

Minding the Gap: Bringing Mindfulness and Reflection-in-Action into Higher Education Settings

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ABSTRACT

Mindfulness can be said to provide grounds and space to create mental states that support people's positive reflections. This paper will explore the practice and benefits of mindfulness activities as a means of supporting reflection-in-action on present live and in-person activities by the students who complete them along with focusing on activities away from technology and more towards tactile actions. The mindfulness activities are completed during weekly taught in-person seminars with postgraduate students at the London College of Fashion. The range of mindfulness activities include sketching physical objects through to origami designs.

KEYWORDS

Mindfulness, Reflection-in-Action, Reflection, Sketching, Higher Education

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1. Mindfulness

Mindfulness can create mental states that support people's positive reflections. The practice of mindfulness has been described as, "paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" [1].

This practice or state of mind is related to thinking mainly on present and current activities rather than directing one's thoughts to past or future activities – an active choice that allows for focus to be directed to the 'here and now'.

1.1 Reflection-in-Action

As one half of Schön's Reflection-in-Action / Reflection-on-Action Theory developments (1983), this paper and the mindfulness activities discussed, focuses on the former.

Reflection-in-Action relates to the practice of thinking through one's own thoughts and actions in the present moment while the activity is going on as opposed to afterwards. Involving such consideration can allow users to think in new and immediate ways and also implement them just as quickly.

2. Mindfulness Methods

The methods used to facilitate the in session mindfulness activities initiated with the students being presented with the subject and practice of mindfulness, at the start of each respective academic year in September, during the induction session. The subject of mindfulness would be introduced to the students, referencing the work on mindfulness of Kabat-Zinn [1] The purpose of completing the mindfulness activities are also explained as a means of facilitating reflective thinking on their own work, development and practice. Contextual details including a research paper and televised documentary, as detailed below, also supplemented the details and instructions for completing mindfulness activities and were provided to the students for their reference.

Time allocated to the mindfulness activities were scheduled to take place across the first 15 minutes of the seminars sessions before taught activities would take. This was completed once a week over two 15-week block terms in the academic year (i.e. September to December and February to May). For the first block of mindfulness activities, the students were directed to complete sketching activities only. For the second 15-week term, the options made available to students were open to include any activity of their choice that could be completed without the use of digital devices such as smartphones, tablets or laptops.

Examples of student work have ranged from completing the sketches to creating paper origami animals, chatterboxes,

crocheting, meditating and reading creative writing pieces, with examples being present in the figures above.

The key element is students are to engage in activities that do not involve technological devices such as smart phones, thus encouraging more tactile and physical practices.

This was further presented in a documentary created by the late Dr. Michael Mosley, called *'Secrets of the Superagers'* (2024) [2] where the practice of mindfulness was discussed as part of explorations related to the human brain and health. The documentary focused on the positive impacts of mindfulness practiced through different mediums across the world including Kung Fu experts, in China through to participants in New York. A research paper – also referred to within the *'Secrets of the Superagers'* documentary above – produced by Sevinc et al [4] also presented scientific data on the benefits of mindfulness activities on the human brain. Both mediums of information provided added context to the practice of the mindfulness activity, which were made available to the students at the start of the academic year for reference.

Students would also be advised to bring in an individual physical object, paper (such as in a sketchbook) and materials such as pens, pencils or colours for the Block 1 sketching activities. Resources for Block 2 could be extended to those that facilitated non-sketching activities. However, they needed to be activities that involved tactile interactions.

Through practice in my teaching sessions, I encourage my students to engage with activities that encourage them to practice activities that encourage this mindset.

3. Sketching for Mindfulness

The initial stage of solely completing sketching for the mindfulness activities draws on research that references the benefits of sketching for supporting reflective practices Lewis et al, & Sternman, [3 & 6], one of which is self-control.

Lewis et al [3] describes self-control as an ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts and behaviours even in the face of temptations and impulses that reduce one's capacity to achieve goals or regulate ourselves in less favourable environments.

4. Outcomes

Following completion of the mindfulness activities, mixed experiences and outcomes occur. For some students, filling the full 15-minute period with time away from devices proved to be difficult as some would be back on their phones within 10-minutes of the timed activity taking place. However, others would find creative ways to fill their time, such as crocheting or completing

activities that were related to their personal cultures such as making origami animals.

Some examples of the students' work is shown in the figures below, which will be discussed in more detail in the workshop.

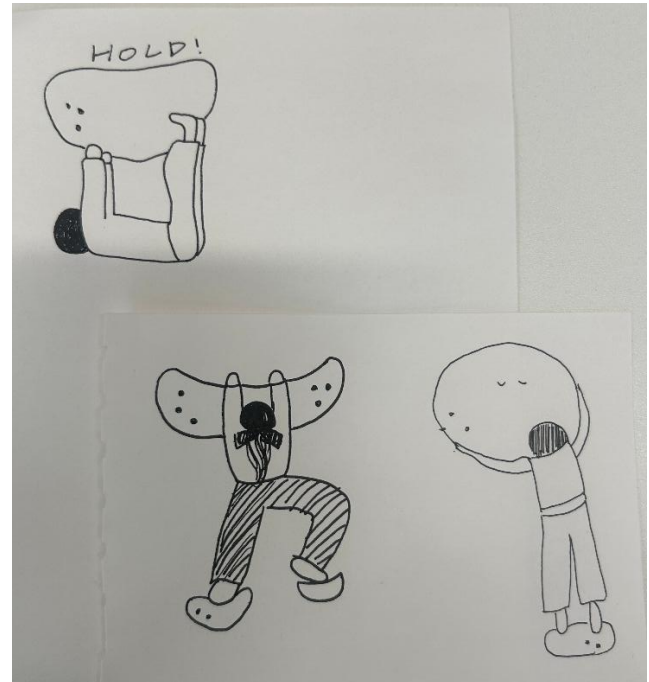


Figure 1: Mindfulness Activity – Student Sketch 1



Figure 2: Mindfulness Activity – Student Sketch 2



Figure 3: Mindfulness Activity – Student Sketch 3

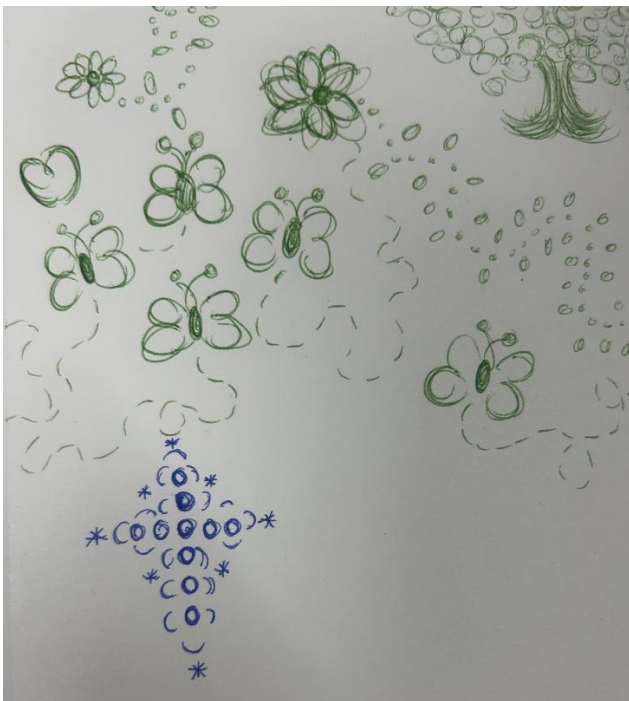


Figure 4: Mindfulness Activity – Student Sketch 4



Figure 5: Mindfulness Activity – Student Sketch 5

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[4] Michael Mosley: Secrets Of The Superagers, The Brain, 20:00
14/07/2025, Channel 4, 60 mins
<https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/3C530C43?bcast=143474569> (Accessed 08 May 2026)

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<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006322319314076?>

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