

Experiences from Implementation in Practice

As part of the Munich Model, students independently carry out mindfulness and meditation projects in their professional fields after completing their studies. Some have become lecturers, as well. In the following section, a selection of these students report on their experiences.

A. U. Graduate of the Munich University of Applied Sciences

How the Munich model “Mindfulness and Meditation in a University Context” has influenced my studies as well as my further professional path.

Although I'd already practiced yoga before my bachelor's degree in social work at the University of Applied Sciences in Munich, it was still a mystery to me what “meditation” was really all about. I then heard during my studies about the various meditation courses offered. As I was eager to learn more about this topic, but could never get a seat in the courses, I decided to ask Prof. de Bruin if I could just audit his lectures.

I felt very lucky to be allowed to participate in this way. Through these lectures I came more and more to understand what meditation really means. From that time on, I was hooked and I wanted to learn as much as possible about it. I made an effort to combine all possible educational credits with the topic of “Mindfulness and Meditation”, in order to engage with it at the level of science. In my practical semester, while working with children, I also experienced the positive effects that an attitude of mindfulness promotes. For this reason, I also chose this topic for my bachelor thesis, which reinforced my decision to integrate “mindfulness and meditation” in my further (educational) work. When, as part of a course, we were asked to create a business plan a topic of our choice, the foundation stone for my small business “Meditation Gives You Wings” was laid, and I started my own business in early 2017.

I am very grateful that through these lectures I was able to learn meditation at an early age, as it has since played an indispensable role in both my private and professional

life. It's the reason I decided to undertake training as an MBSR teacher, based on the method of Jon Kabat-Zinn (Stress Reduction through Mindfulness) parallel to my subsequent Master's program (Diagnostics, Coaching and Intervention) at the Munich University of Applied Sciences. This, as well as further training as an MSC trainer (Mindful Self-Compassion), has left an powerful and lasting impression on me. In my master's thesis I also deal with mindful self-compassion and research “The relevance of mindful self-compassion as a resource for students of social work”. The goal is to find out what effects this form of practice has on people, especially in the helping professions, for example in dealing with caregiver fatigue, as well as how it enriches pedagogical work.

In winter semester 2019/20 a dream of mine came true when I was allowed to take over one of Prof. de Bruin's courses on the topic of “Mindfulness and Self-Compassion in Studies” at the Munich University of Applied Sciences. It was incredibly enjoyable to meditate together with the students for a whole semester and to talk about important theoretical topics and scientific findings in the context of mindfulness and (self-)compassion, as well as discussing together how and where these forms of practice can be used in one's own life, in one's studies and especially in one's later professional life as a social education worker.

G. B. Graduate of the Technical University of Munich

Meditation at university?

A fellow student told me about an elective course where one learns to meditate. I paused for a moment. Learning to meditate at university – a strange concept. He said that the seminar was completely overbooked, but I should come to the first class and ask if there was still a place for me. Well, I thought to myself, I have nothing to lose. Meditation in a university context. It crossed my mind that anyway, if it was no good, at least there were some easily earned ECTS credits. No sooner said than done. Soon I was sitting in a room with many other students

who also wanted to participate in the seminar “Meditation at School” for prospective teachers. And then the “meditation professor” Andreas de Bruin arrived. He seemed like a very normal person. No baggy pants, no incense sticks, no “OM” as a greeting. Without much explanation he drew a flying elephant on an until-then white canvas and asked us, what did it mean? Turned out later: buzzing thoughts. Shortly after this, an anchor was put on the elephant to prevent it from freely trampling everything or, rather to keep it from flying low.

And that was the beginning of a long journey for me, a journey into the world of mindfulness. This seminar was to change my life. We now met once a week for joint mindfulness exercises. Meditations while walking and sitting, a body scan while lying down, conscious eating. The peaceful silence that matured in me during these exercises had a great effect on me. I felt so relieved after each meditation and was incredibly grateful for these tools. I also had the good fortune that Andreas de Bruin invited me to the annual MBSR conference (Stress Reduction through Mindfulness) in Munich, as an assistant. After that weekend there was no doubt in my mind that I would be doing an MBSR training!

And now, seven years and about twenty MBSR courses later, I’m sitting on the mediation cushion telling the incoming students something about buzzing thoughts that can be tamed with a little discipline and lightness, thus reducing stress. I am very grateful that LMU has made such an innovative project possible under the leadership of Andreas de Bruin, thereby assuming a pioneering position in Europe.

C. K. Graduate of the Munich University of Applied Sciences

Before her death, my mother was positively transformed by a daily one-hour meditation, over a period of five years. So, I was very curious a few years later as a young adult when meditation was actually offered as a subject at our university and for which one received educational credits, thereby progressing.

Through meditating I realized what it means to be totally present, to be alive and also to feel that thoughts are just patterns and opportunities that, without mindfulness, we normally just internalize by acting and reacting accordingly. Meditation became for me the way to

achieve freedom from thoughts. Not only to experience phases of total silence of thought, but also a total distancing from thought. In the end, most of the suffering I experienced by the loss of my mother was based on painful thought constructs. [...]

Recognizing the value of meditation and mindfulness, I felt enthusiastically moved to bring more mindfulness into social work and decided to pursue a career as an addiction therapist after my studies. I was amazed to find that mindfulness has for long been implemented here and pervades all therapeutic processes, from trauma therapy to behavioral therapy. In the groups I participated in, the answer to the question of what clients who had undergone therapy considered most important, for example in the case of potential relapses, was often: mindfulness. And so my therapeutic response will also remain mindfulness, because it brings us nearer to ourselves and to life. It is the foundation that keeps emotions from overwhelming us and that enables us to better recognize and let go of toxic views about our past and future. Thanks to the Munich Model and thanks to Andreas de Bruin!

Drug counselling in prison

At an introductory drug counselling session I had 20 people mandated by the juvenile court to participate in an addiction counseling session. We had the great luxury of letting them choose between a lesson in mindfulness and the normal drug counseling, which is anything but normal. We did a Buddhist body scan and breathing meditation (Anapana), watched a film sequence about meditation at a school in a problem neighborhood in Baltimore and talked about mindfulness in general. We also had a “snow globe” with us, to symbolize the thought traffic that reigns within us and limits our happiness – because the soul or soul forces can only show themselves when there is silence.

In the individual counseling sessions, among other things, I introduced mindfulness in such a way that an empty chair is reserved for it. During the conversation I try to bring focused attention to the body, which is our access to the here and now. What is happening? The chair provides the opportunity to sit down in the place of mindfulness, thus taking a step back and seeing oneself from a distance: what does Mindfulness perceive in you now?

A. S. Graduate of the LMU Munich

During my studies, I took part in the Munich Model and now I'm furthering it, through teaching and research at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich. Meditation and mindfulness were already a part of my life before I had the good fortune to deepen them in the context of the "Meditation at School" course in my teacher training. Inspired by the idea of passing on the valuable life enrichment that meditation and mindfulness brings, I pursued a doctorate on "Mindfulness and Meditation at Schools" after my state examination and master's degree.

Meditation in school

For my doctoral thesis I developed a meditation and mindfulness program with teenage students, which was anchored in the curriculum during a regular class period. Through numerous practical exercises, the youth are given a space in which they can develop a more intensive perception of their body as well as their thoughts and feelings. In addition, they deal with topics such as concentration and self-regulation and learn facts from psychology and neuroscience. More than one hundred students in Munich, between the ages of 10 and 18, participated in the program as well as in the accompanying study, which will be published with my dissertation. A fifth grader reported: "I particularly liked the fact that we were able to close our eyes and simply allowed to be with ourselves." A sixth-grade student noted: "I feel much more balanced now."

Meditation at the university

Besides my doctorate, I also have the opportunity to introduce meditation and mindfulness to students of primary and special needs education at the LMU Munich. In regular seminars, prospective teachers experience the effects of these exercises, which will help strengthen their resilience for the future. They also have the opportunity to lead exercises themselves. The participants appreciate "the varied exercises, adapted to elementary school" as well as "the scientific background and theoretical insights". The young people obviously also personally benefit. One student sums it up: "The seminar showed me ways to feel good and enjoy life."

In my experience, ensuring that meditation and mindfulness has a place in school and university is an important step into the future. Only those who experience themselves can truly develop their potential to lead a self-determined, successful and happy life.

A. M. H. Graduate of the Munich University of Applied Sciences

I was born in Landshut, Lower Bavaria where at the age of 21, I completed my training as a state-certified pre-school teacher. As I worked for one year as the group leader of a municipal childcare center, it seemed ever more clear to me that important elements in upbringing and education, crucial for the continued development of even the youngest children, were often neglected or even lost in everyday life. So I decided to further my personal and professional development through an "Early Childhood Education" degree program at the University of Applied Sciences in Munich, leading to a state-approved early childhood education specialist qualification.

In my studies, I attended the course "Methods of Stress Management" with Professor Andreas de Bruin, as part of the Munich Model. As we tried out various methods and forms of meditation and mindfulness in the first few classes, I already noticed the first positive changes in my ability to concentrate and in my inner balance. Since we were instructed to keep a meditation journal for the duration of a semester, I integrated specific exercises into my daily routine. Through regular meditation I felt clearer in my thoughts, more relaxed and more cheerful. These effects are confirmed by some scientific studies, and this brought me back to the initial question that had originally motivated my studies. I had now discovered what elements – so important for a child's development – were missing in the education and upbringing of children.

Throughout my studies I continued to expand my exercise of mindfulness. I noticed many positive effects on my family and friends. Overall, my daily life became more carefree and I was able to face difficult challenges more easily. This brought me to the connection between mindfulness and resilience in difficult life situations. A desire quickly grew in me to scientifically substantiate these connections. I decided to write my bachelor thesis with Prof. de Bruin as my supervisor because he had guided me through the previous stages and had set me on

this path through his classes. The initial question of my thesis focused on the connections between mindfulness in day care centers and the strengthening of factors of personal resilience.

As I was so impressed by the results of various studies on this subject, I simultaneously trained as a relaxation education specialist for children at the “fitmedi” academy for independent health professions and became a promoter of resilience training in day-care centers at the Protestant University of Applied Sciences in Freiburg, Germany, in cooperation with the Centre for Child and Youth Research, led by Ms. Rönna-Böse and Mr. Fröhlich-Gildhoff.

Afterwards I launched my own company, “Heldenstärke”, by offering various courses on relaxation techniques for children and adults. Soon, my courses were recognized by various health insurance companies as a successful preventative offering for health and stress, and “Kita-Aktuell” – a professional journal published by Wolters-Kluwer for day-care center providers and managers – took notice of my work.

After I had successfully completed my bachelor thesis, Prof. de Bruin helped me write an article for “Kita-Aktuell” on the same topic, “Mindfulness and resilience in daycare centers”, which was recently published.

Meanwhile, at the age of 24, I give several advanced trainings and seminars for professionals, parents and enthusiasts, I run a day care center for children and regularly host prevention courses for children and adults. Looking back on the last three years, it’s clear that attending the course “Methods of Stress Management” was pivotal in my professional development.

A. S. Graduate of the Munich University of Applied Sciences

Mindfulness in the pre-school curative education day care

The eight children in my group are between 3 and 6 years old and are looked after by me and another teacher. We live together between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., as in a small family. Our group is situated in a home that promotes values such as mindfulness and humanity through lived example.

In my work, I feel so enriched by the mindfulness and spirit of discovery that the children bring with them.

The singing bowl ritual gives our group a gentle start to the day. We come together in the morning circle, the children hold hands; I hold the singing bowl in my hand and let it sound once. The children listen to the sound until the end and then, when they no longer hear it, they sit down.

We also practice mindfulness when we play with sand. We have three Zen gardens in the group and at times the children are completely absorbed in raking them and designing their own garden. They can redesign it, again and again.

We practice mindfulness as we observe animals; we are very quiet, so as not to frighten them. We’re connected with the one moment in which we pause. We like to watch the two squirrels in front of our balcony door when they get food from the food box we fill together. We watch the animals drinking in the rain gutter and do gymnastics as they climb trees. The children are very focused and attentive. Afterwards, we reflect on what we have just observed.

We did the lemon exercise together and noticed that most of us found it difficult to imagine a lemon. So we did a preliminary exercise and offered the children a real lemon wedge to bite into. We noticed how sour a lemon is. To my astonishment, lemon became their favorite fruit. All week long they wanted lemons for dessert.

In children’s yoga we practice the first figures such as cat, cow, dog and mountain.

Last spring there was a sensory parcourse with various exercises. The feet are great tactile instruments, and there are different surfaces to walk on. Some children have the trust to walk on them with their eyes closed.

After lunch together, it’s time to relax. During our break we regularly relax through an imaginary journey that leads to peace and quiet. The children like to have a say in the content. The children have a lot of ideas, and we try to take them up and respond as best we can.

When consciously arranged with the children, playing the guitar, making music and singing are all little exercises in mindfulness. We try to create a framework for this and always show them what kind of interaction we’re striving for, because if you’re not calm and mindful yourself, you can’t convey it to others either.

I look forward to the day that mindfulness becomes firmly established in other institutions.

What's particularly positive is that the children are friendlier to each other and also approach their fellow human beings more respectfully. There is less quarrelling, and more peaceful play. In this respect, the fixed rituals of the group's daily routine are supporting them.

J. F. S. Graduate of the LMU Munich

Mindfulness for me means the deep authenticity and integrity of being the author of one's own life. To me, cultivating mindfulness means: to live an awake, conscious and present life. With the intention of wanting to live such a life, I came across meditation and mindfulness.

I can think of several biographical points of reference for mindfulness. Although there may not be only one decisive point, there are a number of experiences that have significantly influenced the path I am following today: the search for mental balance and self-acceptance since puberty, a serious sports injury in my early twenties and the handling of this challenge physically and mentally, the desire to live a clear and enlightened life. After a lot of trial and error, I now practice mainly Qigong and mindfulness and meditation every day. The qualities of BEING awake, BEING conscious, BEING present are inherent in every human being, but to what extent and with what depth this is achieved is probably the decisive factor. A certain amount of practice, a cultivation of the posture of mindfulness, is needed to make it truly tangible and a lived experience. It is especially important to me that mindfulness is fostered in the educational institutions of our society. For this reason, I am working on a systematized concept of mindfulness for teacher training in the context of my doctorate. Additionally, I facilitate a seminar called "Mindfulness in Pedagogy" at the University of Passau, as well as workshops at the LMU Munich and the MZL Munich. I also organize trainings – for example at PROFiL at the LMU Munich or at the Elite Network of Bavaria – and give lectures on the theme of mindfulness, especially in the context of universities and schools.

