

# Mindfulness: Beyond the Buzzword

So, what's the buzz all about? The term *mindfulness* has popped up everywhere, from training regimens for Olympic athletes to keynote talks at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

One summer workshop I gave used it in the working title (“Mindfulness: Beyond the Buzzword”), and the room was so packed that people had to sit on the floor. I thought this was great—everyone was so eager to hear about “mindfulness,” a topic that had been somewhat obscure in previous years. While this was encouraging to me, I realized it could be seen as a harbinger of the word’s abstract vagueness, adding confusion to complexity—if a word grows into a buzzword, it runs the risk of being commodified, exploited, misinterpreted, and ultimately misunderstood. I’m no purist, yet I’m motivated to promote and maintain the integrity of something as resonant and important as mindfulness.

It’s not too bold a statement to say that mindfulness has powers to change the entire learning environment and experience; it’s an effective change-maker that is scientifically proven to make a huge difference in quality of life. I wanted to simplify it, to demystify what was happening with the rise in popularity of the term. When someone asks me to explain what mindfulness is, I usually respond that it’s a building of three capacities: Awareness, Advancement, and Authenticity. And it’s truly nothing but a concept—*until we apply and embody it.*

## A Practical Definition of Mindfulness

It’s a common practice to define mindfulness as a “focused awareness.” University of Massachusetts researcher Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005), famous for helping to develop

mindfulness programs through his use of MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction), calls mindfulness “awareness of the present moment on purpose without judgment.”

There are other popular definitions, too. In their co-authored book on mindfulness, aptly subtitled *A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World*, Mark Williams and Danny Penham (2011) call it a “simple form of meditation” that is all about “observation without criticism; being compassionate with yourself.”

The simple definition of mindfulness that I’ve created is “a way to be in the world, using Three A’s: Aware, Advancing, Authentic.”

It starts on a personal level, and has amazing results, with the potential to reach many others through this presence. Because the focus is on a state of being, the simple definition of mindfulness that I’ve created is “a way to be in the world, using Three A’s: Aware, Advancing, Authentic.”

## **Aware**

### **of self; of others; of senses and context**

Being aware involves increasing your focus and knowledge about the current situation, surroundings; emphasis on questions over instant answers, projecting outward, seeing all angles and factors. Sharpening listening skills and techniques. Awareness of multiple perspectives.

## **Advancing**

### **active, curious, insightful stretching, outward and inward**

Advancing involves using trends and methods to test assumptions and chart a course, resilience-building; adaptability. Looking at a system and seeing influences. Prioritizing the goals that have more to do with the “why” objectives. Purpose-driven organizational change. After addressing the “why,” moving outward to the “how” and then the “what.”

## **Authentic**

### **accepting of self and others, without judgment**

Being authentic involves developing a true voice and presence, applied to speaking, writing, and all levels of innovation and design. Questioning assumptions and judgments. Using terms that MIT’s Otto Scharmer (2009) uses, employing *open mind* (non-judging), *open heart* (noncynicism), and *open will* (release of fear), this is the stage that allows for the greatest leaps in social awareness, empathy building, and rich compassion. Major personal and organizational shifts are possible here (Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013).

This approach shapes mindfulness as a choice about how to be in the world, using the three core principles of “Aware, Advancing, Authentic” as guides and a framework to turn embodiment into action. It puts the power in the individual’s hands, giving back agency, ownership, and true freedom. It’s purposeful presence with trust. For learners, this has huge impact.

Throughout this book, the mindfulness exercises are connected to the Three A’s, with details about each principle and how it directly connects to outcomes and strengths built as a result.

Mindfulness has applications in every discipline imaginable. It’s not just insight that directs inward—it’s also an expansion outward, with curiosity and care, addressing other cultures and environments. Imagine the possibilities for education, in designing curriculum that spans the globe.

When I incorporate mindfulness into my daily life, inviting it into the classroom, I focus on both the definition of mindfulness as a way to be, and its Three As in active application, using it to actualize many benefits, including:

- ▶ promoting presence (Aware)
- ▶ increasing focus (Advancing)
- ▶ boosting connection capacity for relational trust (Authentic)

In the different exercises in this book, I explicitly point out some of the ways the exercise enhances each of the Three As to illuminate the deliberate, intentional connections. Mindfulness sets a stable ground for learning and expanding, allowing teachers and students to connect with themselves and with others. We are more empathetic, and more compassionate—less rigid and fixed. While the word can seem vague and abstract on its own, we see mindfulness in action in engaged classrooms, and we know when mindfulness is absent from the environment and state of mind.

Thus, *what it is* also involves *what it isn’t*.

### Aware

of self; of others; of senses and context

### Advancing

active, curious, insightful stretching, outward and inward

### Authentic

accepting of self and others, without judgment

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*Since we had all built up a sense of trust and motivation between ourselves, it was easy being open about thoughts. I thought that everyone was able to share their ideas without being criticized for them, and it helped the overall classroom experience and how we collaboratively tackled problems.*

*I believe that an open environment is one of the best to have in a classroom as ideas are exchanged and people learn to work together on different topics that they would maybe not know how to tackle themselves. Therefore, openness and communication are key to ensure collaboration.*

—Rafael, former student

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To clear up some myths and misconceptions, here are some of the useful (and surprising) discoveries I've made about mindfulness along the way:

Mindfulness involves mental focus and training. It is not a religion, though the word mindfulness has origins in Buddhism. In a secular way, it is truly addressing the mind itself and a way of heightening awareness.

Some exercises related to mindfulness incorporate meditation, and many of the mindfulness meditation activities will focus on the breath as a guide and a focus. You don't have to sit on the floor or assume any special physical position in order to exercise mindfulness—it can happen anywhere, anytime.

Using mindfulness does not result in a weaker willpower, and it does not make you more passive or happy-go-lucky. In fact, mindfulness deepens the clarity with which you see the world and engage with it. It helps with everything from goal-setting to learning—with passion!

Scientific findings, as well as Jon Kabat-Zinn's successful and well-regarded MBSR courses (mentioned earlier), have caused mindfulness to gain attention over the past few decades, and its many applications continue to be a topic of curiosity and enthusiasm in many different societal institutions and learning environments.

## Mindful Qualities of Learning

When educators incorporate mindfulness into learning, amazing things start to happen. Lessons that incorporate mindfulness offer chances to build mental focus so that students and teachers are able to make authentic connections, responding to a dynamic

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*You made the classroom a safe space to share thoughts. I remember looking forward to not only sharing my ideas but hearing everyone else's. I know sharing is difficult at times. I've struggled with speaking in front of people, but never in your classroom. I would volunteer to share ideas and then listen to others. I felt confident in my ideas.*

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—Claire, former student

environment that is neither rigid nor static. Research shows that mindfulness practices decrease toxic stress and anxiety, improving connections, relationships, and levels of attention. Adopting a mindfulness practice also has great benefits in social-emotional arenas, linked to compassion and empathy, among other beneficial traits. Students will be aware of this quality of mindfulness, which increases our ability as educators to dwell in the present moment, holding space for what arises and what is needed, connecting with students, and establishing relational trust in community.

Mindfulness implies being more flexible and open; this requires a certain breathing space and mental acuity that we can adopt first, as educators, and then stretch to bring to our classrooms.

The benefits of mindfulness that are especially powerful for educators to consider include the following four arenas:

1. Attention management, greater awareness
2. Increased focus and concentration, less attachment and reactivity to emotion
3. Health and well-being, including calming abilities in stressful situations
4. Conscious decision-making and greater compassion for self and others

Benefits of mindfulness in education are vast, and a greater number of scientific studies, with foundations in neuroscience research and findings, are published every year. I keep up to date with the latest findings and continue to publish them online, also following others' research and posts. Many of the current scientific findings are available on the Mindful Schools research page, which reports (with further citations online) that "When teachers learn mindfulness, they not only reap personal benefits such as reduced stress and burnout, but their schools do as well. In randomized controlled trials, teachers who learned mindfulness reported greater efficacy in doing their jobs and had more emotionally supportive classrooms and better classroom organization based on independent observations" (Mindfulschools.org, 2018).

Regarding studies relating to mindfulness exercises and student benefits, the Mindful Schools site reports, "Studies find that youth benefit from learning mindfulness in terms of improved cognitive outcomes, social-emotional skills, and well-being. In turn, such benefits may lead to long-term improvements in life. For example, social skills in kindergarten predict improved education, employment, crime, substance abuse and mental health outcomes in adulthood" (Mindfulschools.org, 2018).

It starts in the classroom, and grows from there. There are new applications for mindfulness springing up across a wide variety of industries, including:

- ▶ Engineering
- ▶ Politics
- ▶ Economics
- ▶ Business
- ▶ Technology
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Science
- ▶ Health

While it's hard to pinpoint exactly what mindfulness looks like in practice, because it's not formulaic, we can all envision what a person who embodies mindfulness in day-to-day life might represent, in traits and behavior. Over years of leading mindfulness and leadership seminars and dialogues, participants and I have had discussions that aim to define some of the characteristics of mindfulness—without trying to be limiting. This is one list example recorded during a group roundtable that took place at a "Mindful Leadership" meetup:

A mindful person is . . .

- ▶ aware
- ▶ listening
- ▶ advancing
- ▶ approachable (not arrogant)
- ▶ authentic
- ▶ has flaws and is authentic about showing them
- ▶ resilient
- ▶ selfless
- ▶ focused
- ▶ caring
- ▶ committed to social good
- ▶ honest
- ▶ loyal
- ▶ positive
- ▶ charismatic
- ▶ open-hearted
- ▶ passionate
- ▶ open-minded
- ▶ present
- ▶ open-willed

I reference this list again in this book, in the exercise for teachers about values, called “Prime Values, Purpose, and Presence.” When we look deeply into how our actions connect to our core beliefs, we might find that our values are connected to our sense of purpose, our “why” that gives us a reason, even if that reason is intuitive. Once these values are realized, they can manifest in better quality of health, increased satisfaction and engagement, improved focus and awareness, and many other measurable statistics shown by scientific studies. In tremendous, life-changing ways, often surprising, the benefits are limitless . . . it takes beginning with enthusiasm and open curiosity . . . and it leads to better presence, which impacts the outer world.

### **Four Cornerstones of a Mindfulness AAA Mindset in a Learning Culture**

Being “mindful,” embracing and embodying mindfulness, means you have a “Mindfulness AAA Mindset”—you are Aware, Advancing, and Authentic by nature. It’s the lens from which you look, the mindset from which you operate, the way you choose to be in the world. AAA is, by definition, about simplicity over complexity. It’s a way of being.

Now, the question is, once you decide you would like to choose that way of being, what could happen? What would you perhaps see around you, in quality and form, that would then be linked to this foundation, with our vocation in mind? Four prime values emerge that serve as cornerstones. These four cornerstones, foundational values, and elements manifest in every individual and organization that identifies with a Mindfulness AAA Mindset. We might even view them as related to the culture of the classroom—they are *culture cornerstones*, pointing to the values of what we stand for, as mindful leaders. They are: Dignity, Freedom, Invention, and Agency.

These four prime elements are visible and celebrated in every *Mindful by Design* environment—natural cornerstones that become visible when one chooses mindfulness. The AAA is the definition of mindfulness itself; the four culture cornerstones of

Dignity, Freedom, Invention, and Agency are what it means to apply *Mindful by Design*—what emerges as part of the classroom culture. In evident ways, they are the embodiment of a learner in action. While they are linked, each has its own distinguishing traits that are embodied in different ways, showing themselves through classroom interactions, mood, experiences, and ultimately, outcomes.

*Dignity* is at the core of my classroom, and is present throughout this book in different “For the Classroom” exercises. It involves actionable, palpable respect and care for each individual in the group. Students feel that you, as a teacher, are treating them with dignity—often, they will articulate this as feeling “respected.” The art of listening, holding spaces, sharing with a mindful reverence for the “other” as a source of insight, building awareness of connections rather than separations, embodying and acting out of respect for self and others—these are all inherently part of dignity. I want students to expect the best from themselves and from each other, and this is also what dignity represents.

*Freedom*, when operating from a place of dignity, means that each individual has a voice; each student is recognized and welcomed. It’s a freedom to create new connections and form understanding and inferences, as well. This means that students can personally reflect and connect, sharing ideas, thoughts, and reflections in community with others, building social and emotional learning capacities. I think, often, we might bypass and/or overlook this phase of deep self-awareness and social-awareness, which have a lot to do with feeling endorsed and welcomed from the beginning—to be free, in many senses, to investigate what it means to be curious learners at this particular place and time. What do we need to spark this level of engagement?

### On Dignity

*Often, it seems like a statement that is just placed in the syllabus (“Respect each other”), discussed the first day, and then never thought of again. The teacher needs to model that respect for their students, and then in turn, the students can really respect one another. You were able to accomplish this by really listening to what each of us contributed to the conversation and validating and building upon our opinions to encourage further discussion by others in the class.*

—Charlotte, former student

*It reinforces how you treat a classroom, that students are not numbers. You saw us all as individuals, and you treated us all with respect and care.*

—Viki, former student

### On Freedom

*The biggest help for me was learning and experiencing enough to see that ideas come from the connections we make through learning, not directly from the source from which we learned. Source material can create a spark, but it can’t get you all the way there, not when your unique perspective is fundamentally different from anyone you’re working with. Learning to do things like brainstorm uninhibited, to present ideas that may not be the best fit at first, and understanding that to be wrong is to accept a challenge rather than accepting defeat—that sparks the critical thinking needed to pare the ideas down, and bring the successes to completion.*

—Ellen, former student

### On Invention

*The thing that I feel makes the biggest difference in innovative learning is understanding that no idea is a bad idea. The only way to be truly innovative is to come up with hundreds of ideas and then weed them out one by one until you come up with something innovative. . . . If we didn't put so many ideas on the board (say, we only came up with ten) then I never would have come up with the idea that eventually won us the competition. Like I said, it made me realize that no idea is really a bad idea.*

—Joseph, former student

### On Agency

*I finally learned how to seek out my own learning. I wish I had more classes like that as a child. I didn't feel exhausted or burnt out. Though the curriculum was set to some extent, I learned a lot about making connections and finding ways to integrate passion into purpose. I found the things I loved learning about.*

—Ellen, former student

*Invention* comes from “*What if . . . ?*” questions and opportunities to design possibilities. With a base of dignity and freedom in place, the cornerstone of invention is about mindful problem-solving, creativity, and meeting real-world challenges with feelings of optimism, inclusion, compassion, and commitment. As inventors, students carry with them all of their amazing insights, ideas, and dreams. As W. B. Yeats says in his poem “The Cloths of Heaven,” “Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.” The mindful inventions that come forward from here have the power to change the world.

*Agency* is the sense of creative power—the pride and ownership of learning—that students carry with them. It is what they will take far into the future, spanning beyond the four walls of our classroom space. *Agency* couples with identity, and turns to mindful act. It also affects approaches to assessment. Depending on the complexity, I start by guiding students, using questions and models to make learning visible. Eventually, students develop their own personal agency, and this is when relational trust meets evident action, reflecting the four culture cornerstones together in consonance (*such alliteration!*).

To have a sense of agency is to belong, and to understand the connection to a larger system, with understanding and empathy for the value of each perspective and contribution. When students feel a sense of agency, working in tandem alongside dignity, freedom, and invention, what sort of learning environment will this be? How will it feel to be a teacher and student in that mindful space?

## Presence: The X Factor

Teachers know it when they experience it: the raw confrontation of facing a classroom of students for the first time. Everyone comes into a classroom with their own set of histories, perhaps a set of fears. It can be an intimidating moment: the energy of thirty adolescents packed into the room, legs and arms spilling out over the desks, pencils tapping, feet moving, bodies rocking, a mass of fifteen-to-eighteen-year-old enthusiasm, anger, frustration, confusion, desperation, wit, joy, impulse, and deliberation—it can all become undeniably chaotic and adrenaline-inducing, all at once.

I entered the high school classroom for my first day of teaching with absolute verve, remembering all of the *education about education* that I had received. I had every lesson printed, every minute decided. I had clipboards with attendance rosters and journals with labels of my students' names. I knew how to differentiate instruction—in theory, at least; I knew about different learning styles; I intellectually *knew* what it meant to teach. The trouble was, I hadn't done it yet, and it scared the heck out of me. I was more nervous as a first-year teacher than I had been as a student entering high school, and I tried to deny my fear, letting it become absorbed by the constant action surrounding me.

I hit the ground running, with detailed plans and clipboard in tow, but it didn't always go as expected. Unforeseen events in a classroom not only caught me off guard but also seemed to undermine my entire authority. While I tried to maintain complete control, I found that when I let myself instead focus on the purpose of my teaching—supporting my students—that's when my ego began to dissolve, and I allowed myself to truly inhabit my role as a guide and mentor. My presence allowed me to invite reflection, to foster connections, and to truly recognize my students, inviting dynamic exchanges that were authentic and meaningful.

Gradually, I came to understand that the number one quality that impacted my students' experience in my classes was something I could effectively change at will: my presence. I had ample book knowledge, skills at my craft, energy spent in preparation, and as much curiosity as the most vivacious student; yet it was my ability to be fully present that made more of a difference than anything else.

Once I discovered this, it was the most wonderful “aha!” moment, and also the most frightening challenge. All other criteria were within my ability to control; presence was the most elusive, and yet I knew it would be the key to being able to connect with students, and to serve as an effective teacher.

I knew what my presence looked and felt like, and I could see its effects. When I was present and fully “in flow,” I would walk into a room, and I could sense subtle details surrounding me. I could see who was having a good day and who wasn't, and I could quickly decide when to move on from one exercise or discussion to a new point. I was actively listening, and the students were responsive.

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*I was a person who was always afraid to be wrong . . . yet in our class, it was about reflecting. We shared and discussed.*

—Viki, former student

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*Something that I appreciated then, and even more so as adult, is how you invited people/students to have a conversation rather than speaking to them. That conversation that a teacher has with a student allows the student to open up and think in ways that she might not have even thought of before. Making the student an equal in a conversation not only challenges them, but it gives them more confidence and encourages them to speak and think for themselves. Turning a lecture into a dialogue makes a world of difference.*

—Molly, former student

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It was as if a form of magic had descended upon the room. We were all aware of it, yet no one could actively pinpoint what it was. The trouble was, this presence that I had established was fleeting, not a stable certainty.

On a good day, I knew that teaching would be my life's passion. I could tell when a class was "with me" and enthralled by certain parts of the material and discussion; like this, I could teach for a lifetime. On the days when I was not engaged, it was as if I set the tone for the entire class: I would walk in uncertain or in a slightly "off" mood, and calamity would result.

I taught all levels of courses, from honors to a group thought to be the most challenging from a disciplinary standpoint—the lowest in "academic achievement." It turned out to be this group that was often the most rewarding and creative in mindset and approach. The subjects were British and American literature. I was given a textbook, key objectives, and outcomes, yet I also had free rein to design parts of the curriculum

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*I felt so endorsed and encouraged every time I shared a poem, whether it was in class or in poetry club. Ages fourteen and fifteen are really hard, and I think it is a time in a teenager's life when they really need teachers to believe in them, especially if they are not getting that at home. If it wasn't for your belief in me, I don't think I would be in college pursuing a degree in writing, especially with a concentration in poetry. Teachers can make such an incredible impact and I don't think they always realize that.*

—Charlotte, former student

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according to my choice of independent readings. There was a lot of freedom, and this open approach made such a positive difference for me: the chance to craft my lessons.

I learned how to hone my own *presence*, how to shape it in the best way to engage students, how to use it to keep myself sustained and whole in the process. I was there to attend to students, and that was my purpose: to convey that everyone has significance, and every voice matters. That special evolution is distilled down into practices in this book, beginning with the "Mindfulness for Teachers" exercises, there for you to try out and experience for yourself.

Each time I focused on presence, I was practicing what I now recognize as the core of mindfulness. I was able to grow in a new way, which is true to this day. The growth and learning are constant. Much evolved and changed over the course of the next decade, in which I was given the chance to lead and develop curriculum models across all subjects, in international schools around the world. As I sought to develop the pedagogical practice that would make the best sense, I was constantly experimenting, shaping, and reshaping what would be most effective for the students who came to my classrooms every day.

Not just any students. *These students.*

I reached mindfulness in teaching through this daily practice, which is the balance of presence and focused mindfulness. In their book *Collaborative Intelligence: Thinking with People Who Think Differently*, Dawna Markova and Angie McArthur say that "attention, intention and imagination form the connective tissue of the human mind" (2015).

These three qualities, in education and beyond, are foundational elements of mindfulness. Attention, intention, and imagination. With mindfulness in mind, the attention is building awareness; the intention is toward growth and advancing; the imagination is to dream and seek that level of internal and external truth—that deep authenticity. I am again led back to mindfulness and the Three A's: Aware, Advancing, Authentic. Once they are there, presence and purpose are naturally involved in a seamless way.

While I can work to ensure that I adopt these qualities, students also need to be allowed to form their own understanding of purpose, their embodiment of presence, and their understanding of what the Three As mean—that's part of their journey, and their ownership and appreciation of learning.

## On Mindset: Growth versus Fixed

There's great news to be had here. In the past, intelligence might have been thought to be static, an assessment based on one aptitude test—an ability that can apply itself in different ways, but the raw intelligence itself cannot shift. This was the thinking behind a “fixed mindset,” and it created an educational world of labels and limiting beliefs. Now, with the advent of greater understanding of the brain through neuroscience findings, cognition labs, and long-term research studies, we find that intelligence itself can be altered through training and experience. And understandably, the mindset and approach that an individual has to this type of adaptive learning make a difference!

The brain becomes stronger when we learn something unfamiliar, when we seek out challenges, and when we recognize patterns and relationships between what we are learning and what we have already learned, placing it in a context that leads to even greater understanding and application possibility. We form new networks and new relationships in the brain, and we seek out even more related knowledge.

Carol Dweck (2006), in her work at Stanford, looks at motivation and mindset, investigating how different ways a learner approaches the mindset toward learning itself have big impact on outcome. Her studies found that emphasis on praising fixed achievements had less positive impact than focusing on positive feedback toward the efforts and skill development that were used in the process. In a sense, it's process over product, and the challenge along the way is a signature of growth; therefore, the challenges themselves are something to be embraced.

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*I think that having an open atmosphere is one of the best contributors to learning and growth. If you can trust yourself and anyone else with almost everything, learning opportunities tremendously increase and risks can be safely taken. I loved this type of atmosphere. Other classes felt tight and the mindset wasn't as flexible.*

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—Rafael, former student

Growth mindset, and the knowledge that intelligence is not fixed—that there is plasticity—represent liberating discoveries and a challenge to educators, as we look at how we want to shape our own classrooms. The

more open and positive the environment, focusing on the invitation to explore, to grow, to challenge, and to learn through making cooperative, connected associations—this is all rooted in the values of mindfulness.

Growth mindset, and the knowledge that intelligence is not fixed—that there is plasticity—represent liberating discoveries and a challenge to educators, as we look at how we want to shape our own classrooms.

*There was an openness to thoughts and ideas. No matter what your view or stance, there would be no judgment. There would always be agreement and disagreement, and we would have a respectful and challenging discussion.*

—Joseph, former student

## Mindful Methods: How Mindfulness and *Mindful by Design* Methodology Link to Core Standards and Models

*It's all about intention. Then, the form will fit the function.*

—Caitlin Krause

Yes, it's a marvelous discovery, when we step back to think about it, underscoring emphasis on the quality of the learning environment we cultivate for ourselves and others. We want to nurture a “fail-forward” mentality, one that embraces risk and growth, and we can do this through being *Mindful by Design*.

As we'll see in the investigations of standards and models, having a Mindfulness AAA Mindset, one that incorporates growth mindset with Awareness, Advancement, and Authenticity—this is the base from which the best standards and models can be applied in a positive, successful way.

*Next steps to explore:*

How does mindfulness look in action, and how can these strategies fit the frameworks of current education standards and models?

I'm quoting myself. I've always had what I considered a good reason for teaching what I taught. More important, I always had a good reason for teaching *in the way* I taught. And, most important, my students always were part of the process, understanding why we were learning in a certain way, using a certain method.

At the beginning of my teaching career, I was often reminded that my curriculum goals, as a learner and as a teacher, should consistently be linked to outcomes. In education, this was called “backwards planning” or “backwards design”: teaching toward the goals. Then, I discovered that the process, if also based in values that support the outcome goals, will naturally reinforce the outcome, too. *Outcome-driven, process-proven.*

Effective learning is rarely about the “what” endpoint—it's about the intentional “why” underneath, and the “how” defines the experience that will make the process of understanding possible. There's a great TED Talk by Simon Sinek (2009) called *How Great Leaders Inspire Action* that features the famous phrase “Start with the why.” As we begin to design our teaching practices, acting as Mindful Designers, we're thinking

about the reasons behind what we're choosing to use in lessons; the intentionality—which gives us the agency and empowerment to choose how to make it happen in pursuit of our learning goals. It's a rich, malleable process with its own life in it.

Where do standards and models fit this equation, then? Standards can serve as useful guiding points, giving us tools and a language to gauge progress and recognize certain societal values that are attached to learning outcomes. We can use this language to share ideas and set goals with students as active participants in the process. Ideally, standards and models give us a common language, acting as supporting structures for our learning.

Standards can serve as useful guiding points, giving us tools and a language to gauge progress and recognize certain societal values that are attached to learning outcomes.

Standards and models do not replace deep learning goals. The larger intentional goals of our education systems relate to values and intention. These values link back to mindfulness practices, which invite that deeper reflection. See Chapter 3, "Mindfulness for Teachers," to effectively initiate a personal practice in which you compare your own system of values to your teaching practices. This is the driving force, and the essential passion behind what you are doing. Students have these, too—and your classroom and school share a larger set of values, which can become the culture of the organization.

Standards and models, then, are not a replacement for these values, nor are they the reason behind the learning. They can serve as useful tools for reflection about teaching and learning practices, and they can often drive us to think even more deeply about the intentionality behind our education designs.

### A Note on Formative and Summative Assessment

Conversations about standards seem inevitably to link to considerations of evaluation methods. Some assessment forms are up to us, as educators, to choose—others are delivered and required by mandate. In either case, students take their cues from us about how we interpret and use the assessments, whether we approach them as guideposts for growth or endpoints for judgment and critique. We can incorporate them and give assessments attention as we see fit.

In essence, summative assessments don't always seem to convey mindfulness values because they can be high-stakes, stress-inducing, and also static judgments of ability, which students might construe as measures of their own self-worth. Note that this doesn't have to be the case, though—both formative and summative assessments can be used in mindful ways if students are given enough support, feedback, explanation, alternatives, and reflective time to use the assessment as a tool for their own learning. As with everything, it's more about *why* and *how* we decide to approach the method.

Formative assessment is designed to give groups and individuals guidance toward future growth, goals, and progress. As Stephen and Jan Chappuis (2008) note in a concise overview of assessment purposes in the January 2008 issue of *Educational Leadership*, "how the results are used is what determines whether the assessment is formative or summative."

If most effective learning is judged to be formative, with supportive feedback, then summative feedback (including high-stakes testing and certain grading strategies) can be augmented/replaced with methods that give students more active, conversational feedback, authority, agency, and inclusion in the evaluation methods. This allows students to have the ability to play a role in articulating their own growth strategies.

I mention this because, in the current education landscape, with rich access to both online resources and in-person learning, we have the opportunity to reshape classrooms, creating the ideal atmosphere for student-driven inquiry, using a teacher as a curator, mentor, guide, and reflective co-creator—a modern Socrates!

Let's take a look at some of the commonly used standards and models to see how they are in consonance with our "Mindfulness AAA (Aware, Advancing, Authentic) Mindset." For this book's purposes, we're introducing and addressing examples of standards and models in this chapter, expecting that the assessment landscape will continue to adapt and change. Therefore, good advice is to follow current news and online updates from your mindful "PLN" (personal learning network), as well as the companion website, [caitlinkrause.com](http://caitlinkrause.com), to access the best, most current external links, practices, measures, models, and ever-evolving lingo!

Each exercise in Chapters 3 and 4 can also be linked to these standards and models. Since specific standards vary by grade level, and the geographic location and type of school culture/pedagogy often play a role in selecting standards to align with, each individual user of this book will be able to map the alignment that best suits their individual conditions. The specific alignment will be context-dependent.

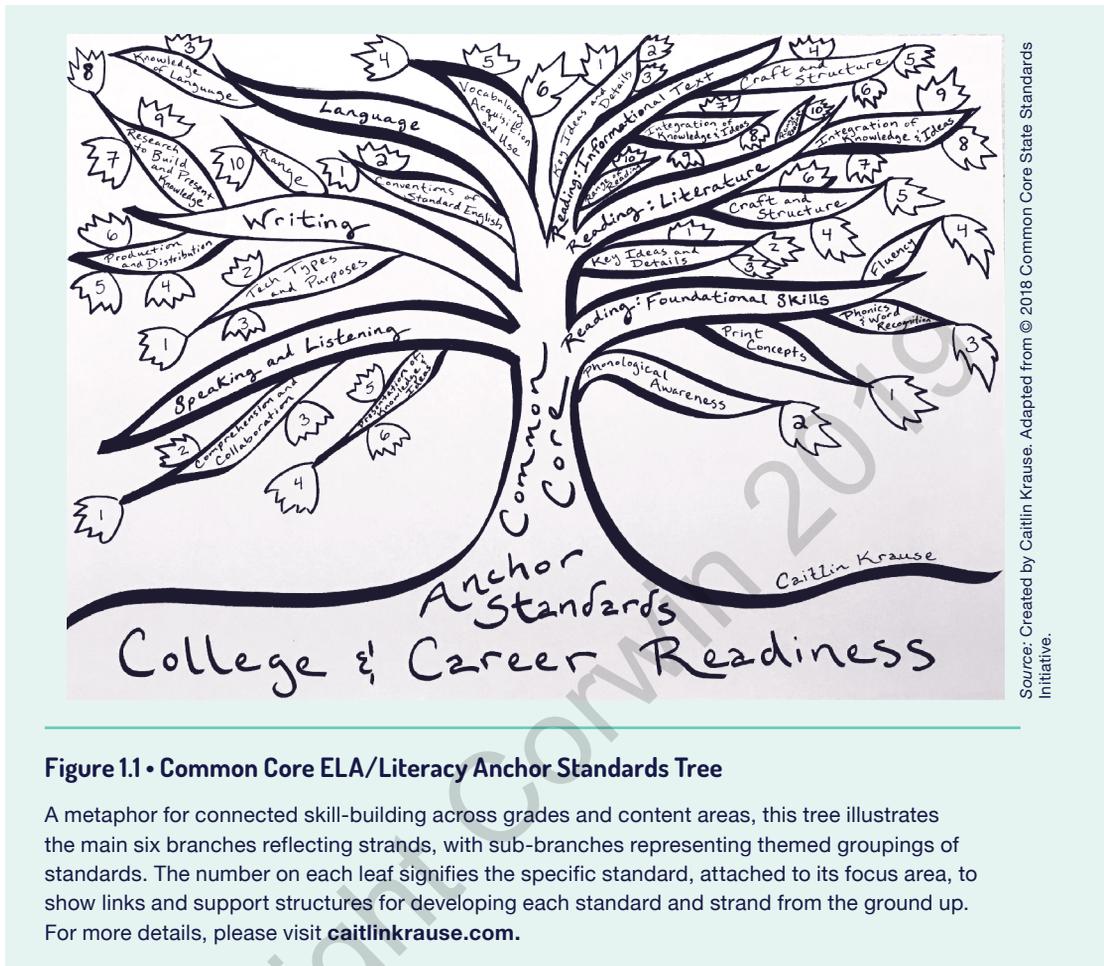
The classroom exercises are designed to be able to be modified to suit your specific curriculum needs, and they are linkable to the standards, and relatable to models. Let's jump in and explore several that are especially prominent, linked to the Mindfulness AAA Mindset and *Mindful by Design* methodology.

## Standards and Models

### Common Core Standards

Operating with an AAA Mindset means recognizing where there are areas for learning growth, and the Common Core Standards are used (in the United States) as one effort to "define expectations for what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade" (2018b). The goal of the Common Core is to prepare all students for success in college, career, and life. Each state leads its own efforts in adopting, implementing, and measuring the standards, as an interactive map on the website displays.

Addressing frequently asked questions, the website reads: "The Common Core is *not* a curriculum. It is a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents, and others will decide how the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their



Source: Created by Caitlin Krause. Adapted from © 2018 Common Core State Standards Initiative.

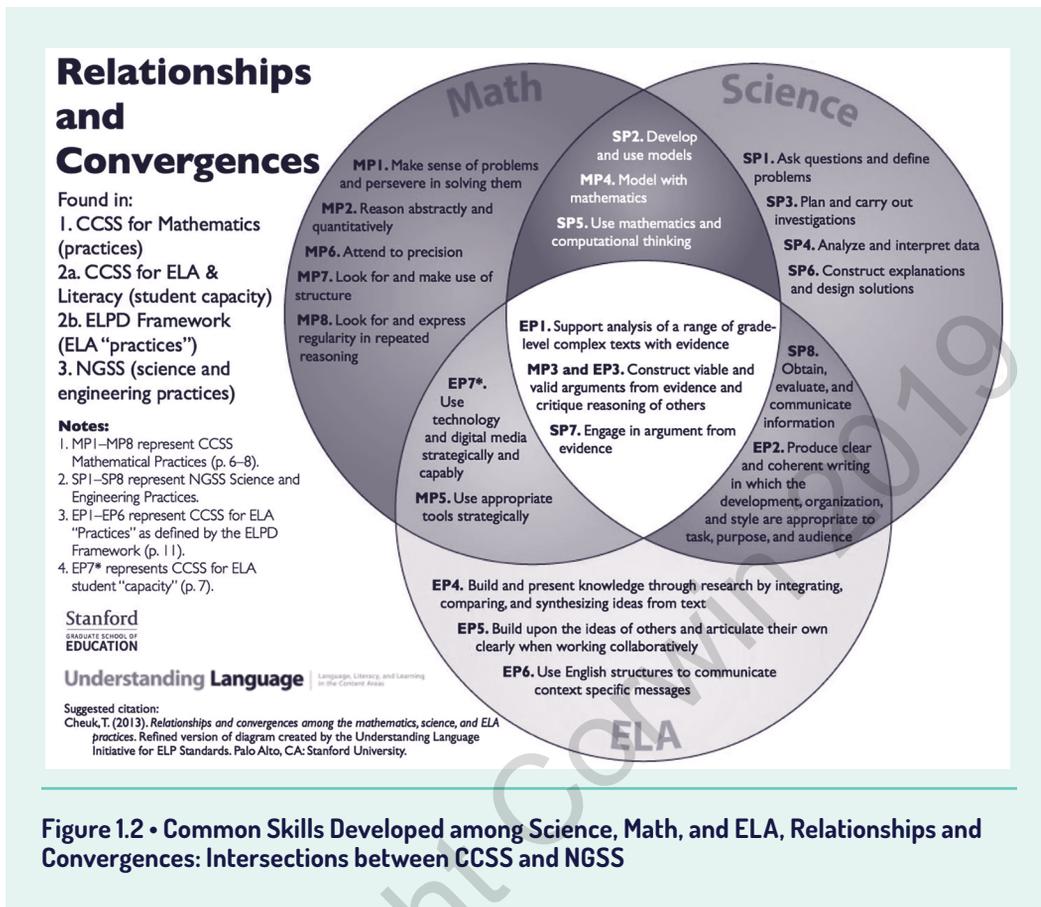
**Figure 1.1 • Common Core ELA/Literacy Anchor Standards Tree**

A metaphor for connected skill-building across grades and content areas, this tree illustrates the main six branches reflecting strands, with sub-branches representing themed groupings of standards. The number on each leaf signifies the specific standard, attached to its focus area, to show links and support structures for developing each standard and strand from the ground up. For more details, please visit [caitlinkrause.com](http://caitlinkrause.com).

classrooms.” The Common Core doesn’t replace teaching, and it doesn’t replace each teacher in a classroom having the ability to envision, build, and synthesize curriculum. The mindfulness exercises in this book offer great ideas and also freedom for teachers to address the standards and personalize their approaches to curriculum, with mindfulness values embedded.

The Common Core doesn’t replace teaching, and it doesn’t replace each teacher in a classroom having the ability to envision, build, and synthesize curriculum.

Although the Common Core is a set of standards in mathematics and ELA (English Language Arts)/Literacy, they can be applied to different areas of curriculum, and many educational institutions have applied the standards in different ways, recognizing interdisciplinary links and overlaps. Figure 1.2 shows Tina Cheuk (2013) and the Stanford Graduate School of Education’s work to demonstrate overlaps in pedagogical approaches to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Math and ELA, also overlapping with the NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) science and engineering practices. The exercises in *Mindful by Design* involve the deep, complex reasoning, engagement, expression, and analyses that the CCSS and NGSS encourage and articulate across the curriculum.



**Figure 1.2 • Common Skills Developed among Science, Math, and ELA, Relationships and Convergences: Intersections between CCSS and NGSS**

In addition to the grade-level standards, the Common Core profile of a learner links well with *Mindful by Design* exercises and overall values. As the Common Core website states, “Students who are college and career ready in reading, writing, speaking, listening and language” are able to exhibit these capacities:

- ▶ They demonstrate independence.
- ▶ They build strong content knowledge.
- ▶ They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.
- ▶ They comprehend as well as critique.
- ▶ They value evidence.
- ▶ They use technology and digital media strategically and capably.
- ▶ They come to understand other perspectives and cultures.

Source: ©2018 Common Core State Standards Initiative.

A learner who is developing traits and capacities associated with the Common Core State Standards is certainly using a future-forward mindset—one that is Aware, Advancing, and Authentic in nature, reinforced by active practice in a learning environment.

## ISTE Student Standards

Released in 2016, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Student Standards reflect the commitment of the organization to promote developing a broad range of skills and attitudes, including agility, adaptability, and empowered curiosity, to ensure that students are future-ready. It's a universal web, well displayed as a seven-part map, shown in Figure 1.2. The *Mindful by Design* student exercises can each be correlated with several of the ISTE standards, encompassing all of the values.

Here are some of the *Mindful by Design* classroom exercises from Chapter 4, used to illustrate the complements between mindfulness and the ISTE Student Standards:

**Empowered Learner:** Confidence and capability are part of the *Mindful by Design* approach. Thinking about the four cornerstones—Dignity, Freedom, Invention, and Agency—what could be more empowering than having these as foundational elements and cultural values in a learning community? We can smile and embrace our identities as mindful individuals, empowering ourselves and fellow learners on a lifelong journey. As illustrations, the exercises “Story of My Name” and “Storytelling, Empathy, and Kindness” are just two examples of ways that learners feel more recognized, welcomed, and empowered in our classrooms.

**Global Connector:** Connection and a global mindset are key aspects of a mindfulness outlook and approach to learning. Our AAA mindset spans the globe, and the curiosity with which we approach broad topics and systems is what helps to serve as a guide. In the exercise “The Danger of a Single Story,” for example, we cultivate our skills as global connectors, recognizing the multiplicity within cultures and identities and increasing our awareness about complexity and connection.

**Creative Communicator:** The ability to communicate effectively, with clarity and precision, cannot be stressed enough in the modern environment of quick transmissions and multiple ways of connecting and learning. Our goal, as *Mindful by Design* learners, is to amplify humanity as we connect with care, with creativity, and with a natural joy that motivates us to explore and express. You can find examples of how we practice creative communication in “Great Debates: ‘Fire and Ice,’” “Mindful Journaling,” and “Out of This World,” among others.

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*Our class was my first experience in seeing words beyond a textbook definition. Previously, I read to regurgitate. Tests, book reports, cold calls in class. The class helped me understand that the reality of words and communication had a lot more depth to it. It was a step beyond an educational “system,” offering an approach that would drive lifelong creativity.*

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—Ellen, former student

**Digital Citizen:** The fact that there is an exercise titled “Digital Mindful Citizen” in Chapter 4 is a testament to the importance of this topic. Notice that the “digital” is modifying the identity “Mindful Citizen.” With a Mindfulness AAA Mindset, we view a digital citizen as a mindful citizen, and the digital applications stem from those core values and ways of being. It gives great consonance to what we do, and to the care we see in and beyond the physical classroom learning space. There is a SEL (social and

emotional learning) component here, too. As Matthieu Ricard (2018) has said, mindfulness should be called “kindfulness,” and this is applied kindness to all that we learn, giving us even greater presence and purpose.

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*I think learning is about ownership in the sense that a teacher can give a student all the tools to succeed and to learn, but it is still up to the student to use these tools. A student can't be forced to learn; they really need to want to learn and put the effort in. With the right balance, I believe that both the individual and the group can be encouraged. Especially when working in a group, I think a teacher can emphasize that a group works best when each individual brings their own talents and ideas to the table.*

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—Charlotte, former student

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**Knowledge Constructor:** Part of constructing knowledge is about noticing detail, and about distilling information, giving it context and meaning. Having the ability to do this, smoothly, rationally, and with a powerful AAA mindset, is what *Mindful by Design* methodology supports and enables, through practice and application. One exercise example that shows this in action is “Four P’s: Projects, Passion, Peers, and Play,” which looks at how knowledge is gathered, researched, and then applied to build a meaningful, creative invention. As ISTE.org (2018) states, “Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.” That comes to life in the Mindfulness AAA Mindset, *Mindful by Design* methodology and exercises.

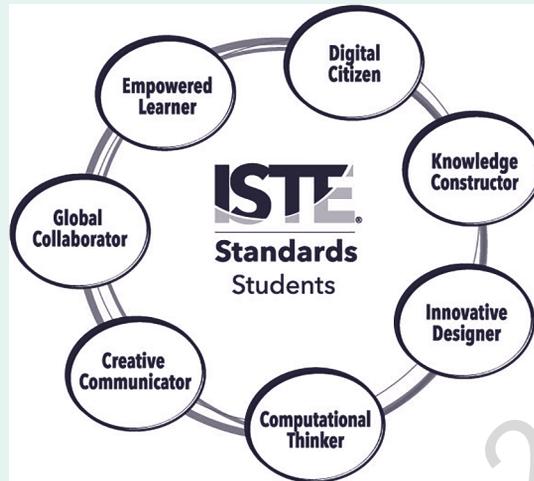
**Innovative Designer:** *Mindful by Design* is all about having a designer’s mindset, and all of the exercises showcase this in different ways. “Nature as Teacher: Bold Biomimicry and Design Thinking,” for example, allows learners to look to nature as a model, then design different solutions that are inspired by the purpose and intention underneath. The creativity and freedom necessary to approach these topics is underscored by a Mindfulness AAA Mindset, a way of being that embodies an innovative designer.

**Computational Thinker:** CT skills involve using digital tools and applying them effectively. Using a Mindfulness AAA Mindset, we are able to have the awareness and empathy for deeper connections and motivations behind what we are addressing in abstract computations. For example, the “Architecture and Virtual Worlds” exercises allow students to apply CT skills with mindful purpose and deeper reasoning. As part of using mindfulness with CT, we can also understand how to use data and processing to innovate solutions that result in contributing to a better world. Thus, the way that students approach everything from coding VR environments to Big Data analyses all involve mindfulness skills and values at a foundational level.

There are detailed descriptions of the ISTE standards, as well as classroom supplements available online at ISTE.org.

## IB Learner Profile

Well recognized as a global standard for student learning, the International Baccalaureate Learner Profile describes the characteristics of a globally minded, actively engaged student, addressing the ideal outcomes for international education. It nicely



Source: ©2019 International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 1.3 • ISTE Student Standards**

complements mindfulness values, looking at the context of learning across a wide range of descriptors, each of which represents a component of the core learning principles. The full profile describes an interdisciplinary, modern learner who represents the vision of operating with a Mindfulness AAA Mindset: active, confident, caring, compassionate change-makers who encompass diverse cultures, backgrounds, and beliefs.

The IB Learner Profile aims to develop learners who are:

- ▶ Inquirers
- ▶ Knowledgeable
- ▶ Thinkers
- ▶ Communicators
- ▶ Principled
- ▶ Open-minded
- ▶ Caring
- ▶ Risk-takers
- ▶ Balanced
- ▶ Reflective

Source: © International Baccalaureate Organization 2010 | [www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org)

## Creative Convergence: “Intersectionality” and a Mindfulness AAA Mindset

Much is evolving in the way that standards are applied in education practices. It’s our larger goal, with a Mindfulness AAA Mindset and *Mindful by Design* methodology, to constantly engage with these standards, as if we’re standing at the crossing points, incorporating them into our teaching practices in ways that amplify students’ appreciation of the intersectionality of disciplines, philosophies, and global goals.

These standards essentially represent what a community cares about; we can reflect upon them in our learning environments, effectively putting them to use in ways that align with our own values and larger objectives. Again—and as ever, starting with ourselves—*starting with the why* makes all the difference.

Next, we'll take a look at what that classroom actually looks like when we give a Mindfulness AAA Mindset and *Mindful by Design* methodology and exercises both our attention *and* intention. How can we envision that space?

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