



SPECIAL ARTICLE

# Mindfulness based stress reduction and citizenship education: A systemic review of the empirical literature



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**Abstract** Mindfulness based stress reduction has been proven effective in education on several metrics of analysis, but no quantitative research has been conducted within citizenship education. Analysis was conducted across four databases, examining the field work available within citizenship education and mindfulness based stress reduction. A comprehensive and systematic review of the research base was conducted to identify the existing empirical evidence of mindfulness based stress education's impact on citizenship education ([American Psychological Association Survey Shows Teen Stress Rivals That of Adults, 2014](#)).

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## PALABRAS CLAVE

Mindfulness;  
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Reducción del estrés  
basado en el  
mindfulness

**Reducción del estrés basada en el *mindfulness* y educación para la ciudadanía: una revisión sistémica de la bibliografía empírica**

**Resumen** La reducción del estrés basada en el *mindfulness* se ha demostrado eficaz en la educación de varios parámetros de análisis, pero no se ha realizado ninguna investigación cuantitativa en la educación para la ciudadanía. El análisis se realizó en 4 bases de datos y se examinó el trabajo de campo disponible en la educación para la ciudadanía y la reducción del estrés basada en el *mindfulness*. Se llevó a cabo una revisión integral y sistemática de la base de investigación para identificar la evidencia empírica existente en el impacto de la educación del estrés basada en el *mindfulness* en la educación para la ciudadanía ([American Psychological Association Survey Shows Teen Stress Rivals That of Adults, 2014](#)).

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Students are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress in today's school system. A national study, titled "Stress in America," was conducted by the American Psychological Association observing student stress in the United States. The findings were startling. Currently, youth in the United States are more stressed than adults, with data reported 5.8 for teens versus 5.1 for adults out of a 10-point scale. The numbers become higher at varied points during the year, dependent upon if school was in session ([American Psychological Association Survey Shows Teen Stress Rivals That of Adults, 2014](#)). At such a young age, children should not be at this high level of stress. A plethora of factors have led to higher student stress levels. School is just one contributing factor increasing stress. With higher stress levels, coping skills must be taught to students to address stress and anxiety.

The coping skill analyzed within this literature review is mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR). Originating in 1979, MBSR is a coping tool founded by [Kabat-Zinn \(1994\)](#). As per [Kabat-Zinn \(1994\)](#), mindfulness is "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present-moment, and nonjudgmentally. This kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality" (p. 4). The coping skill allows for a complete observation of self, without judgment. A strategy such as this would be useful for any age, but it would be more valuable for k-12 students.

More specifically, middle school students experience a different set of stresses than other age groups. As these students grow, the maturation process is quite different than that of a student 10 or 15 years ago. Technology and social media has shifted students' perceptions of life amongst k-12 students. To facilitate the learning of life, an emphasis on citizenship education must be placed in schools. UNESCO defines citizenship education as teaching children from a young age to be critical and enlightened thinkers ([Citizenship Education for the 21st Century, 2016](#)). Teaching students how to clearly think would facilitate their everyday life beyond school. It would mitigate concerns of stress, and instead produce more mindful citizens.

In this literature review, a detailed examination of how mindfulness can enhance citizenship education is proposed. To analyze this proposal fully, there needs to be a clear understanding of what citizenship education and mindfulness are to properly connect the two. Once defined, a full examination of the research available will be analyzed. The following five literature review articles attempt to answer to what extent does mindfulness based stress reduction impact citizenship education among 7th grade Civics students.

## Citizenship education

Citizenship education can be confused with democratic education. They may be similar, but they are not the same. According to the [Education Commission \(2000\)](#), democratic education

is concerned with academic skills such as how a bill becomes a law, although it includes acquiring civic skills and knowledge. Rather, education for citizenship is a moral enterprise. It is concerned with organizing schools in ways that give students opportunities to learn

about citizenship and its importance, and acquire the needed skills and knowledge associated with it. It is based on the belief that it is just as important for young people to acquire a "democratic self" or a "civic self-understanding" as it is to gain specific civic skills. (p. 1)

Citizenship education provides a complete education of the child.

Citizenship education is not anything new. Beginning in the early years of the United States, the emphasis of education was to train children to become efficient and productive citizens. Thomas Jefferson was a primary promoter of this, stating, "An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people" ([Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, 2016](#)). This type of education produced citizens that were knowledgeable and could affectively participate within the government. As the years passed, this emphasis of democracy grew as the state of education shifted wider in spectrum to encompass subjects outside of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Yet it was not until the early 1900s when the importance of citizenship and education was clearly laid out that furthered both a child's education and well-being. John Dewey suggested there needed to be a change in education to achieve the true democratic standard that were to be taught to students, stating, "Were all instructors to realize that the quality of mental process, not the production of correct answers, is the measure of educative growth something hardly less than a revolution in teaching would be worked" ([Dewey, 1975](#)).

The change that would be most effective would be focusing on the mental process of students and the power of this? includes citizenship education and modifying the curriculum to include mindful citizenship. The current emphasis of citizenship education needs to be reformed. Evidence suggests there needs to be more democratic critical thinking instead of teaching about government and testing on it. There needs to be more critical understanding of the United States' political foundations ([Newmann, 1987](#)). The disconnect comes from political disengagement including "the most fundamental acts of citizenship voting or staying informed on public issues. In withdrawal, they [the students] become alienated, angry or apathetic" ([Education Commission, 2000](#), p. 16). This effect allows not only for a lack of citizenship but also a lack of mindfulness. To have a more productive society, both mindfulness and citizenship must be employed.

## Mindfulness based stress reduction

Mindfulness is a growing field of study within the realms of education. It allows students to be more cognitively aware of themselves as individuals and as students. Within mindfulness, there is a wide spectrum of various types of mindfulness methodology. The method analyzed within this literature review is mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon-Kabat Zinn in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Initially Zinn's ideas stemmed from Buddhist meditation techniques, but it was his goal to make meditation more accessible for people without a current meditation practice. MBSR was created for this reason, as well as to remove any religious dogma associated

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