

**- Students initiative „mindfulness in social work“ and as teaching faculty:**

**- Prof. Dr. Andrea Budde, ASH Berlin**

**- Simon Guendelmann, Ph.D. , adult psychiatrist, Berlin School of Mind and Brain, HU Berlin**

## **1. Goals of project**

The project aims to enable students to know and to experience what mindfulness oriented interventions are, how they can be used in the field of social work and to be able to evaluate those interventions for their use in social work practice. The focus is twofold: students can use their experiences and their research for applying it to themselves as self-care in the sense of burn out prevention as future social workers and in applying it to clients and groups of clients in their work field.

Besides getting to know theoretical and experiential approaches, students will get to know the recently expanding field of contemplative sciences. They will get to know different and transdisciplinary approaches to research methods: quantitative scientific methods of neuroscience, neurobiology and medicine, of psychology as well as a social sciences approach with a more qualitative methodological framework.

By observing the international research, students will be able to transfer results of these studies and of implementation formats into different fields of social work. Because in Germany the implementation of mindfulness-related interventions outside of clinical psychology is pretty much at its beginning, students do have the opportunity to create a new field in social work.

One goal will be to build a research and practice network for students in Germany and possibly to present the results of the project in the form of publications and a conference at the end.

## **2. Content:**

The content of the project includes basic notions of contemplative science, the scientific study of mind-body effects of contemplative practices, which will constitute a scientific and humanistic frame for understanding mindfulness, its mechanisms, and its applications to social work. Content will explore a myriad of benefits of mindfulness and related practices at the brain and body level, as well as at the individual psychological and interpersonal level, particularly relevant for social workers. The combined knowledge from different disciplines like cognitive neuroscience, medicine, psychology and philosophy, offers new ways for understanding health mental as well as social (dys)functions.

The project will be structured similarly in each semester through all the modules and will contain the following 3 elements:

**1. Theoretical knowledge building:** will consist in theoretical and interactive classes, covering the following contents:

- Basic notions of brain anatomy and functions.
- Mind-body interactions in health and diseases. Social determinants of health.
- Basic notions on Contemplative Sciences: Scientific definition of mindfulness, compassion and empathy.
- Clinical and Neurobiological Evidence of the effects Mindfulness on: Attention systems, Emotion regulation, Cardiovascular health.
- Clinical and Neurobiological Evidence of the effects Compassion practices on Empathy, Decision-making and Social behavior.
- Psychological and neurobiological mechanisms of stress, emotion and health related behaviors.
- Psychological and neurobiological mechanisms of empathy and compassion in health care professions (social work).

**2. Practical experiencing:** will introduce the students to different contemplative practices, ranging from mindfulness (samatha and vipashyana), to loving-kindness and compassion meditation practices. Participants will be able to have an experiential knowledge of these meditation techniques. This module requires home practice and assignments, which will be complemented with selected lectures on specific topics. Each class will consist on guided meditation practices, dyad exercises, group discussions on personal practice and home lectures.

Specific contents:

- Practice & training of Focus Attention (samatha, body awareness, yoga, walking meditation) based techniques.
- Practice & training of Open Monitoring (vipashyana) based techniques.
- Practice & training of Compassion (loving-kindness) based techniques.
- Understanding of basic principles underlying contemplative practices (including notions from western mindfulness literature and buddhist psychology readings).

**3. Transfer to own working field:** students will be encouraged to bring forth their own inputs, inviting them to look for relevant applied and (or) theoretical material relevant to their own interest and working fields. Classes will include meditation practice, and student's presentations of papers, fostering the integration of theoretical knowledge, personal practice and real-life professional application. Topics will range according to student's interests, always focusing on relevant issues for the field of social work.

### **3. Content according to the four semesters:**

#### **1. First section: Mindful Attention.**

- Weeks (1-2): General concepts, methods and lines of research in Contemplative Science. Clinical and Neurobiological Evidence of the effects Mindfulness on Attention systems.
- Weeks (3-10): Experiential Practice: meditation, Discussion / Study Group. Mindful Attention (techniques on focus attention).
- Weeks (11-14): Students presentations of topics of interest relevant for Social Work.

#### **2. Second section: Open Presence.**

- Weeks (1-2): Clinical and Neurobiological Evidence of the effects Mindfulness on Stress, Emotions and Body systems.
- Weeks (3-10): Experiential Practice: meditation, Discussion / Study Group. Open Presence (techniques on open monitoring and working with emotions).
- Weeks (11-14): Students presentations of topics of interest relevant for Social Work.

#### **3. Third section: Being with Others.**

- Weeks (1-2): Clinical and Neurobiological Evidence of the effects Compassion practices on Empathy, Decision-making and Social behavior.
- Weeks (3-10): Experiential Practice: meditation, Discussion / Study Group. Being with Others (techniques on compassion, empathy and perspective – taking, introduction to nonviolent-communication).
- Weeks (11-14): Students presentations of topics of interest relevant for Social Work. (restorative justice, talking circles...)

#### **4. Fourth section: Cultivating Personal and Interpersonal Health**

- Weeks (1-2): Psychological and neurobiological mechanisms of empathy and compassion and burn-out in health care professions (social work). Clinical and Neurobiological Evidence of the effects Compassion and Mindfulness Practices on Health-Care Professions.
- Weeks (3-10): Experiential Practice: meditation, Discussion / Study Group. Cultivating Personal and Interpersonal Health (mindful-communication, healthy life style, interpersonal mindful-conflict resolution)
- Weeks (11-14): Students presentations of topics of interest relevant for Social Work. (political implications? Contemplative sciences ./ critical social work? Practical consequences: consumerism, ecology...)

During the 1st and 3rd section short field trips can be undertaken. In the fourth section there can follow a longer field trip prepared by students themselves with support of teachers. First ideas are: Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Israel, Chile, USA, ...

As a result of the 4 semesters there could be an (online?) publication of papers /student inputs and maybe a student-organised conference for interested students of other universities in Berlin.

### **4. Specific Fields of Work for Social Workers**

As in psychology and in medicine as well as in psychiatry and pedagogy mindfulness based interventions are more and more applied, researched and implemented social work will be influenced by this trend. Social workers in Germany already use mindfulness based methods in addiction programs (MBRP: mindful based relapse prevention), mindful eating programs for young people with eating disorders, with children in schools and in Kindergartens, in assisted self help groups for Borderline patients (DBT: dialectical behavioral therapy), MBCT : mindfulness based cognitive therapy for relapse prevention in patients with clinical depression and last not least in MBSR: mindfulness based stress reduction programs for the self care and burn out prevention of social workers themselves.

## **5. Gender mainstreaming and intercultural sensibility**

Especially in neuroscience and new hormone research the question of gender differences is an important topic: the influence of oxytocine on interpersonal behavior. For example, it is known that people with borderline personality has decreased oxytocine levels, which is related to interpersonal problems. There is no studies evaluated changes in oxytocin levels by practicing contemplative exercises: differences or similarities? Are mindfulness-based approaches more „female“? How do they influence the level of testosterone? There is no studies that assessed the influence of mindfulness on sex hormones, nevertheless, this questions is central for better understading the specific effects of these practices in women and men. The stance that mindfulness is based on an attitude of acceptance and appreciation of the inner diversity, can be clearly translated tot he outer world as an attitude of appreciation and deep respect toward different diversities in our society.

A very important topic in the contemporary research ist the question of Ingroup vs. Outgroup behavior: In how far are contemplative practices suited to deal with aggression and hate against outgroup members? Is it possible to train prosocial behavior towards outgroup members?

Last not least intercultural sensibility is expressed through language: Because the scientific language of international contemplative sciences research is English, this class will be primarily taught in English. There will be some units where German will be used as well. Participants must be able to speak and read and write English fluently. All examinations can be written in German if wished so, according to the Prüfungsordnung of ASH Berlin.

The preparing students and teachers group is coming from diverse cultural and national backgrounds and Incoming international students at ASH are especially welcomed to participate. By comparing, contrasting and discussing together practical intercultural learning can take place in the project group.

## **6. Literature:**

- Turning the Mind Into an Ally (2004) Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche
- The Sanity We Are Born With: A Buddhist Approach to Psychology (2010) Chogyam Trungpa
- The Path Is the Goal: A Basic Handbook of Buddhist Meditation (2011) Chogyam Trungpa
- Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness meditation for everyday life (2016) Jon Kabat-Zinn

- Full Catastrophe Living (Revised Edition): Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness (2013) Jon Kabat-Zinn
- The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being (2013) Daniel J. Siegel
- Mindfulness: international journal, Springer Verlag (Springer online)
- Mindfulness for Teachers (2015) Patricia A. Jennings
- Achtsamkeit im Kindergarten (2014) Nils Altner
- Wache Kinder (2015) Susan Kaiser-Greenland
- Achtsamkeit in der Schule (2011) Vera Kaltwasser

## **7. Potential internships in Berlin (examples)**

### **1. Clinical Social work**

**Tagesklinik: Zentrum für Seelische Gesundheit:**

**Kurfürstendamm 216**

**10719 Berlin**

**Dr. med. Michael Teut**

**Charité Hochschulambulanz für Naturheilkunde am Standort Mitte**

**Luisenstraße 13**

**10117 Berlin**

**Dipl.-Päd. Johannes Schäfer Psychotherapie & Coaching**

**Friesenstraße 9**

**10965 Berlin-Kreuzberg**

**Netzwerk Achtsamkeit in Berlin**

**Dipl.Psych. Michaela Menge**

**Schönhauser Allee 71a**

**10437 Berlin**

### **2. Social Work in Schools**

Friedrich-Ebert-Gymnasium

Blissestr. 22

10713 Berlin

Georg-Büchner-Gymnasium

Lichtenrader Damm 224

12305 Berlin

Ev. Schule Berlin Zentrum

Wallstr. 32

10179 Berlin

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Achtsamkeit für Kinder und Jugendliche e.V.  
Muthesiusstr. 6  
12163 Berlin

### **3. Social Work in Healthcare**

Oberberg-Klinik Berlin/Brandenburg,  
Am Glubigsee 46  
15864 Wendisch Rietz

Städtisches Klinikum Dresden  
Industriestraße 40

01129 Dresden

Vivantes Humboldt Klinikum

Am Nordgraben 2

13059 Berlin

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students initiative „mindfulness in social work“

Prof. Dr. Andrea Budde

Simon Guendelmann Ph.D.