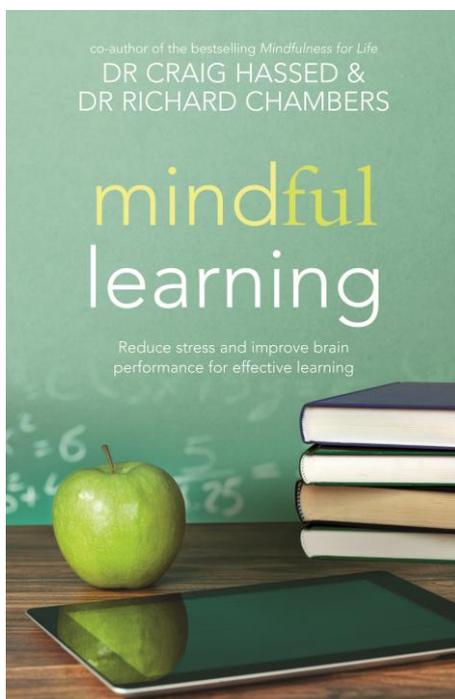


Resources & Publications

Mindful Learning: How the science of mindfulness can improve wellbeing and performance in students and educators.

By Dr Richard Chambers and Dr Craig Hassed



Mindfulness is essentially about being more aware and awake in every moment of your life. It is about intentionally paying attention to each moment, being fully engaged in whatever is happening around you and within you. It involves bringing an attitude of curiosity, acceptance and friendliness to whatever is experienced, rather than habitual patterns of judgment and criticism.

Mindfulness is the direct opposite of taking things for granted and operating on automatic pilot. The research shows that when we are not paying attention to what we are doing, default circuits become activated in the brain, mostly in the temporal and parietal lobes, along with the hippocampus, with some prefrontal activation. This default mode of attention is characterised by mind-wandering, mental chatter, dwelling on the past and worrying about the future. It is associated with a range of psychological problems including increased stress, anxiety, depression, ADHD, autism and even criminal recidivism. It has also been associated with reduced cognitive functioning, and therefore impaired academic and occupational functioning.

In contrast, when we pay deliberate attention to what we are doing, we engage different parts of the brain (primarily prefrontal regions such as the insula and anterior cingulate cortex). We experience things directly through the senses, rather than through layers of judgment, criticism and fight/flight reactivity. We all experience this way of being at times – while exercising, playing music, being in nature, engaging in hobbies and spending times with loved ones, for instance. In these moments, we are effortlessly in the present, fully engaged in the senses and fully present.

However, we all know that it is much easier to experience this mindful way of being when we are watching sunsets than when we are working our way through emails on Monday morning or trying to concentrate during an exam, as the stress starts to build. At these times, mindfulness becomes a practice – we need to deliberately and intentionally engage our attention in the senses, and bring it back when it wanders off again into default mode. Because of the neuroplastic nature of the brain, doing this repeatedly activates the prefrontal regions associated with being present, and these areas grow stronger. At the same time, the default mode areas become weaker. In this way, we literally rewire our brains to be present – and healthier and happier.

This is why learning to pay attention and increase engagement with the present moment brings benefits to students both in the classroom and in their lives generally. It is the single most important life-skill we ever learn and for this reason interest in mindfulness has in recent times gone beyond medicine and healthcare and expanded into fields such as business, sport and education. Helping students become less stressed, psychologically healthier, more empathic and have better performance just makes sense. Hence the growing support amongst educators for bringing mindfulness into the classroom and lecture theatre, from early childhood contexts through primary and secondary and tertiary institutions. Many educational organisations are now running programs for their students and some are even pioneering more integrated, whole-of-school approaches to mindfulness.

Mindful Learning lays out, in a clear and accessible way, how to do this. Written by two experts in the field of mindfulness in education, Dr Craig Hassed and Dr Richard Chambers, it is a guidebook for educators and administrators wishing to bring mindfulness into the classroom and a resource for parents and students who are interested in exploring the benefits of mindfulness themselves, as well as counsellors and therapists working with students, parents or teachers.

The book begins with an exploration of what mindfulness is and what it has to offer education. It explores the meaning of education, which in its original Latin rendering *educare* means to draw out wisdom from within the student, actively engaging them in the process of discovery rather than passively filling them with information. It also explores the science behind mindfulness and some of the neuroplastic effects of mindfulness practice. Mindful Learning then explores a number of practical means for bringing this about, including an exploration of stress reduction, attention training (including the fallacy of ‘multitasking’), memory enhancement, mental flexibility and problem solving, mindsets, emotional development, communication and relationships, mindful use of technology, creativity, movement and sport.

The book also explores ways teachers can bring elements of mindfulness into their classrooms, including the art of conducting mindful enquiry, working with resistance, as well as managing their own stress levels and the expectations of others. The book then details ways to apply mindfulness beyond the classroom, such as learning to take better care of ourselves, enhancing social development, and parenting mindfully. It concludes with some practical advice for those interested in coordinated, organisational approaches to mindfulness.

About the authors:



Dr Craig Hassed is an internationally recognised expert in mindfulness who has presented widely at national and international seminars and conferences and has published extensively in the areas of mind–body medicine and mindfulness. He has been instrumental in promoting mindfulness as a simple, natural and accessible technique for enhancing wellness, preventing and managing illness, and improving performance within health, educational and corporate settings. Craig is co-author of Exisle’s very successful *Mindfulness for Life*.

Dr Richard Chambers is a clinical psychologist in private practice, where he specialises in mindfulness-based therapies and runs regular mindfulness courses. He is also employed as a mindfulness consultant by Monash University and regularly consults to top-tier law firms and premier educational institutions. He is a developer of *Smiling Mind*, a free web and iPhone app designed to make mindfulness accessible to young people.



Mindful Learning is available from www.exislepublishing.com.au and wherever good books are sold. Also available as an eBook.