objective (Diener, 2000). Take a classroom example: the B+ grade. Objectively, one could argue that a B+ is a solid grade, showing a high level of skill or conceptual knowledge. But, as every teacher knows, a B+ will create elation and hope in one student, and anxiety and despair in another.

Put simply, our sense of well-being has more to do with how we *feel* about our objective reality than the reality itself (a theme we’ll explore in more depth in Chapter 3). Business school professor Srikumar Rao (2010) describes this in terms of “mental models”—the way we frame or label our experiences in the world. For example, if someone cuts us off in traffic, we really don’t know why he did so. Maybe he’s a jerk, or maybe he’s rushing to the hospital because he got a call that his wife is in labor. We don’t know, but we use a quick, subjective mental model to make sense of the objective reality. Or say a student falls asleep in class. Do we think, “She fell asleep because she doesn’t take school seriously and doesn’t respect me,” or do we think, “Maybe she had a rough night at home and is sleep deprived”? Is that e-mail from a parent really accusatory, or are we adding our own interpretation of the tone and intention?

The objective reality is most often neutral, but our subjective response to it is what influences our well-being. The good news is

that we can choose what mental model we employ in response to an objective reality. The bad news is that our brain is often biased toward the negative.

## **Principle #2: Negativity Bias— *Bad Is Stronger Than Good***

Motivation can be summed up in two words: *avoid* or *approach*. Human brains have thousands of years of evolution rooted in the following two choices: approach the treat, avoid the threat. Between those two choices, however, our brain prioritizes “avoid the threat.” We are wired to search for and assume dangers. Why? Because if we don’t “approach the treat” (the fruit high in the tree), we still might have other opportunities in the future. But if we don’t “avoid the threat” (the snake in the grass), this day could be our last.

Thus, the brain has evolved toward a negativity bias. The amygdala, which processes emotions (namely, fear), is one of the most connected parts of the brain; it has routes to almost every other function. It also butts right up to the hippocampus, which converts short-term memory into long-term memories. We’re wired to better remember unpleasant experiences (Manns & Bass, 2016) and are conditioned to search for, remember, and prioritize threats more than treats. Couple that negativity bias with a job in education, which is often about identifying deficits and improving existing conditions, and it’s easy to see why staying positive in this career can be difficult.

However, the fact that the brain has priorities doesn’t mean we should just accept the bias. As a parallel, our bodies have also evolved to crave fats and sweets in order to have fuel reserves in the event we have to run from some wild beast. But that doesn’t mean, thousands of years later, we should turn the bulk candy bins into our daily buffet.

Having a negativity bias is no reason to give up on looking for positives. It is, instead, the reason why we need to more proactively look for positives. And, because the brain is malleable, we can—with effort—dampen the negativity bias.

### **Principle #3: Neural Firing—Neurons That Fire Together, Wire Together**

If you have kids of your own, you remember the challenge of choosing names for a child when you're an educator. You have so many associations with specific names that those feelings become automatic. The naming conversation between me and my wife sounded like this:

“What about ‘Miles’?”

“Nope. I had a Miles who was grumpy and weird. What if we name him ‘Jack’?”

“Oh lord, no. Don't you remember the Jack I had two years ago who ate his own boogers!?! I don't want a booger-eater name. Maybe ‘James’?”

“Ehhh. What if he's skinny? Kids will call him ‘Slim Jim’ his whole life. I've heard kids do that.”

The associations we make between names and feelings don't come out of nowhere. They exist because we've created neural connections in our brain between a specific name and a set of memories or feelings. Every psych-nerd knows the simplified version of “Hebb's postulate,” introduced by Canadian psychologist Donald Hebb in 1949: “Neurons that fire together, wire together.” In other words, every time we do something, think something, or experience something, our neurons leave little “tracks,” or imprints. Do something often enough and these tracks become paths, which can become roads and then highways.

Thankfully, these neural tracks are not permanent. The brain is plastic, constantly changing the number and strength of neural connections. For example, there is a set of motor neurons that fire

when you lift your left thumb. A different set fires when you move your left index finger. What happens if tragedy strikes and that left index finger gets chopped off? Do those motor neurons for the lost finger just hang out in isolated sadness? Nope. It turns out that they too, in a sense, get “chopped.” When certain neurons are no longer used, that “real estate” gets invaded by surrounding properties—a process called *cortical reorganization*. Lose an index finger and the neural space grows for your thumb and middle finger (Doidge, 2017). Use it or lose it; the brain is always changing.

On one level, the concept of “neurons that fire together, wire together” explains why we can get stuck in ruts of negativity. The more we are aware of the negatives and the more we talk about them, the more we fire neurons associating those memories with an unpleasant emotion. If we do this often enough, we build a negativity superhighway in our brain. Now those negative memories are easier to recall, and they connect more quickly to new experiences.

Conversely, this principle gives us hope for rewiring ourselves to form more “positive highways.” If we choose to focus our awareness on positives in our world, we can forge new paths. This choice—to rewire positive associations with our days, our jobs, our relationships—has a powerful double effect: focusing on the good not only helps us see more good, it also helps us ignore petty irritations.

## **Principle #4: Inattentional Blindness— We See Only Part of the Picture**

Imagine you’re walking one day along a route you follow often. Part of a normal day, right? Not quite. A short distance away, a clown is riding a unicycle. You’d notice that, right? Maybe. But maybe not—especially if you were talking on your cell phone.

Researchers from Western Washington University found this phenomenon to be true (Hyman, Boss, Wise, McKenzie, &

Caggiano, 2010). When people were focusing on a cell phone conversation, 75 percent of them didn't remember seeing a unicycling clown.

This study is one of many demonstrations of an effect known as “inattention blindness.” If you want to experience it, stop reading right now and search the phrase “awareness test” on YouTube.

The awareness test is a re-creation of one of the “invisible gorilla” studies that measured inattention blindness. In another classic study, researchers gave 24 radiologists pictures of lung scans. The radiologists were tasked with identifying abnormalities in lung nodules. Although the radiologists did a great job finding the abnormalities, they did a terrible job noticing an image of a gorilla that had been digitally inserted into the picture. Even though eye scans showed that they looked at the gorilla image as they searched, 83 percent of the radiologists didn't recall actually seeing it (Drew, Vö, & Wolfe, 2013).

The gist is this: because the brain has selective attention, when we focus our awareness on one set of stimuli, we notice it more, but we often *don't* notice other stimuli. Focus on your phone call and you'll conduct a conversation but not notice the clown. Focus on enforcing one classroom rule, like no chewing gum, and you'll see all the chompers going to town but not notice as many kids texting on their phones below their desks. Cast as a rule of behavior, this principle can be expressed in this way: *When I look for X, I notice less Y.*

We can't underestimate the importance of this rule in a discussion of well-being. It plays out in many ways. Consider these:

- When I pay attention to the bad, I don't notice the good.
- When I complain about what I don't have, I'm not grateful for what I do have.
- When I focus on the problems of tomorrow's adults, I don't notice their potential.

- When I look for what my third-period students will do wrong, I miss what they do right.

The choice of what we attend to—what enters our awareness—has a compounding effect on our well-being.

## **Principle #5: Memory Reconsolidation —Memories Change**

Just as every psych-nerd knows the phrase “neurons that fire together, wire together,” most brain junkies also know the initials *H. M.* The subject of perhaps the best-known case study in cognitive psychology, Henry Molaison suffered brain trauma when he was a kid: a bike slammed into him, torquing his body and causing severe damage to the limbic system of his brain. After years of seizures, Henry consulted neurosurgeon William Beecher Scoville, who specialized in lobectomies. In 1953, Scoville snipped and removed the damaged parts of Henry’s brain, including his hippocampus. Success! No more seizures. But also failure. From that point forward, Henry lost the ability to form new memories ever again (Dittrich, 2017).

Henry’s tragedy helped us understand the role of the hippocampus in forming memories. But decades of study revealed something else: Henry lost his old memories faster than average. Before the surgery, his hippocampus hadn’t just formed new memories; it had also fine-tuned old ones.

The new understanding is this: every time we recall a memory, our hippocampus helps reconsolidate it. One byproduct of this process is that our memories change each time we recall them (Bridge & Paller, 2012). In fact, our mood or mental priming at the time of recall can influence this shift. For example, imagine you watch a dinner-date scene from a movie and then have to recall details. If you were hungry when you watched it, you might have stronger recall about the food that was ordered. If you had

heartbreak on your mind, you might have zeroed in on the couple's tense, awkward moments.

We can again see how this process influences our positive memory bank: if we shift our awareness to some of the good things in our life and then recall those positives, we may strengthen them, curating more “permanent pieces” in our collection.

Let's wrap all of these concepts together into an example. Imagine you have a new student coming from another district. Some of your colleagues say they heard this new kid is a behavioral nightmare. This shot of negative gossip taints your reality before the student even steps into your classroom (subjective reality). The first day he enters your room, you're on edge, paranoid, and concerned, looking for signs of trouble (negativity bias). Sure enough, he appears to scowl and delays getting started on the first assignment you give him, sitting closed off and silent. You associate this behavior with the last challenging kid you had, thinking, “Oh, great; another one of those types” (neural firing). All day, you seem to notice every minor issue—he texts on his phone or gets distracted; he talks to other kids instead of reading; he doesn't even make eye contact with you.

The “problem child” narrative in your head builds all day, to the point you don't notice some other details. For example, he did raise his hand to ask where the bathroom is. He picked up and handed back a classmate's pencil when she dropped it. He actually said good-bye to you when he left the room. All of these incidents faded into the background behind the negatives (inattentional blindness).

In the staff lounge and at home, you vent about your worries, the imperfect behaviors, the fears—staining your memories (memory reconsolidation) a deeper shade of negative (neural firing). Without an intentional shift in awareness, you've spent an entire day curating negative after negative, not considering the other realities—that this kid is going through a major life transition that

might not be pleasant, that he might be just as paranoid and protective as you are, that there were a number of positive behaviors.

If we're going to thrive as educators, and not just survive, we have to intentionally and proactively confront our mental models and our cognition and develop patterns of positive awareness. We have to become "goodness curators." We need to collect just as many moments of triumph and memories of affirmation. What's the best way to begin this process? Give it a day—as described in the next section.

## Noticing the Good

The first week of my positive psychology class, I give students their hardest assignment of the trimester:

Go 24 hours without voicing a complaint, criticism, or gripe. If you catch yourself complaining, start the clock over. See how long it takes you to get a 24-hour stretch without negative speech.

There's no grade or evaluation for the assignment, of course. It's a "life assignment." And there are caveats:

- You can't just build up all your negatives, wait 24 hours, and then spew them out in a fit of rage.
- Addressing true injustices is fair game, as long as you're actually addressing the issue and not just griping.
- Complaint baiting is not allowed. Don't bring up a topic that you know someone else will complain about just so you can nod in agreement.

The next day we check in. Usually only a couple of students admit they were successful. Others either forgot to do the task or kept slipping. We then have some engaging conversations. We note how we forget to avoid complaining, suggesting that we need to *remind* ourselves to not complain for even just one day. We discuss

“contextual complain spaces,” areas in which we are more prone to gripe than others. We share about how much we notice others’ negativity when we make “not complaining” an awareness.

Having a perfect day is not the end goal. Instead, we’re trying to establish an awareness about how we view and approach the world. The 24-hour “no-complaining challenge” reveals how we tend to focus on the bad and ignore the good.

The challenge is also about breaking and making patterns. We’re trying to break our pattern of curating the bad things in our day and make a new pattern for noticing and reminiscing about the good.

Twenty-four hours, of course, aren’t going to permanently shift our patterns. As I tell my students, a healthful diet doesn’t consist of one day spent undoing years of bad habits. Similarly, one day of focusing on positives can’t rewire years of negativity bias and awareness habits. But every great change—whether in our personal lives or historically—begins with one day of action.

Becoming a goodness curator can be the jolt we need to make teaching worthwhile again. It can transform how we interact with our students and staff, even our family and friends. And we have nothing to lose by trying it. We’ll continue to live our reality regardless of whether we try to make it more positive or not. But we’ll still have to choose what reality we see. So, if you’re ready to begin choosing a more empowering, fulfilling, and worthwhile reality, let the curation begin.



## Life Assignments

The following “assignments” are some of my favorite ways to build a collection of good things.

## Assignment #1: Take On the No-Complaining Challenge

I recommend everyone try the no-complaining challenge. This challenge is like a life audit: you'll step back and see how your mind works. There are a couple of routes you can take:

- **Option A:** Don't tell anyone you're doing the challenge. Simply give it your all and notice if people seem to shift in their interactions with you, especially people who know you well, like your partner, friends, or family.
- **Option B:** Enlist others. Get a partner or a handful of colleagues (or students) together who want to take on the challenge. Having others join you in the challenge enables you to keep each other accountable and provides a debriefing group for talking about the experience.

Remember that the idea isn't to find perfection; it's to make progress in identifying and reducing negativity bias.

## Assignment #2: Add a "Peak-End Ritual" to Your Day

One of the greatest lessons I've learned about parenthood is that rituals matter. Parenting books and gurus talk about having bedtime rituals to help kids go to sleep. But the gurus are missing a huge question about such rituals: What's in it for me? I might sound pretty selfish, as providing a good night's sleep for my child should be the end goal. But every parent knows how much work it takes to build and maintain that ritual.

Fortunately, I've learned that the ritual is worth it not only for my son's sleep, but also for my well-being. As mentioned earlier, due to the "peak-end rule," recency and resolution matter for our memory and satisfaction. So, if I have a "bedtime-means-war" experience putting my toddler down to sleep at night, I'm likely to say I had a rough day. But if he goes the "snuggle-and-be-sweet"

route, I'll feel like my day was amazing. And my thoughts at the end of the night matter because soon I'll be sleeping (or ruminating) and consolidating my version of reality into my memories.

My wife and I have habituated positive rituals into our child's bedtime routine. For example, even if my son has had a day of mega-tantrums, I make sure that I sing to him and kiss him good-night—even when I'm grouchy. These rituals are positive ends to an otherwise challenging day. They give me a piece of goodness to collect to show me that the whole day wasn't bad.

Consider building a peak-end ritual into your school day. Before leaving your class, you could do one of the following:

- Ask yourself, what was your “win of the day”?
- Play a mood-lifting song as you do a final organization of your room or desk.
- Have a “victory session” rather than a “vent session” with colleagues.
- Write down a specific goal for tomorrow. Reflect on the progress you made today with the goal you set yesterday.
- Send a quick e-mail message to a parent, sharing something positive about one of your students.
- Write a positive affirmation on your board that students will see when they walk in the next day.

Also try some peak-end rituals at home in the evening. Check out some of the other practices described in this book, such as mindfulness meditations (see Chapter 2) or gratitude journaling (see Chapter 3).

### **Assignment #3: Start a Jar of Goodness**

Get a large jar. Each day, recall one positive memory, write it on a slip of paper, and place it in the jar. At the end of the year (or sooner, if needed), pull out the slips of paper and reflect on the many positive memories you have.

## **Assignment #4: Reminisce About Your Reason for Becoming a Teacher**

My students often ask me why I became a teacher. Based on their reactions to my response, they seem to expect me to say, “Because I was inspired by so-and-so” or, “I had this class that changed me.” Neither of these was my reason, though. Truthfully, I was a defiant, antagonistic little punk. As an upperclassman, I skipped school often; I pulled pranks; I got kicked out of Spanish class permanently.

Despite my discontent with school, I remember the exact moment I decided to become a teacher. I was about to skip school again, most likely aggravated by some teacher and thinking, “I can’t wait to get away from this place and never come back.” Then, like getting smashed between the eyes with clarity, I had another thought: “That’s one of the most selfish ideas ever—running from a problem rather than fixing it.” That moment I decided that I wanted to be the teacher I didn’t have in high school.

My aversion to school was a product of not having positive relationships with my teachers. In hindsight, of course, I can see that I had some great teachers. My issues with teachers were my version of reality as a teenager (I hadn’t yet realized the importance of goodness curation). Nevertheless, my inspiration to teach was the desire to deliver what I had lacked. I wanted to build positive relationships with challenging students to help them find a better path—and for them not to simply infer that someone cared about their well-being, but to know it every day.

When we’re frustrated as teachers, we often ask ourselves, “Why do I continue to do this?” But a more powerful question is “What inspired me to do this in the first place?” I’ve questioned my decision to stay in education many times. Every time I do, though, I bring myself to that moment in high school—having an epiphany that I could do something good for others.

Take some time and reminisce about your reason for teaching. Even though it has probably shifted since you started and the memory has been reconsolidated many times, recall the spark that led you to do this work. Write it down, talk about it, mull it over on your drive to school, post about it online—do whatever it takes to recall the empowering reasons you got into this career. That memory shouldn't be stuffed in the back of the museum; it should be the centerpiece.

## **Assignment #5: Celebrate with Others**

Just as art curators don't have to be the ones who make the art, goodness curators don't have to be the source of positive things to take note of. Instead, we can celebrate the good with others. One way of doing this is “active constructive responding.”

Say a student shares some good news about playing well in her soccer game over the weekend. Imagine how you might respond. Here are some possibilities:

- Point out the negatives of the event (active destructive):  
“Hmm. You should be careful; I just read about the long-term effect of concussions from soccer.”
- Ignore or brush off the good news (passive destructive):  
*Nod head, continue to organize desk.*
- Give a vague and clichéd response (passive constructive):  
“That's pretty neat.”
- Share authentic support and curiosity (active constructive):  
“That's awesome to hear! Tell me more about it.”

A group of studies found that when people seek out others and discuss good things, it boosts their positive emotion and well-being to a point beyond the benefits of the good event itself. Additionally, if their partner gives an active-constructive response, it boosts the positive effect even more (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). Celebrating others improves our relationship, allows us to share some goodness, and helps ignite the sharer's positive emotion.

This outcome doesn't mean we need to stop what we're doing and dive in every time a kid shares some good news. We all know how time consuming that would be, especially with elementary students who love to share that cool thing their cousin's friend's mother did 17 months ago. But consider offering some active-constructive responses in situations like these:

- With your partner or other key relationships in your life
- With a student you'd like to have a more positive relationship with
- When you're having a rough day and could use a boost of something good
- Tomorrow

## **Assignment #6: Curate “Emodiversity”**

Many people think that happiness simply means pleasure in the moment (*hedonia*, as discussed in the Introduction). We become disappointed, then, when we don't experience pleasure all the time or the feeling doesn't last long. Being a goodness curator means recognizing the many different positive emotions and experiences that make up our well-being. For example, here's a list of some of the most common positive emotions felt by people everywhere:

- Serenity: sense of calm and contentment
- Interest: deep curiosity about a topic or an experience
- Hope: sense that the future will be positive
- Pride: satisfaction with the work or effort one produced
- Inspiration: motivation to take positive action
- Joy: boost of positive feeling, often associated with a surprise
- Awe: feeling overwhelmed with greatness of something on a large scale
- Amusement: experiencing genuine laughter
- Gratitude: recognition of the good things in one's life

Some of these emotions are context dependent, whereas others we can choose to experience. For example, awe is usually triggered by something grand in nature (I can't simply walk into the chaotic hallways of a high school and force myself to be in awe). Gratitude, on the other hand, can be sparked intentionally (a concept that we'll explore in Chapter 3).

Variety, beyond being the "spice of life," can be good for our health. One study looked at the positive and negative "emodiversity" of 175 adults and found that individuals who had a range of different positive emotions had lower inflammation in their bodies, regardless of whether their emotion was more or less positive or negative compared to others (Ong, Benson, Zautra, & Ram, 2018).

When collecting good things in your world, look for the range of different kinds of positives. Before leaving work each day, review the list of common positive emotions and consider at least one you experienced. But don't obsess over finding a range of positive emotions. If you spend too much time trying to figure out whether something is or isn't inducing happiness, the effort might be counterproductive. A good art curator doesn't spend every second analyzing whether every object is art or not—she simply notices it when it's there.



Developing the awareness needed to become a goodness curator isn't easy. I recall, during the year I almost quit teaching, deciding to focus on the good the moment I stepped into the school. Within the first 30 seconds of entering the building, I heard a student scream perversely and profanely across the hallway at another kid. It was like a kick to the shins of my positivity plan.

I had to make a choice. Actually, I had to make a couple. Choice one was the decision to address the issue of the screaming profanity, which I did (true issues should not be ignored). But then I had a more powerful choice: to let that moment dictate my day, framing every interaction I had around what's wrong with the world, or to still look for and curate the good in my school, my students, and my choice to teach. It wasn't hard to find positives—it just required a different lens.

# 2

## Awareness: Being Mindful

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*You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.*

—Jon Kabat-Zinn

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How much time should I give them to finish this reading? My room smells funky... teenage hormones probably. Should I cold-call on my students when they finish reading? No, a pair-share first. Am I doing too many pair-shares? Is that kid texting? No, just scratching his leg. I wonder if they have that taco bar in the cafeteria today. For real, what's that smell. Is it me? Did I put on deodorant? Some of them are finished reading. What was that mind-blowing question I was going to ask them... shoot. I had it a minute ago. I wonder if my son ate another rock at day care today. I hope not. How many small rocks can a small child eat safely? I need to buy some air freshener for this room.

Welcome to the chaotic mind of an educator. Whether it's prepping our next words, pondering what happened during the last lesson, or anticipating our next meeting, we often live everywhere but in the present moment. And if we *are* focused on what we're doing, we're often tense, evaluating every decision and observation.

What if our habits of frantic thinking and circular fretting are wreaking havoc on our well-being? What if our greatest hurdle to our present happiness is that we aren't *aware* of what's happening in the present?

In this chapter we explore the two-headed beast of the unmanaged mind: rambling and ruminating. We'll not only understand how rambling and ruminating affect our well-being, but also learn how to tame the two heads of the beast.

## Rambling

How often do human minds wander? Ten percent of the time? Thirty-three percent of the time? How often has your mind already wandered since starting this chapter?

Researchers have provided some good answers to this question, collecting a lot of data to better understand what we think about and how a wandering mind affects our well-being. Matt Killingsworth (2013) and a crew of researchers collected 650,000 real-time reports from 15,000 people of all ages around the world. Randomly, an alert would go off asking participants to respond to three questions:

1. How do you feel?
2. What are you doing?
3. Are you thinking about something other than what you're doing? (And if "yes," is it a pleasant, neutral, or unpleasant thought?)

So, how often *do* human minds wander? The answer: we spend 47 percent of our waking hours thinking of something other than what we're doing. We are not present for *half* of our waking hours.

Mind-wandering can have benefits. Some aspects of mind-wandering help us come up with creative solutions or achieve aha moments. However, Killingsworth's data reveal that, more often than not, people are *less* happy when their minds are wandering. And the data show a causal effect. It isn't that we are unhappy and so we drift to pleasant dreams. Instead, mind-wandering tends to *precede* unhappiness (Killingsworth, 2013).

So, what's happening when we let our mind wander? And why is doing so reducing our sense of well-being? For those answers, we need to see what happens when the brain is in default mode.

No matter what time of day or type of thought, our brain is "in motion" as different parts are processing—an ecosystem never at rest. When we're actively focused on something (e.g., absorbed in an enjoyable, challenging hobby), a "task-positive" network of the brain is active (Hasenkamp, Wilson-Mendenhall, Duncan, & Barsalou, 2012). I refer to this as a Focused Attention Network. However, when we aren't focused on the external task at hand, our brain activates a network known as the Default Mode Network.

The Default Mode Network can challenge our well-being for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- When our thoughts are rambling, we aren't in a "flow state," a deep and often satisfying engagement in a challenging and interesting task (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009).
- When we focus on the past and the future, we aren't savoring the present moment and cultivating positive emotions.
- When we divide our attention, we make more mistakes and often take longer to complete important tasks (Medina, 2014).

But there's more. Not only does this mind-rambling Default Mode Network run opposite of savoring and flow, it also sets the stage for negative rumination. This is an important point: When our brain engages the Default Mode Network, it creates ideal conditions for the second head of the beast—rumination, which can be the true source of unhappiness.

Let's say your mind is like a classroom. Imagine you've provided students with an interesting and challenging learning task. They are engaged in the task. They are present. They are in the zone and experiencing flow. Although the occasional student might cause a distraction, he's easy to manage. Now imagine that you give students free time to do whatever they want. They soon

run amok. Distractions and misbehaviors pop up. This is the Default Mode Network at work. A mind without focused attention often finds mental mischief and leaves the gate open for the beast of rumination to devour our well-being. Rambling leads to ruminating.

## Ruminating Our Own Ruin

It's the middle of the night and you *know* you need to sleep. Your brain starts rambling through random thoughts, but soon you can't stop rehashing a scene or problem. Maybe you're thinking of perfect comebacks to that student's snarky question, or you have a school board presentation in a few days that you haven't started preparing for. Now you're stuck in a rumination loop.

In its most basic form, rumination is the experience of a repetitive thought. The word *ruminant* comes from the Latin *ruminare*, meaning "to chew over again." Just as ruminant animals rechew food to help digestion, rumination is theorized to have evolved in humans as a helpful mental process: pondering problems can help us generate solutions.

But, like many processes that serve a purpose in human evolution, rumination sometimes kicks in when it doesn't need to, like when a song plays in your mind over and over again. Much of our rumination, though, isn't about catchy pop songs. More often we ruminate about problems, real or imagined, from our past or from our simulated future.

You may be thinking, isn't focusing on a problem the *opposite* of mind-wandering? If we were actually addressing the problem, then we would have focused attention. However, we typically *aren't* dealing with problems that are the subjects of our ruminations. We're postulating, then trying to get our minds off the stress, only to see it "wander" back into our thoughts. Rumination is the fly buzzing around a television screen. It flies away but circles back to smack itself against the screen and disrupt our focus.

Although we may *think* this rumination is helping us solve problems by planning ahead, research finds that negative rumination makes us *worse* at problem solving (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995). Most of the time, we're simply spinning negative thoughts and emotions on a loop, rather than planning.

Our ramblings and ruminations are like an emotional acceleration system. Our rambling Default Mode Network opens up the throttle for worry and stress to go full blast. What we need, then, is a logical brake system. We need the ability to dampen our spiraling and cycling thoughts. That braking system is our Focused Attention Network. And, to give it a tune-up, we need to practice mindful awareness.

## Mindfulness

*What's the opposite of mind-wandering?* Focused attention.

*What's the opposite of obsessing about the past or the future?* Being aware of the present.

*What's the opposite of worry and evaluation?* Detaching our judgment.

Introducing the counteraction to rambling and rumination, that thing you keep hearing and reading about: mindfulness.

Mindfulness is currently a hot topic of research. Although there's a lot about it that we don't know yet, what we do know offers much promise. For example, a meta-analysis of 39 research studies found moderate to strong effect sizes for mindfulness interventions on well-being. For the average person, mindfulness practices led to reduced anxiety (0.63 effect size) and increased positive mood (0.59). For those with high levels of anxiety, the effects were stronger (0.97 anxiety reduction; 0.95 positive mood increase (Davies, 2011).

Aside from decreasing anxiety and boosting our mood, benefits of mindfulness have included stronger interpersonal

relationships (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007), better sleep (Carlson & Garland, 2005), better focus and attention (McGreevey, 2011), and increased body satisfaction (Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackleford, 2014), to name a few.

Most important for the classroom, there's growing evidence that mindfulness affects teacher stress management *and* the culture of the class (Roeser et al., 2013). One study randomly assigned 224 urban elementary teachers to either a mindfulness-based stress management program or a control group (Jennings et al., 2017). The teachers were then tracked and observed while teaching. Those who experienced mindfulness training improved their emotional regulation and reduced their psychological distress and urgency about time. Classroom observations showed that these teachers also had more positive interactions with students—taking more calming deep breaths, remaining curious instead of rushing to judgment and punishment when students misbehaved, and even smiling more.

I was slow to accept the value of mindfulness. In my studies, I had seen it come up often in religious and spiritual history. But as a pragmatic person, I didn't understand what mindfulness had to do with me. Although the psychological basis of mindfulness piqued my curiosity, it wasn't until I started practicing it—even for a few minutes a day—that I realized the pervasive benefits of having a more mindful awareness.

Before we get into the basics of mindfulness practice, let's see how your thoughts work. Here's the simple task:

1. Set a timer to go off in one or two minutes.
2. Once you start the timer, try to maintain your attention solely on your breathing.
3. Focus on each inhale, visualizing the air entering and filling your lungs. Then, focus on the exhale slowly leaving your nostrils.

4. Close your eyes and continue to focus on your breathing. Each time you catch your mind drifting to a thought *other* than your breathing, simply return your focus back to your inhales and exhales.

How'd it go? If you're like me, you probably felt wildly incompetent at this task, thoughts drifting repeatedly. This simple "pre-test" tells us how overpowering our Default Mode Network can be (and how weak our Focused Attention Network is).

If you struggled to maintain focus, you might think, "This isn't for me because I can't do it." Actually, the opposite is true. The harder it is to maintain focused attention, the more we may *need* to practice mindfulness. If you said, "I can't jog 20 yards without getting winded," it would be odd to then think, "I'm out of shape; cardio must not be for me." The worse shape we're in, the more important it is that we work out.

There are many ways to increase mindfulness, some of which I will outline later. Despite these variations, all of these practices hinge upon two basic concepts:

- Purposefully trying to maintain focus on experiences in the present moment (focusing on the present)
- Trying to refrain from evaluating or judging (accepting the experience)

## **Focusing on the Present**

As educators, our world is plagued with events that divide our focus and shift thoughts from the present. Technology beeps and flashes, hitching us to hundreds of distractions in and beyond the classroom. Although we may have moments when we are present with our experience, typically our awareness shifts quickly.

We may see our rambling thoughts as a nuisance to our attempts to focus. However, if we reframe mind-wandering, we can leverage it to improve our Focused Attention Network.

View drifting thoughts as resistance training for focus. Each time your thoughts drift from the present, you have an opportunity to shift back and strengthen your focus. Just as resistance training changes muscular strength and efficiency, mindfulness practice changes the brain (Hölzel et al., 2011). Don't get frustrated, then, at the challenge of returning your focus. Welcome the opportunity for an attention-workout repetition.

In its most basic form, this is one of the main practices of mindfulness meditation. Although the *goal* is to maintain a focus on the present, the *practice* involves starting over whenever we notice that our minds have wandered. Some say that mindfulness meditation is the “art of beginning again.”

Once we shift our awareness to the present moment, we transition into shifting our emotional connection with the present, accepting and experiencing the moment as it is rather than ruminating about it. It's important to note that mindfulness is not just about paying more attention; it's about paying *different* attention. We move from our default *evaluating* mode to a more calming and grounding *experiencing* mode.

## Accepting the Experience

We are a motivated species. (Even that student avoiding class work is motivated. Look at his level of dedication to repeatedly deconstructing and reconstructing his pen.) Our drive to “do” things makes it challenging to fully experience life as it is.

In their book *The Mindful Way Through Depression*, a group of mindfulness gurus, including Mark Williams of the Oxford Mindfulness Center and Jon Kabat-Zinn of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, discuss how mindfulness differs from our usual “do stuff” mode—and why it's critical for increasing our well-being (Williams, Teasdale, Segal, & Kabat-Zinn, 2007).

They divide awareness into two types: our *doing* mode and our *being* mode. Our doing mode is the type of thinking we use to analyze and solve problems. As noted earlier, problem solving

can be a good thing, but the authors discuss how it often leads to rumination and overthinking. In doing mode, everything we do is through the lens of comparison—how it *could* or *should* be rather than how it *is*. Sounds like a typical day in the classroom, right?

The being mode, according to Williams and his colleagues, is different:

In being mode, we discover we can suspend evaluating how our experience “should” be or “ought” to be, of whether it is “correct” or “incorrect,” of whether it is “good enough” or “not good enough,” or of whether we are “succeeding” or “failing,” even whether we are “feeling good” or “feeling bad.” Each present moment can be embraced as it is, in its full depth, width, and richness, without a “hidden agenda” constantly judging how far our world falls short of our ideas of how we need it to be. (p. 65)

If you’re picturing someone “experiencing the present” as a floating, unmotivated sloth, adjust that image. The authors stress, “We can still act with intention and direction” (p. 65). In fact, we’re more *intentional* in our actions when we’re mindful. Rather than stress-induced ruminations tainting our decisions, we act more objectively.

For example, imagine a student had an emotional meltdown yesterday. You may still be ruminating about it today. Today, that student starts to ask you some questions. If you’re in normal *doing* mode, you may feel your emotions rise as you think, “Here we go again. Another meltdown in progress.” Your focus narrows on all the things this kid does to annoy you. Judgment is now tainted with a host of emotions, many of which are overly reactive.

What if you could dampen the emotional overload for a moment and *observe* the student? What if you remained open to what the student needed—listening fully—and calmly helped him

de-escalate his worry rather than escalating your own stress? Both the student *and you* would benefit from this moment of objective, rational thinking. Take it from mindfulness maestro Thich Nhat Hanh:

During the moment one is consulting, resolving, and dealing with whatever arises, a calm heart and self-control are necessary if one is to obtain good results. . . . If we are not in control of ourselves but instead let our impatience or anger interfere, then our work is no longer of any value. (1975, p. 14)

Mindfulness is not being devoid of emotion. Instead, it is experiencing the present in full awareness. Consider these possibilities:

- Imagine being stuck behind that slow-moving first-year student and disengaging your stress, seeing instead an opportunity to look around and smile at students.
- Imagine eating lunch and savoring each bite, rather than mindlessly scarfing it down.
- Imagine seeing the uniqueness of the student in front of you, rather than having your mind ramble and rage about all the other things you *could* be doing.

Mindfulness is a full engagement in life. It is finding the richness in how life *is* instead of only seeing deficits in how life *could* or *should* be.

If it sounds like I'm getting fired up by this stuff, it's because I am. When I reached the end of my fuse with the most challenging, disrespectful class I ever taught, mindful breathing helped me stay rational and objective. When I came home after an exhausting day of teaching, mindful awareness helped me keep a calm head, be patient with my colicky newborn son (and distraught wife), and still find joy in being a dad. Mindful awareness has brought more

meaning, more gratitude, and more calm to my life as a teacher, a father, and a spouse than any other cognitive change.

## Life Assignments

Mindfulness is an antidote to the ruminating, rambling habits that plague our well-being as teachers. Although the world of mindfulness is expansive, here are a few assignments incorporating research-based practices that have helped me develop a more mindful awareness and a less ruminating and rambling mind.

### Assignment #1: Use Mindfulness Triggers

You're probably already thinking, "When do I have time to meditate? I barely have time to eat lunch." We'll set aside the probability that we waste time doing mindless things. If you're looking for a brief boost of mindful awareness, use a *mindfulness trigger*.

First, identify a common event or situation in which you go into either rambling mode or negative rumination mode. Here are some examples:

- Rambling Triggers
  - Cleaning rituals (washing hands, cleaning dishes)
  - Sipping your morning beverage
  - Students walking into your classroom in the morning
  - Driving (e.g., pulling into a parking lot)
- Ruminating Triggers
  - Being stopped at a red light
  - Being stuck behind slow-moving students in the hallway
  - Having to wait in line
  - People driving on the expressway differently than you do
  - A colleague asking a ridiculous question near the end of a staff meeting

Once you identify a trigger, use it as a mental cue to take a few mindful breaths and shift your focus to the experience. For example, if you stop at a red light, rather than thinking, “I should have gone. I need to get where I’m going,” take a slow, deep breath. Focus on the air entering your lungs. Let your senses do their thing. You can also nonjudgmentally note whatever emotion you’re feeling, as in “I realize I’m feeling anxious to get to work.”

When you breathe, do so intentionally and slowly. Feel the air fill the bottom of your lungs first, lifting your stomach. Then focus on air filling up your lungs as your chest rises. Hold the breath for a few seconds. Then reverse the exhale, letting go of the air at the top of your throat, followed by your chest, then belly.

One byproduct of this mindful moment is the activation of our *parasympathetic nervous system*, which dampens our stress response (Jerath, 2006). Most people are familiar with the “fight-or-flight” response, which is triggered by the parasympathetic system’s opposite: the *sympathetic nervous system*. When we experience (or think about) something unpleasant, the sympathetic nervous system kicks in, cuing the release of more cortisol, a stress hormone.

So, rather than having a jammed copy machine trigger rumination and fight-or-flight mode, we can use the experience to trigger a few deep, mindful breaths to activate the “rest-and-digest” mode via the parasympathetic system.

## **Assignment #2: Schedule Unwired Time**

My name is Chase, and I have an addiction. I’m addicted to my phone. I find myself subconsciously reaching for it and then absent-mindedly flipping through apps, checking my e-mail, checking social media sites over and over again. I used to catch myself multiple times a day getting stuck in an app-addiction cycle. I started to break the cycle with a simple approach: I scheduled some unwired, mindful time.

I now have a rule I try to follow each day. When I get home from work, I put my phone out of sight. I work to engage my attention on being present with my family. And when I go into autopilot and pat my pocket looking for my phone, I remind myself to be aware of what I'm experiencing in the moment.

Just as we sometimes need to schedule time to hang out with our friends, we can schedule time to hang out with the present moment. Whether it's five minutes or five hours, find time to disconnect from devices that divide your awareness.

Want to know just how important it is that you schedule unwired time? Enable a phone-usage app for a week. Prepare to be shocked.

### **Assignment #3: Meditate**

If you *do* want to take mindfulness to the next level, look into practicing mindfulness meditation. Choosing from among the many programs available can be overwhelming, but the variety provides a lot of options. Much like physical fitness programs, you can find “mindful fitness” programs for any time commitment, level, and cost.

**Types and costs.** Different types of mindfulness programs may provide different benefits. Here's a list of categories and benefits, based on a study of 200 participants (Newman, 2017):

- **Presence**—Breathing meditations and body scans
  - Best for improving attention
- **Perspective**—Meditations that involve observing thoughts and becoming less reactive to them
  - Help regulate emotion to stay calm under stressful situations
- **Affect**—Emotional-attachment meditations such as “loving kindness”
  - Help regulate emotion and can promote compassion and altruism

**Meditation programs.** Here are a few examples of the many mindfulness meditation programs that are available:

- **MBSR-Umass** (<https://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/>)—One of the most highly researched and thorough programs is the eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program from the University of Massachusetts. For those who don't have access to an MBSR class, MBSR offers detailed online courses.
- **Mindful Schools** ([www.mindfulschools.org](http://www.mindfulschools.org))—For a more education-specific focus, check out Mindful Schools, featuring different levels and durations of programs. There are even options to earn CEUs. These courses are a fraction of the cost of MBSR.
- **Palouse Mindfulness** ([www.palousemindfulness.com](http://www.palousemindfulness.com))—Dave Potter took his training from MBSR onto the internet, creating Palouse Mindfulness. If you like the words *free* and *unscheduled*, take a look at this option.

**Apps.** You can also find plenty of apps with guided meditations and support. Here are some to consider:

- Insight Timer—a buffet of guided meditations
- Aura—a 3-minute, personalized, daily guided meditation
- Headspace—a 10-minute-a-day guided program with a buddy-system option
- Calm—another collection of guided meditations

Although apps are a good option for the time-strained teacher, keep in mind that an app is only a resource. Just as an app can't replace a high-quality teacher in education, an app can't replace instruction from a reputable, research-based mindfulness program.

**Movement-based programs.** If you like to move while you practice mindfulness, consider a program that has elements of mindful breathing and focus, such as yoga, tai chi, or Pilates. Join

that colleague who won't stop inviting you to a local class or scour the web for resources.

## **Assignment #4: Practice “Raisin Awareness”**

When are you likely to be *least* mindful? When you're eating. No doubt you've had that moment when you've looked into a bag and thought, “Uh... did I really put down a half-bag of corn chips?” Yes. You probably did.

Try the mindful-eating experience. First, choose a food. Many mindfulness maestros recommend a raisin. I use an orange because (1) oranges are delicious, (2) I can use all the vitamin C I can get, and (3) they provide a rich multisensory experience for a mindfulness novice. Next, find an environment free of distractions. I also recommend doing this alone, otherwise you will feel (and look) like a weirdo. The goal is to slow down the experience of eating, focusing on each sense individually:

- **Touch and sight.** Use your fingers to examine the food thoroughly. Notice every variation and what makes it unique. Bring your attention to the actual contact points on your fingers as you notice the texture and temperature.
- **Smell.** Let the scent waft into your nostrils. Feel the sensation from the moment you notice the odor in the air through the scent traveling into your lungs.
- **Taste.** Focus on each bite and the various points of the experience: the feel of your teeth sinking in; the movement across your taste buds and under your teeth; the development of flavors; even the preparation of your swallowing reflex and how it feels when you bring that grub down to meet your stomach.

Any time your mind wanders to other thoughts (e.g., “I hope no one is watching me”), note them and bring your awareness back to the experience.

## **Assignment #5: Visualize Comic Clouds**

Everything we do happens through the lens of a mood or an emotional state, which makes it hard to detach our experiences from our emotions. Most mindfulness gurus recommend noting thoughts and emotions as if they were in a cloud and then watching the cloud drift away in our mind. Noting. Drifting. Noting. Drifting.

When I first tried this strategy, I felt cartoonish. I began imagining myself in a comic strip (X-Men–like on a good day, Charlie Brown–like on a bad day), seeing myself from a third-person perspective. I would see my current experience with dialogue and thought bubbles and Morgan Freeman narrating, if the mood was fitting. The detachment might seem hokey, but there is some evidence that a third-person detachment can lower the intensity of negative affect, improve emotional regulation, and help with self-control (Moser et al., 2017; Wallace-Hadrill & Kamboj, 2016).

## **Assignment #6: Take a Weather Check**

In Chapter 3, I discuss how the weather cues us to make mental comparisons: we instantly attach an evaluation to weather. We look out the window and either feel great because it's precisely how we want it or we get grouchy because it's not meeting our expectations.

Instead of wasting thoughts on what the weather *could* or *should* be, shift to a mindful awareness. Use the conditions outside to trigger a mindful moment. When you step into rain, take a few seconds to feel the sensations of the raindrops hitting your skin, to smell the damp soil. When the sun is blazing, feel the warmth on your skin and notice the hazy sky in the distance. In the winter, note the feel of icy air and melting snowflakes. Use the weather to practice mindful awareness.



Your mind is a classroom. It's filled with dozens of thoughts waving for your attention. But you have a choice. Do you let the thoughts run wild, or do you learn to manage them? Do you study them, or do you ignore them? Pursuing mindful awareness is like pursuing masterful teaching. It takes practice and time. But it's worth every effort.

We're not doomed to a life of rumination and rambling simply because we're teachers with a lot to think about. Nor are we destined to disappointment by the regrets of yesterday, the distance of tomorrow, or the contrast of what *is* to what *could* be. With mindful awareness, we can find fulfillment in every second we are awake, every breath we breathe, and every step we take.

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## About the Author



Chase Mielke is a writer, speaker, and award-winning high school teacher. He holds a master's degree in curriculum and instruction and runs [www.affectiveliving.com](http://www.affectiveliving.com), a blog dedicated to helping educators better understand and teach social-emotional learning. Mielke's work has been featured on CNN and on the websites *We Are Teachers*, *Edutopia*, *HuffPost*, and *Cult of Pedagogy*. He lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan, with his wife, Ashlee, and son, Maddox. Mielke can be contacted via [AffectiveLiving.com/contact](http://AffectiveLiving.com/contact).

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