



MINDFUL PROFILE



Far left: Linda Lantieri. Above: Peace corner in a second grade classroom in East Harlem. Left: Lynne Hurdle-Price, staff developer for The Inner Resilience Program, teaching 8-year old Nai'im how to meditate.

From the Inside Out: Helping Teachers and Students Nurture Resilience

Linda Lantieri began teaching in 1968 at Public School 171 in East Harlem. "I was responsible for their minds, hearts and souls—37 kids in my classroom," she recalls. "There was a presidential election on at the time and I didn't want the kids asking me who I'd vote for. I was too young to vote!"

The job was difficult and stressful, so from her mid-20s, meditation became a non-negotiable part of Lantieri's life. Her practice helped her so much that she started to think about how she might integrate mindfulness in her profession. "I wanted to bring it into a public school environment, but I didn't really expect it would have a place. We weren't as open as we are now."

Lantieri became an Assistant Principal at her school and took positions with the New York City Board of Education. In the mid-1980s,

she co-founded a learning initiative: the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program. The program was developed to help create nurturing communities of learning that improve academic success while preventing violence in schools. The program was embraced around the country and is now the largest and longest running school program in the U.S.

"Coming of age in the late 60s made most of us who were caring individuals want to be in a place where we felt we could make a difference," says Lantieri, who was part of the group of visionary educators who created alternative charter schools with specialized curriculums in poverty-stricken districts. Their efforts were detailed in Seymour Fliegel's book *Miracle in East Harlem*. "I feel that education is one of the last places we can make quite a difference in young people's

lives and the future of what happens in the world."

That need to make a difference really came to the fore after 9/11. On that sunny Tuesday morning in September 2001, 200 teachers and administrators from 11 schools in the shadows of the World Trade Center shepherded their students away from Lower Manhattan—8,000 kids were delivered to safety.

Dealing with the Aftermath of 9/11

In the weeks and months that followed the fall of the twin towers, as the children and their teachers returned to school, Lantieri visited them. She saw how educators were struggling to keep the horror of that day from permanently damaging the kids. The anxiety in the teachers was also plain to see. The wounds were fresh.



Linda Lantieri talks about cultivating emotional intelligence in children at mindful.org/lantieri

"New York teachers were there for their students in ways far beyond what was required of them. They were at risk of burnout. They were not taking care of themselves at all.

"It was obvious to me how stressed so many of the teachers were, and I became very concerned," says Lantieri. "I read a lot about compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatization, and I began to make the argument that although the research I'd read had been done with doctors and nurses in health care, teachers were also on the front line of that happening to them."

Teaching Teachers to Nurture Their Inner Life

That's when she came up with the Inner Resilience Program—mindfulness training geared to help teachers in New York. "This whole nurturing the inner life through meditation and yoga, giving them time for inner work and reflection, was something people in education hadn't even considered," says Lantieri. The program had lots of things to offer as an alternative to what was available in the mainstream, "which was basically therapy."

The techniques were at first considered unorthodox, but Lantieri encouraged the administrators to do the math, and consider the cost of a decade of therapy. "'You don't have that kind of money,' I told them. We're giving inner-preparedness, where there's a reservoir in the teachers that we could nurture. That's what we need to be doing."

Lantieri took teachers away on retreats where they learned contemplative practices and did yoga. "We couldn't do enough of them," Lantieri says, so they started to bring instructors into the schools. Though her ideas took some convincing with the powers that be, after all her years with

the Board of Education, Lantieri had earned a lot of credibility. A number of foundations, including the September 11 Fund, financed the Inner Resilience Program for those educators who needed it the most.

More than 6,000 staff, 3,000 parents, and 40,000 students have gone through Lantieri's Inner Resilience Program to date.

"They get better listening skills, learn how to say what they think and feel, develop good communication and problem solving skills," she says. "But if they don't have the deeper self-awareness and emotional regulation, they're not going to be able to use those skills. And I think that's what mindfulness does. It helps them become resilient."

Building Both Academic as well as Inner Preparedness

The program spread throughout the city helping teachers and administrative staff to deal with the numerous challenges and day-to-day stress of their jobs. A curriculum for children in kindergarten to grade eight was also created and some 40,000 students have been through the program, which operates with help from grants from the Department of Education. The Inner Resilience Program has now been expanded to Ohio, Vermont, and Madrid, Spain.

"It came to me one day, what's really going to save us all is inner preparedness," says Lantieri. "Because all of those steps we take for outer-preparedness could fall apart. But what we have inside us is not going to break down. We have it in us no matter what." ●