MINDFULNESS FOR EDUCATORS CONFERENCE AT MORAVIAN UNIVERSITY

February 28, 2022



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Mindfulness for Educators Conference at Moravian University

It was a dark and frigid Thursday night in January, but it was one of the most exhilarating and fun times in my professional experience! On January 27, 2022, we hosted the opening

reception for [“Loving Kindness: A Children’s and Teens’ Art Exhibition about Mindfulness”] in Payne Gallery on the Moravian University campus in Bethlehem.



I curated this exhibition along with my co-curator, Kin Cheung, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Asian Religions. Kin researches contemporary Buddhism and has published on Buddhist-based meditation's effects on the brain and senses of self, the practical implications of Buddhist ethics, and the relationship between Buddhism and mindfulness.



I was first introduced to the practices of mindfulness in schools while earning my 200-hour yoga teacher certification in 2016. I learned more about the use of mindfulness practices in schools through my work as an art and mindfulness teacher with Shanthi Project, a 501(c)(3) educational, nonprofit organization, that provides mindfulness programs to more than 4,000 children and adults annually across the Greater Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. A growing number of educators regularly guide children and teens in mindfulness practices, which are often followed by art lessons where students create works of art with mindfulness as inspiration. I was excited about curating a show that highlighted this kind of artwork. As my ideas were brewing, I sought out

my colleague, Kin's, advice on how best to present a mindfulness-related exhibition that honors its ancient Buddhist roots while still being inclusive for a public school audience.

For the "Loving Kindness" show, art educators submitted works created by children and teens that relate to the theme of "mindfulness" and correlated themes such as Loving-Kindness; Compassion; Community; Happiness; Friendship; Family; Kindness; Fairness; Diversity; Acceptance; Peace; Gratitude; Forgiveness; and Calmness. Here's a snapshot of the show:

# of participating art teachers: **16**

# of participating school districts: **7**

Bethlehem Area School District

Blackhawk School District

Garnet Valley School District

Kutztown Area School District

Pine Grove Area School District

West Allegheny School District

Williamsport Area School District

# of participating community organizations: **1**

Northampton County Juvenile Justice Center, Easton

# of individual works of art: **39**

# of murals: **15**





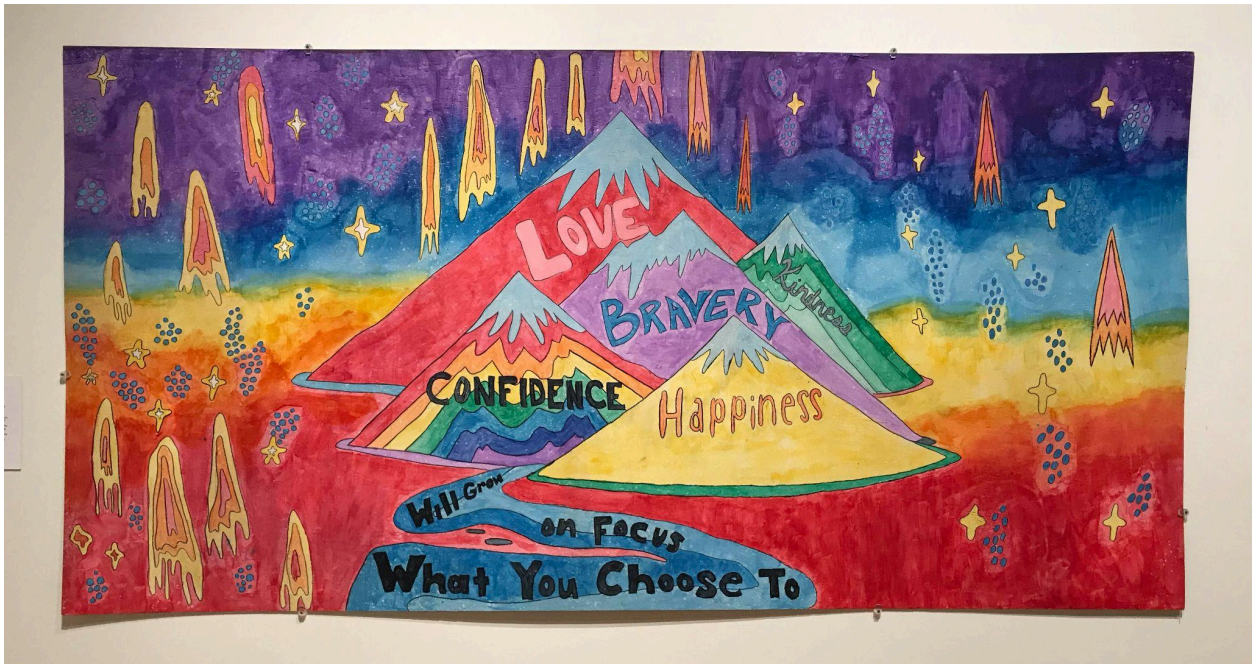


Not only was the children's artwork stunning, but during the opening reception, we also made "positivity charms" out of paper clips. Gallery-goers wrote inspiring words on paperclip charms and attached them to necklaces and keychains.





To highlight a few of the works, I'd like to tell you about "Heck Ya, Happiness" a series of 12 cardboard murals made by 1,000 + students from 3rd, 4th, and 5th-grade students in the Bethlehem Area School District (BASD)! Starting in December 2021, I visited many of the classes and conducted a lesson with the children where I first guided them in short mindfulness meditation practice, followed by reading a related children's picture book, such as Ruby Finds a Worry. The students were then asked to choose a word, pattern, scene, or other design that expressed their personal response to practicing mindfulness. For most of the cardboard pieces, the students used construction paper crayons, oil pastels, and Sharpies. (A third-grader at Miller Heights Elementary School in Bethlehem came up with the brilliant title for the murals!) These murals could not have been possible without the leadership of Jaime Bloss, Lead Teacher and Art Teacher in BASD and PAEA's Elementary Art Educator of the Year 2021! Thank you, Jaime!







Another set of murals were made through a collaboration among my First-Year Writing Seminar students at Moravian and adjudicated youth at the Northampton County Juvenile Justice Center (NCJJC) in Easton, where I teach art and mindfulness each month. In the fall semester of 2021, my students at Moravian sketched the outlines and overall composition for the designs of the murals. The designs are based on a variety of images we found online, such as Matthew Taylor Wilson's, You Are Loved and Asja Boros's, Celebrate Every Victory and You Are Doing Better than You Think. The preliminary sketching and planning were completed during Moravian's annual day of community service called "Heritage Day." After the murals were sketched by Moravian students, they were then painted by youth at

NCJJC in December 2021 and January 2022, supervised by Kristy Robinson, NCJJC Recreation Coordinator.

What's often overlooked when mindfulness practices are incorporated into school curricula is that mindfulness practices have their roots in sacred Buddhist religious traditions. To address this gap, Kin and I are planning a mini-conference on March 13, 2022. We're excited to have four stellar educators lined up to plan a lively panel discussion. We'll discuss the spiritual and religious origins of mindfulness and ways to mitigate negative consequences of cultural appropriation as we use mindfulness principles in educational and other secular settings. Our very own Lisa Kay, Ed.D. will be one of the members of our panel discussion! Lisa is an active PAEA member and Associate Professor, Department Chair of Art Education and Community Arts Practices & Program Head of Art Therapy, Tyler School of Art and Architecture, Temple University.

The three other panel members will be Funie Hsu, Ph.D. Associate Professor of American Studies at San José State University. She has published academic and popular media articles on mindfulness in the classroom, including what it means to present mindfulness as secular. She was a former public school teacher and has a research agenda that examines the growth of secular mindfulness in schools in relation to race and neoliberalism.

Maureen Wendling is the Executive Director of Shanthi Project, Allentown, PA. Her mindfulness training includes completing a practicum at the Myrna Brind Mindfulness Institute at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital and an apprenticeship at the Center for Mindfulness at Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN). She participates in extended silent mindfulness retreats and is currently completing her MBSR Certification at Brown University's Mindfulness Center. She is also a certified QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention Instructor.

Pamela D. Winfield, Ph.D. Professor of Buddhist Studies in the Department of Religious Studies at Elon University, NC. Dr. Winfield is the author of numerous articles and chapters on the visual, material, and embodied dimensions of Japanese Buddhism, which have been supported by grants from the American Academy of Religion, the Association of Asian Studies, and the Asia Cultural Council, among others.

- The conference is free and includes coffee, lunch, and refreshments.
- Free exhibition catalogues will be available for all attendees.
- Teachers can earn ACT 48 professional development hours.
- There will be yoga, mindfulness meditation, and hands-on artmaking too!
- Registration is free. Sign up here.

We hope you can join us!

Kristin Baxter, Ed.D. *(region10@paea.org)*

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