

Chapter 36

Heart-Based Teaching: A Mindfulness Program for Preservice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Heart-Based Teaching, a mindfulness training program embedded in the professional education curriculum of preservice teacher candidates, is described. Heart-Based Teaching prepares teacher candidates to model and teach mindfulness to help their future students achieve social emotional goals as well as to enhance the teacher candidates' own social emotional competencies. Theoretical and research bases of the program as well as specific elements of implementation are included: structure of the two required courses, mini-lecture/discussion topics of each class session, assignments, assessments, and rubrics. Some initial qualitative data that contributed to program development are presented, and parameters of an ongoing robust quantitative study are described. Heart-Based Teaching is presented as a replicable model for other teacher education programs.

INTRODUCTION

Heart-Based Teaching prepares teacher candidates to access and maintain their caring hearts in the classroom. When teachers care, students care—about themselves, their classmates, their teachers, and their learning. In the Heart-Based Teaching (HBT) approach, teachers and students work together not only to achieve the cognitive goals of “college and career readiness,” but also to create a classroom environment that can support the development of the social emotional knowledge and skills that have been linked to personal and career success (Goleman, Boyatzia, & McKee, 2002). Mindfulness, the capacity to maintain an awareness of the present moment, without judgment, in the ever-changing now (Kabat-Zinn, 1994),

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provides the foundation for the HBT curriculum. Through this curriculum, mindfulness helps teacher candidates strengthen their in-the-moment awareness, helping them regulate their own emotions and behaviors and be more attuned to and compassionate toward students. Mindfulness also helps teacher candidates develop a classroom management style based in caring and support rather than adherence to a discipline external to students, teacher, and their developing relationships (Gold, Smith, Hopper, Herne, Tansy, & Hulland, 2010).

HBT targets two challenges for teacher educators: first, to strengthen teacher candidates’ social emotional competencies (SEC) in order that they may cope more effectively with the daily onslaught of classroom stressors, and second, to prepare candidates to address the demanding social emotional learning (SEL) goals (see Table 1) mandated by many states and school districts. Because HBT as a curriculum continued to evolve as candidate feedback was analyzed over the first semesters of implementation, no quantitative data from the program are presented here. However, the authors do provide examples from candidates’ writings that describe effects of HBT, demonstrating how this program prepares them to develop future students’ range of SEL skills and abilities as well as their own SEC. Parameters of a robust quantitative study currently planned are also described.

Table 1. Social emotional learning standards for PK-12 students

<p>Goal 1: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.</p>	<p>Why this goal is important: Several key sets of skills and attitudes provide a strong foundation for achieving school and life success. One involves knowing your emotions, how to manage them, and ways to express them constructively. This enables one to handle stress, control impulses, and motivate oneself to persevere in overcoming obstacles to goal achievement. A related set of skills involves accurately assessing abilities and interests, building strengths, and making effective use of family, school, and community resources. Finally, it is critical for students to be able to establish and monitor their progress toward achieving academic and personal goals.</p>
	<p>A. Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior.</p>
	<p>B. Recognize personal qualities and external supports.</p>
	<p>C. Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.</p>
<p>Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.</p>	<p>Why this goal is important: Building and maintaining positive relationships with others are central to success in school and life and require the ability to recognize the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others, including those different from one’s own. In addition, establishing positive peer, family, and work relationships requires skills in cooperating, communicating respectfully, and constructively resolving conflicts with others.</p>
	<p>A: Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.</p>
	<p>B: Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.</p>
	<p>C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.</p>
<p>Goal 3: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.</p>	<p>Why this goal is important: Promoting one’s own health, avoiding risky behaviors, dealing honestly and fairly with others, and contributing to the good of one’s classroom, school, family, community, and environment are essential to citizenship in a democratic society. Achieving these outcomes requires an ability to make decisions and solve problems on the basis of accurately defining decisions to be made, generating alternative solutions, anticipating the consequences of each, and evaluating and learning from one’s decision making.</p>
	<p>A: Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.</p>
	<p>B: Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.</p>
	<p>C. Contribute to the well-being of one’s school and community.</p>

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