



**Janine Francolini, Contributor**

Founder of the Flawless Foundation

# Mindful Education: A Path of Hope

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With everything that we read and hear about the state of kids and teens today, it can be a troubling time to be a parent or educator. Children are reporting being stressed and unhappy at school, bullying seems to be on the rise, and academically, America's students are falling behind their peers in other countries. When we hear all of this, it can be overwhelming, and it's difficult to know what we, as adults, can do to help. Omega Institute's Annual Mindfulness and Education Conference set out to address these challenges and explore ways we can create healthier communities for children, not only in schools but in every environment in which kids learn and live.



MINDFULSCHOOLS.ORG

The conference featured experts in education and childhood development, social-emotional learning, trauma-informed care, yoga, and mindfulness who all shared how we can use the tools and wisdom from these various spheres to build a more peaceful, healthy future, not only

through educating children, but by changing our own practices and mindsets. Over two days of rich dialogue and hands-on practice of techniques in mindfulness, several themes emerged as the most important considerations for those interested in serving children.

Bringing mindfulness into education starts not with students but with the adults who interact with them, and more than anything else, the dominant theme of the weekend was the responsibility we have to lead the way in modeling emotional intelligence, self-care, mindfulness, and positive interpersonal relationships. Linda Lantieri, Director of the Inner Resilience Program, professor at Columbia Teacher's College and co-founder and senior program adviser of CASEL explained it this way: "you have to do the work before you do the work." Her somewhat enigmatic reminder really means that before we can begin to bring mindfulness into education, we have to cultivate it in ourselves. That is, we must do the inner work before we can even hope to be successful in the outer work of transforming our schools and communities.



Linda Lantieri, David Levine, Tala Manassah, Ali Smith, and Marc Brackett

We devoted a lot of discussion to how we, as adults, can build a mindfulness practice, but the conversation was by no means limited to this first step. As much as the speakers focused on laying the foundation, the tone of our time together was one of aspiration and hope with visions for a brighter future. There was a clear consensus among this group about the topic we were discussing: all believe it has the power to change the world. Tim Shriver kicked off the opening keynote reminding us that the path to radical change is through schools and education. The conference featured organizations with a rapidly expanding reach which have set the ambitious goal of fundamentally transforming education. For example, CASEL, whose co-founders Daniel

Goleman and Tim Shriver both spoke at the conference, has launched nationwide initiatives to bring SEL into classrooms. Others like Marc Brackett, Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence are also rapidly expanding their footprint in schools across the country, as well as developing programs that work directly with families.



Tim Shriver

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## The Morning Email

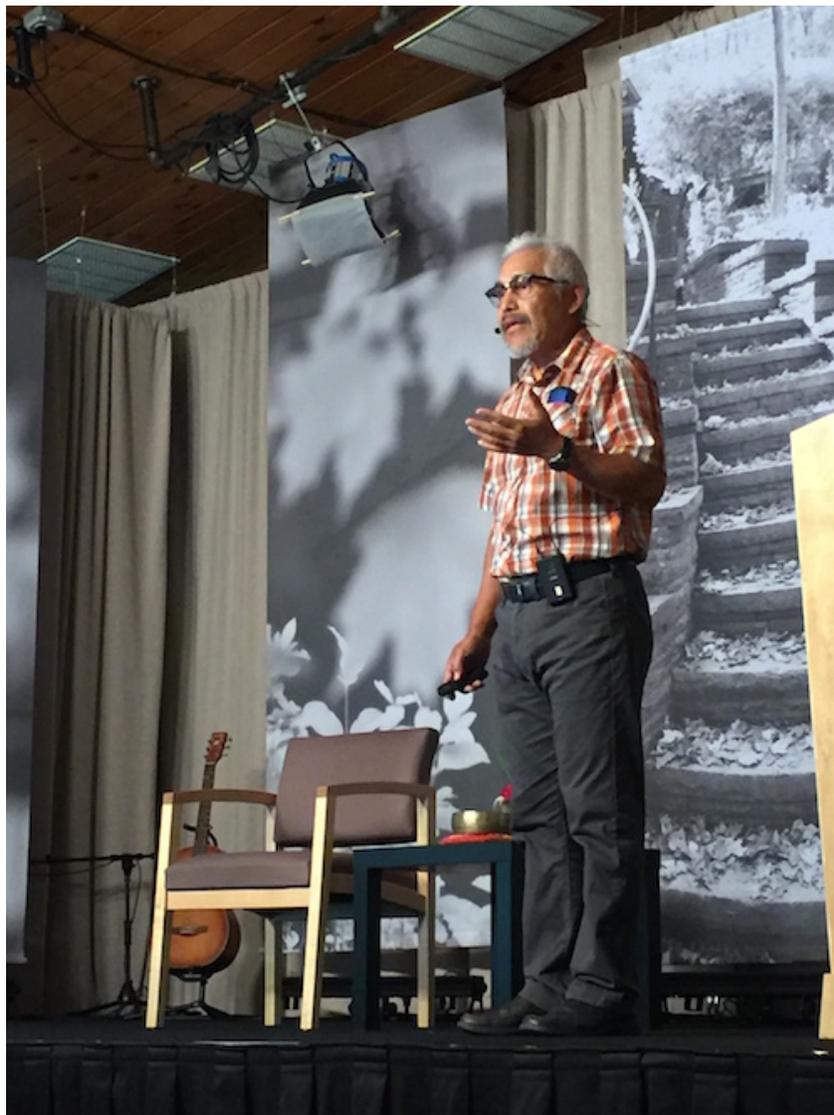
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And while over the past few years mindfulness and SEL have been gaining traction in the education field, the adoption of these models has not necessarily been uniform across communities. With the belief that these approaches should not be limited to just those schools

with the budgets and autonomy to implement them, a group of dedicated individuals have focused on increasing equity and access. Several of them spoke at the conference, emphasizing the importance of bringing diversity to this emerging field. One of the presenters who focused particularly on the issue of inclusion was Michael Yellowbird. A citizen of the Three Affiliated Tribes and the coauthor of *For Indigenous Minds Only* and *Decolonizing Social Work*, Dr. Yellowbird's work focuses on using mindfulness to heal the difficult challenges of colonialism experienced by indigenous peoples. The Holistic Life Foundation, co-founded by Atman Smith, Ali Smith, and Andres Gonzalez, is also working to bring mindfulness and yoga to historically marginalized communities. Operating in Baltimore, their programs include mentoring, workforce development, after school, and others aimed at bringing these practices to diverse groups of individuals and communities, and especially those who are at increased risk of having experienced adversity and trauma.



Michael Yellowbird

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In a dialogue with Tim Shriver, Jennifer Buffett emphasized that it takes intellectual *AND* emotional intelligence to be successful. Jennifer provided a burst of inspiration as she shared her dedication to making holistic health and education a reality for every child through the work of her non profit, the Novo Foundation.

Gratitude was expressed over and over again to the founder of this conference and one of the pioneers of this work, Daniel Rechtschaffen, who leads the Mindful Education project. Next year will be the tenth anniversary of this important gathering so stay tuned for more information on how we will come together to take stock and celebrate this decade of critical research and practice.

To learn more about the inspiring speakers and organizations featured at the conference, click [here](#).

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Response

Van Jones: A Nazi  
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