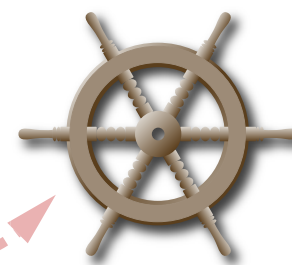


Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Charting Your Course—Professional Development meets Personal Growth

by Adela Njie, NSTU Executive Staff Officer, Professional Development

Mindful Training – Emerging Professional Development for stress management and the social-emotional demands of teaching.

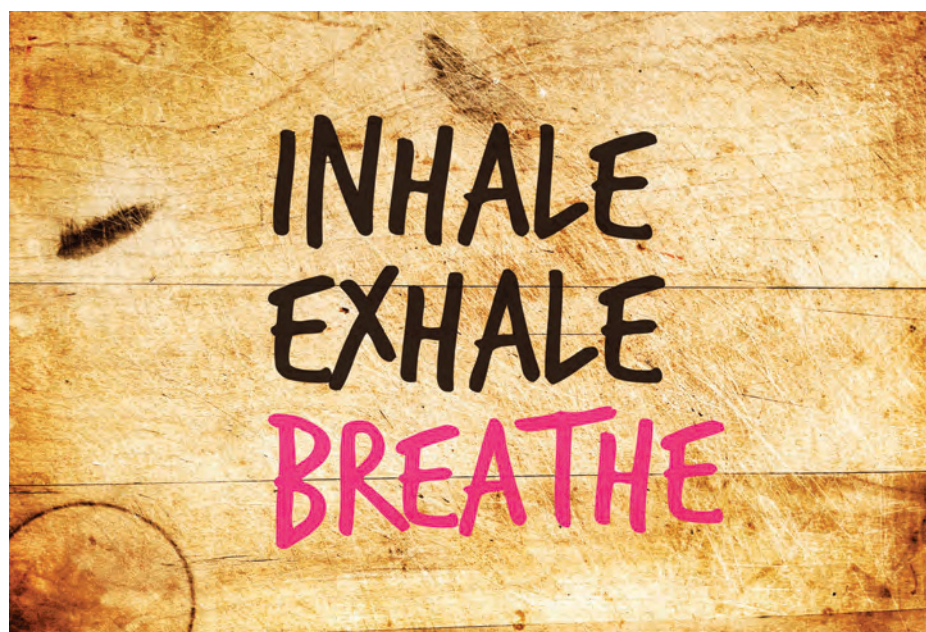
In the past articles information was shared on various Professional Development programming offered by the NSTU. This time I would like to focus on the impact professional development has on my profession and in my personal life. Professional development that has had a lasting impact is one on Mindfulness Training. Most professional development sessions are focused on improving student learning, or teacher practice. Recent research shows that there is an emerging necessity for Mindfulness Training for stress management and to help teachers respond to the social and emotional demands of the profession.

In an article *Mindfulness Training and Teachers' Professional Development: An Emerging Area of Research and Practice* by Roeser, Skinner, Beers, and Jennings, the authors state that Professional Dispositions or habits of the mind are a domain relevant to effective teaching. They define habits of mind as “those dispositions toward behaving intelligently when confronted with problems, the answers to which are not immediately known”. The article also cites (Helsing,) who shares that human service occupations like teaching, because of their social nature, involve high levels of uncertainty, emotion, and attention to others, and require habits of mind that demonstrate mental flexibility, emotion regulation, and relationship management skills. Mindfulness can influence habits of mind—such as tolerance for uncertainty, attentional focus, cognitive flexibility, and emotion regulation—improving teachers' occupational health and wellbeing, which was the most requested PD session this year by NSTU Locals and schools. What is “mindfulness” you might ask? “Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally,” (Kabat-Zinn).

My interest in mindfulness started after participating in Professional Development on Social Emotional Learning. It did not occur to me before this training that my emotions had an impact on my practice. I behaved as if my emotions stayed home while I went to work, and I never questioned how they influenced my practice, and my interactions with my students, colleagues, and school community at large. Even though emotions are an integral part of the lives of educators, there is very little professional development offered in this area.

Practicing mindfulness has allowed me to create a space that is less reactive and more responsive. It influences how I embrace or resist new learning, challenges, changes, or situations. I have gone from being an arrogant teacher who blames others for my thoughts, feelings and actions, to understanding that my thoughts, feelings and actions are conjured by no one else but my mind. I have become less focused on what I perceived was being done to me, and more observant on my reaction to people, situations and change.

Meetings, PD days, and other tasks seem less daunting as my arrogance and resistance have greatly diminished as a result of Mindful Practice. Being present allows me to observe my mind. It is now apparent that my mind loves to reorganize the truth to suit my perceptions and my needs. Being assigned a project, or a task by an administrator that I did not expect, was because they did not like me. It had nothing to do with class numbers, changing demographics, or my expertise. When more accountability is requested, my mind interprets it as micromanagement. Mindfulness also allows me to recognize my emotional triggers in a profession where constant change is prevalent.



In the book *Hijacked by your Brain* Ford and Wortmann provide information on how to create a partnership between our emotional triggers and the centers of the brain that create calm. Their formula (SOS) Step back, Orient and Self-Check as a way to focus and free oneself of stress is similar to being present. Situations that used to send me into flight, fight, or freeze mode have less of an impact on me now than they had 20 years ago.

Emotions such as frustration, anger, stress, sadness, that are fear based, I now consider as learning opportunities. I wait for my amygdala to be calm so it can communicate with my prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for logic, analyzing, and reasoning. I have less verbal tantrums about my colleagues, students, and other drivers on the road. Furthermore, my social interactions are less critical and more dynamic.

Mindful practice has also improved my creativity, as I see more possibilities than limits. The quote that is a constant in my life is one by Eckhart Tolle “The mind is a superb instrument if used rightly. Used wrongly, however, it becomes very destructive. To put it more accurately, it is not so much that you use your mind wrongly -- you usually don't use it at all. It uses you.”

Mindfulness lets me rewrite my story, and decide who drives my bus. I also understand that the movie I have created in my head about my life situation is mine. To blame others for not following my script, even though they are not aware of what it entails is very arrogant on my part and keeps me playing the role of victim in my movie. As I learned from a speaker at the ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) conference I recently attended last week, “Blame is not a strategy for improvement.”

Mindfulness is the cornerstone of my sanity in the ever-changing landscape of education and every professional development opportunity provides fuel for professional and/or personal growth.



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Email your name, home address, and school or campus with PD in the subject line to theteacher@nstu.ca by May 6 to be eligible for the draw.

Qualities of Effective Teachers by James H. Stronge

Learn how effective teachers establish and maintain learning-focused classrooms, organize time, and monitor student progress in *Qualities of Effective Teachers*. This second edition, written by James H. Stronge, includes new tips and tools for engaging at-risk students and high-ability students. It also provides skills checklists and an expanded bibliography, which helps provide further insight and exploration.

