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Inside UWC Thailand's mindfulness program

by Nurhuda Syed 14 Nov 2018

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United World College Thailand (UWCT) is increasingly known in the region and within the global UWC movement for its commitment to a mindful, sustainable and peaceful education. The Educator Asia chats with UWCT's Head of School, Jason McBride to find out why mindfulness is crucial in education.

"As a United World College, a large part of our mission is to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and our belief is that to truly facilitate peace between individuals, we must be at peace within ourselves," McBride said.



"Mindfulness offers us a way to direct kindness and curiosity not only outward towards others, but inwards towards our own thoughts and emotions for a greater sense of internal peace, especially in an increasingly fast-paced, demanding world."

UWCT is considered UWC's pioneer in embedding Social-Emotional Learning and Mindfulness (SEL&M) into their IB-based curriculum. Under the direction of a mindfulness mentor, staff, students and parents develop the ability to think and act mindfully using strategies inside and outside the classroom.

McBride explained that by being curious about, and attending to "present-moment" experiences, students get to learn a lot about their reactions, patterns and themselves. Students then begin to understand that they have a choice and can take space to respond rather than react to everyday stresses.

"Rather than reacting to what is happening around us automatically, mindfulness helps us insert a small pause during which we can regard our thoughts and emotions and then choose how – and if – we are to react," he said. "Mindfulness encourages us to view our range of emotions and thoughts, as well as those of others."

The program also teaches everyone from staff to students to acknowledge that everyone is a "work-in-progress". The headmaster added that the school sees evidence of the approach's impact on campus every day, when students put into practice mindful communication and listening, mindful eating, as well as stress reduction.

"Their ability to describe their thinking and understand and explain what is happening in their brains is an integral first step to making great choices for themselves and others," he said.

As awareness of the school's program spreads, UWCT and the connecting Thanyapura Health & Sports Resort will be hosting one of the most progressive Buddhist scholars, Dr Alan Wallace, for a two-day seminar this week.

Wallace will also officially open UWCT's Mindfulness Centre. His visit underpins UWCT's perspective that mindfulness is integral to a 21st-century education.

The centre will be used daily for secular mindfulness practice by classes ranging from nursery to Grade 12. Students get to explore how to pay attention to the present moment, on purpose, with kindness and curiosity.

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