



# CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

THE POWER OF MINDFULNESS IN THE CLASSROOM

ALAN MORGAN

LECTURER MARKETING DEPARTMENT DUBLIN BUSINESS  
SCHOOL

# INTRODUCTION

- **Alan Morgan – Marketing Lecturer @ Dublin Business School**
- **Dublin Business School**
  - Ireland's largest independent third-level college offering over 100 accredited courses in Business, Law, Arts, Psychology, Film & Media and Journalism to more than 9,000 students from Ireland, Europe and further afield.

# SETTING THE SCENE: 1990 - 2011

- **1990 -2012**
  - 22 years working within the International Marketing & Supply Chain arena in the Retail Industry
- **2012 – Following a life changing event - I Made the Jump to Academia.....!**
  - Part-Time Lecturer @ Dublin Business School and IBAT College
- **2014**
  - Alan Morgan – Full-Time Lecturer @ Dublin Business School's Marketing Department

# SETTING THE SCENE: 2011 - 2015

- **2011**
  - Due to personal reasons I developed a interest in Mindfulness
- **2012**
  - I discovered the amazing power of mindfulness as I developed my own mindful way of living
- **2013-14**
  - Postgraduate Diploma in Third Level Teaching & Learning (DIT LTTC)
  - During Post-Grad studies I developed an understanding of contemplative practices in the classroom

## SETTING THE SCENE: 2011 - 2015

- **2015**
  - Became an Entrepreneurial Educator
  - Entrepreneurial Education became the “enabler” for me to bring mindful practice into the classroom @ DBS

# SETTING THE SCENE: PROJECT BACKGROUND

- During my time at the academy I discovered **Daniel Barbezat's** work and his research into Contemplative Practices in Higher Education.
- **Applied** for a scholarship to attend a contemplative workshop in New York run by Barbezat in Sept 2015

- **- REFUSED..!**

- **BYE BYE NEW YORK**



- **As part of my Diploma project** I began a broader research approach to the use of contemplative practices in my classes @ DBS as a research base for my EE project

# MINDFUL BACKGROUND

- Contemplative pedagogy remained largely outside mainstream western higher education prior to about the year 2000 (Repetti, 2010).
- Contemplative pedagogy is now being advanced by thousands of educators worldwide.
- Contemplative pedagogy serves several educational goals, and current research shows that contemplative practice, even if performed for short periods, improves attention, cognition, and cognitive flexibility. (Jha 2007; Tang et al. 2007), (Zeidan 2010), (Moore, 2009)

# THE PROJECT

- **This study** explores the experience of implementing MMP (Mindful Meditation Practice) in the classroom at DBS.
- **The focus** was on simplicity of implementation, minimal disruption, student engagement with the practice and any positive effects this may bring to the concentration/attention abilities of students.

# THE PROJECT

- The study was implemented in three different class sizes over a ten week period
  - 70 students
  - 50 students
  - 28 students
- Once a week in each of the three class sizes a 3 - 5 minute contemplative practice based on Mindfulness was undertaken.
- The mindfulness instructions was based on the work of Daniel Barezat (2014)
- All students present took part

# THE MINDFULNESS INSTRUCTION

- **The five minute mindfulness focused on:**
  - Breathing
  - Being in the Present
  - Awareness of Being
  - Controlling Focus
  - Mindful walking

# QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT

- Students completed a questionnaire just after week 8 of the mindful practice to ascertain their opinions on introducing mindfulness into their learning.
- The results were extremely encouraging, particularly surrounding attitudes towards combining mindfulness and learning.
- The number of respondents was **67**. This is a response rate of **45%** based on the maximum module attendance during the eight week research period.

# QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The questionnaire design was focused on the students basic reaction to the effect of mindfulness in the classroom.

- The research objectives were based around the following criteria:
  1. Mindfulness effect on concentration
  2. Mindfulness effect on focus in the classroom / on the subject matter
  3. Mindfulness effect on positive attitude toward the learning experience
  4. Mindfulness effect on student relaxation and enjoyment of the experience
  5. Mindfulness is a complete waste of class time

# Quantitative Research

I FEEL THAT PRACTICING MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS FOR 3 MINUTES AT THE START OF CLASS.....

		1	2	3	4	5	6
	ANSWER	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A	Helps my Concentration in class						
B	Helps me to focus on the subject being taught in class						
C	Helps me to maintain an overall positive attitude to the learning experience						
D	It is just a very enjoyable and relaxing practice						
E	Is a complete waste of class time and I have no interest whatsoever						

PLEASE TICK BOXES FOR EACH STATEMENT: A,B ,C,D & E

# QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

- **67 results** when analysed showed the following results:
  - **63% of respondents** “Strongly Agree” that MMP has a positive effect on concentration, subject focus, positive in-class attitude, enjoyment and relaxation
  - **26% of respondents** “Agree” that MMP has a positive effect on concentration, subject focus, positive in-class attitude, enjoyment and relaxation
  - **7% of respondents** “Neither Agree or Disagree” with MMP in the classroom
  - **4% of respondents** thought that MMP was a complete waste of class time and they had no interest whatsoever

# QUALITATIVE COMMENTS

- **Some of the students wrote comments on the survey form which I believe are worth sharing:**
  1. *“It would be nice to have this every day! I would like to know more about this”*
  2. *I really enjoy practicing mindfulness – thanks a lot for introducing it to me”*
  3. *“It is a good way to start the 9am morning class”*

# LEARNINGS

- Students enjoy something different
- They relate to educators who 'think outside the box'
- Simple yet radical change can be achieved very easily

# PERSONAL LEARNINGS & LESSONS LEARNT

- The most significant change that occurred for me during this process;
  1. The realisation that being creative and different is positive and creates a positive mind-set in the classroom
  2. Taking a leadership role to change something – not just following the same worn path
  3. Acting as an enabler to enhance the students teaching and learning environment

# MANAGEMENT REACTION

## **Andrew Conlan Trant – Executive Dean**

*“The results of Alan’s research are very clear to see. I see this as a very important piece of work. Student retention is a big issue for all educational institutions and here at DBS I believe that student engagement, contentment & happiness has a direct correlation with our retention figures”*

## **Darrin Brien – Head of School**

*“Alan’s work has shown some really interesting results. The benefits of this practice to our students clearly outweigh any negativities. I will certainly be speaking with Alan in the New Year about how, as a college we could investigate MMP in the classroom further”*

# PEER REACTION

- **Siobhan Magner – Program Leader & Senior Marketing Lecturer**
- *“I am very excited at the prospect of Alan’s research being put into practice as part of our module delivery here at DBS”*
- *“As a result of Alan's implementation of mindfulness in the classroom, student services have included mindfulness sessions during DBS's Mental Health week which is coming up shortly. To date, the sessions have been oversubscribed “*

## WHAT NOW?

- Attended ICEP Conference on Friday 4th December 2015 (International Conference on Engaging Pedagogy). This years conference theme was “*Voice of the Educator - Self Care and Contemplative Practices*’
- The keynote speaker at this years conference was Daniel Barbezat.
- I have presented Daniel my work and he is very keen to follow the development of MMP @ DBS

## WHAT NOW?

- My project & its findings will be presented at the DBS Research Day to help create a platform for further research into the use of Contemplative Practices @ DBS
- I will continue to develop my own in-class contemplative practices as part of my teaching & Learning Philosophy

## ICEP ACTION PLAN

- In conjunction with ICEP Board - Griffith College & UCD are now collaboratively working on a draft module descriptor for a level 9 (10 ECTS credits) course;
- “Mindfulness Approaches to Teaching and Learning in Higher Education”

## WATCH THIS SPACE!

- Although findings reviewed here provide some preliminary evidence suggesting that MMP's could enhance cognitive functions, further high quality studies investigating mindfulness meditation programmes are needed.
- BUT, the growth in interest and activity in this space cannot be ignored!

THANK YOU

