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The Mindful Classroom

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Acknowledgements

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Goals and Objectives

The practice of Mindfulness in the classroom seeks to assist the student to:

- **become more aware of his/her surroundings**
- **develop their own sense of calmness**
- **decrease stress and anxiety**
- **develop his/her ability to self-regulate**
- **support academic and social emotional development, through the increase of their empathy and understanding of others**

Florida Health Standards

HE.K.P.7.1	**Self-Management- demonstrates the ability to practice advocacy, health enhancing behaviors, and avoidance or reduction of health risks for one's self.**
HE.1.C.1.1	**Core Concepts- Comprehends concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.**
HE.1.C.1.2	**SEE ABOVE**
HE.3.B.4.3	**Interpersonal Communication- Demonstrates the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.**
HE.4.B.4.3	**SEE ABOVE**

Introduction

The practice of Mindfulness seeks to ease stressors through the simplicity of the breath and attention to breathing. The students often find themselves stressed and under the daily pressure of "new" things - new standards and new material to be covered for new tests. Mindfulness seeks to develop a response rather than a reaction especially in stressful situations or ones of conflict. Research has verified that with a consistent mindful practice a person will have changes in brain structure; the prefrontal cortex thickens, allowing an increase in awareness of thoughts, and increased attention, cognitive control and emotional regulation.

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Always We Hope

Always we hope
someone else has the answer.
some other place will be better,
some other time it will all turn out.
~
This is it.
no one else has the answer.
no other place will be better,
and it has already turned out.
~
At the centre of your being
you have the answer;
you know who you are
and you know what you want.
~
There is no need
to run outside
for better seeing.
~
Nor to peer from a window.
~
Rather abide at the centre of your being;
for the more you leave it, the less you learn.
~
Search your heart
and see
the way to do
is to be.

~o~

Lao Tzu

Mindfulness, the Development

Mindfulness has become a really hot topic in the last 5 years and there are many definitions. Mindfulness encompasses the inner and outer being. It is an awareness, a way of being present with our thoughts, emotions and body sensations, right now, in THIS moment, without judgment. This awareness also extends to our social landscape and learning how to develop pro-social behaviors that encourage a sense of connectedness and goodwill rather than separation, hostility and ill-will.

There exists at present a wealth of evidence of the positive effect of mindfulness on adults. If it is so beneficial for adults can you imagine the effect on our world if these skills were taught to adolescents, to preschoolers, giving them time to develop these skills before a negative mindset develops?

HISTORY

Many Asian contemplative practices are based in Hinduism. In 1500 BCE we find evidence of yoga, which means disciple, this practice seeks to unite the soul with God. Some of the schools of yoga are the Jnana, a contemplative form in which the Brahman or God is of an impersonal nature and is often considered the most difficult. Bhakti, often thought of as the simplest in which a love and devotion to a more personal Brahman is emphasized. Mantra mediation is a form of this mediation, here words or phrases are chanted to clear and focus the mind. Karma yoga, emphasizes work performed with devotion and finally, Raja which involves moving meditations and is the most familiar to what we at present call yoga. Here there is a combination of focus on both the mind and body.

Daoist mindfulness existed from the 6th c BCE and contributed to the moving meditation practices through the development of qi gong (energy WORK). Buddhist mindfulness techniques began about 535 BCE and focus on seated mediations and mindfulness of breath, one of the oldest Buddhist mediation practices being Vipassana. Japanese Zen is probably the most familiar technique to the average American where sitting and walking meditation are used to achieve satori, defined by the Miriam Webster Dictionary as "sudden enlightenment and a state of consciousness attained by intuitive illumination representing the spiritual goal of Zen Buddhism.

Evidence of Christian mindfulness can be found from 530 CE, here a direct experience with God is emphasized. Some Christian mystics were St. John of the Cross, St Teresa de Avila and St. Hildegard of Bingen. Muslim mindfulness dates from the 9th CE and is grounded in the Sufi practice. Jewish mindfulness which began about the 10th c, CE, the best known of which is Khabbalah.

In the United States John Kabat-Zinn was the forerunner in the late 1970's of standardizing the practice of secular mindfulness, MBSR was begun as stress reduction program in 1979 at a single hospital in Massachusetts and by 2014 was being offered in 200 hospitals, clinics and universities worldwide. This early focus was on the practice of mindfulness as it related to health care.

In the 1990s mental health became the next focus with the development of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy based on the work of Mark Williams, John Teasdale and Zindel Seagal. Here MBCT was developed to treat clinical depression, specifically that of relapse.

This led to the third phase of mindfulness in the U.S, where a shift to the role of mindfulness in education is presently occurring, away from the educational emphasis on cognitive intelligence, that of the IQ score to a more non-cognitive type of intelligence which seeks to develop resiliency and lifelong fulfillment. It began in the late 1980s with select school programs from educators with an MBSR background with components of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) (led by visionaries such as Linda Lantieri) in the mid-2000s. It is a school of thought that Mindfulness complements SEL since both aim to teach children how to build their self-awareness, handle their emotions effectively and develop their sense of empathy.

At present the emphasis is on validating Mindfulness Based Interventions with children as well as adolescent populations and creating curriculum and techniques specifically geared to the needs of children and youth. In the UK, The Wellcome Trust study is a seven-year long randomized trial on mindfulness training that will involve about 6,000 British students ages 11 to 14.The £6.4 million study seeks to understand how mindfulness can boost concentration and enhance academic performance in students and it is hoped that it will lead to the development of effective methods to assist teens develop mental resiliency, thereby preventing mental illnesses from occurring.

So with a lot happening with the potentially game changing role of mindfulness in the classroom let's turn our attention to the role of the teacher in such a classroom. Many of us have heard the saying that you cannot give what you do not have. This is especially true with the practice of Mindfulness. A personal practice gives "grounding" to a teacher's classroom practice.

In research by the University of Wisconsin's Center for Investigating Healthy Minds (CIHM), led by Lisa Flook, published in 2013, it was found that teachers who practiced mindfulness were able to reduce their own level of stress thereby leading to less teacher burnout. Vicki Zakrzewski, educational director of the Greater Good Science Center, likens a teachers practice to being able to make stressors such as misbehavior, flow like water off a duck's back. She points out that by doing this teacher become more able to focus on their job, that of ACTUALLY teaching. This increased focus would seem to naturally lead to an IMPROVEMENT in teaching.

RESEARCH

There has been research on the effects of mindfulness in the brain, the mind, the body and the behavior for more than 20 years. Approximately 52 examples of empirical and theoretical work indicate that cultivating a mindful way of being is aligned with less emotional distress, a better state of mind and the improvement in the quality of life. From the emotional point of view, mindfulness also promotes empathy and compassion. In addition the practice of mindfulness can influence the nervous system, stress hormones, the immune system and health behaviors in a positive manner.

Mindfulness is also known to assist in the regulation of the emotions by decreasing reactivity and increasing responsive outcomes. Jon Kabat-Zinn, Rosenzweig, Massion, et al., 1998 documented an improvement in the mood, anxiety and general well-being. Meditation can be considered one of the few tools for systematic cultivation of equanimity and tolerance (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006).

Mindfulness can be cultivated through practices such as yoga, qigong and tai chi, but most of the research has focused on the practice of mindfulness through meditation. The self-regulation practices that focuses on the training of the attention and the awareness to bring mental processes under a voluntary control, fosters the development of capacities as calmness, clarity and concentration (Walsh & Shapiro , 2006).

In research done by UCLA (2013) on 2nd and 3rd graders who practiced mindfulness, it was found that the kids with the lowest executive function had the biggest improvement over time. In 2011, Mindful Schools in Oakland compared a control group with a mindful student group in the areas of:

- **Paying Attention**
- **Calmness & Self Control**
- **Self-Care/ Participation**
- **Care & Respect for Others**

The overall difference between both groups, in each area, was almost a 50% increase in favor of the mindful group. UCSB did a randomized clinical trial and they concluded that the kids in the investigation showed higher working memory and decreased in the mind wandering during task.

Other research theorizes that mindfulness meditation promotes enhanced attention capacities through gains in the working memory and these gains contribute to effective emotion-regulation strategies.

MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES FOR K-2

- **Making a calming jar/Calming your mind**
- **Anchoring the breath**
- **Mindful Sitting**
- **Mindful Listening**
- **Observing**
- **Animal poses**
- **Feelings and thoughts, what's the difference?**
- **What is peace?**
- **What is compassion?**
- **Gratitude jar**

CALMING YOUR MIND

Materials
Mason jar
1 cup of hot water
Glitter glue (1-2 tbsps.)
Fine glitter (3-4 tsps.)
Food coloring
Tibetan bells /Singing bowl

Purpose
To aid in the calming of an upset child.

An observation tool to see what happens to a thought filled mind after a few minutes of calming breaths.

Method
In a mason jar add, 1 cup of very hot water. Add 2 tablespoons glitter glue. Whisk to break up the glitter glue somewhat. Add fine glitter until there is about half to three quarters of an inch layer on the bottom of the jar. Fill the jar with water, leaving about one inch at the top for shaking. Add I drop of food coloring.

OPTIONAL
Add chunky glitter and flower sequins to the liquid in the jar.

Screw lid on securely, SHAKE, and enjoy!

Activity
With the students seated at their desk or in a circle on the carpet the teacher will explain to the students that each day, together, they will breathe in an out three times and continue to pay attention to their normal breathing for a minute. At the end of the minute the discussion will center on how the children felt as they breathed.

To close the teacher will shake the calming jar comparing the thoughts of the mind to the glitter in the jar and how the mind with breath, like the glitter with time, settles.

ANCHORING THE BREATH

Materials
Video of boat being anchored.
Tibetan bells/ Singing bowl

Purpose
Creating an awareness of how the breath can be used as an anchor to calm our minds.

Activity
By sounding the bell the teacher will indicate the start of the practice, where students are seated mindfully. Begin with a slow deep inhale followed by a long exhale. Repeat two times for a total of three in and out breaths.

Placing their hands on their belly the students will notice it's rising and falling. Point out how their hands are going up and down and continue doing this for one minute. Explain to your students that if their mind starts thinking about something else to go back to noticing how their belly moves up and down as they breathe in and out.

Close the session with the sound of the bell.

MINDFUL SITTING

Materials
Tibetan bells/Singing bowl
Chairs

Purpose
To prepare the body to give full attention to what is happening within and around us.

Activity
Seated comfortably on the floor or in a chair, barefooted with the soles of the feet firmly planted on the ground, imagine that there is a string attached to the top of your head. Pulling gently but firmly on this imaginary string the body rises to an erect dignified position with the head, neck and back all in vertical alignment. The shoulders are relaxed down and not scrunched toward the ears. The hands may be placed on the knees or rest in the lap with the fingers of the left hand above the fingers of the right hand and the thumbs tips just touching each other forming a closed oval.

Posture is important as it "sets up the container" for your practice, allowing you to fully focus on your breath and the ongoing sensations in the body.

MINDFUL LISTENING

Materials

Tibetan Bells or singing bowl
Recording of a cd with various sounds, tones, rhythms and speeds

Purpose

To attune the ear of the students, getting them to be aware of and notice different sounds.

Activity

The sound of the bowl or bell will signal a time to be quiet, sitting mindfully.

Begin the exercise with three deep breaths. If necessary students can use their belly as an anchor and continue with regular breathing for one or two more minutes, eyes closed.

During this time students will try to identify the different sounds heard.

The sound of the bell/bowl indicates the end of the exercise and we breathe in and out.

On opening their eyes students will discuss the sound experience or draw what sounds they heard.

As an extension, students are encouraged to listen closely in everyday areas such as the bus, driving to school, in the cafeteria for what sounds they hear.

OBSERVING

Materials

Large photograph, picture or painting that the students may observe closely.
Tibetan bells/ Singing Bowl

Purpose

To encourage students to think critically, observe artwork independently and to ground their statements in evidence.

Activity

Choose artwork that is not abstract and ask the students to look at it silently for a minute or two. The following three questions will guide the discussion:

- **"What is going on here?" Student responses are summarized as follows…Mary thinks this could be….**

- **"What do you see that makes you say that?" This encourages the student to base their statements in things that they actually see in the work of art.**

- **To the group the question is directed, "What more can we find?"**

The teacher should during the discussion link the responses together offering comparisons and contrasts of statement. For example, Mia agrees with Brian that the lady seems to be tired or Tom disagrees with John that the dog is well fed and thinks it looks sad. In addition the teacher should not add any information but the discussion is based solely on student responses.

Allowance should be made for the fact that the conversation may go off topic as this exercise is one to encourage critical thinking and not one for information gathering.

ANIMAL POSES

Materials
Tibetan Bells or singing bowl

Purpose
To bring attention to the movements of the body though animal poses

Activity
The students are seated mindfully in a circle on the carpet and the activity begins with the sounding of the bowl or bells. With their hands on their bellies, and their eyes closed, each student takes three inhales and exhales and continues to breathe with regular breath for about a minute at the end of which they are asked to open their eyes.

From a seated position the students will lie face down on the carpet with their head on their hands. Placing their hands under the shoulders the students will raise their heads. Lengthening back they will press into their arms and gently arch up. Moving slowly from side to side the students will make a hissing sound.

Placing their hands under their shoulders students will rise unto all fours. Breathing in, they will arch their back like a cat and breathing out they will round their backs and look at their belly button. Repeat three times.

The students will come to standing with their arms at their sides. Breathing in the students will tuck their arms under their armpit to make wings. Breathe out. Breathing in and out the students will raise one leg and rest it against the standing leg for a short time for three breaths. Switch legs and repeat the pose.

The sounding of the bowl will indicate an end to the practice.

FEELINGS/EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS, IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

Materials

Tibetan bells /Singing bowl

Purpose

To distinguish between the two making communication clearer.

Thoughts are what arise in the mind and are verbalizations of the mind. Generally thoughts precede feelings and these thought may be conscious or unconscious. Emotions are defined as strong feelings and are sensations in the body. Examples of emotions are happiness, sadness, anxiousness, contentment, being angry, overjoyed, loving and lonely.

It is critical to notice one's speech. The statement "I feel like no one understands me" is not a feeling but a thought. Usually when a sentences starts I feel like or I feel that, a thought is probably being expressed. In contrast, the sentence "I think no one understands me and I feel sad or fearful about being misunderstood," expresses both a feeling and a thought.

The young child who states "No one likes me" can be lead to realize that this is just a thought they are having and is not a fact. This allows them to step back from it and become less caught up in the statement as reality.

Activity

The teacher after ringing the bells or bowl and taking a series of mindful breaths will read a story that addresses different emotions to promote the topic. The students will share their own stories and the teacher will clarify if a feeling or emotion is being discussed. When the lesson is repeated the students may have a manila sheet with a line drawn down the middle, one side labeled THOUGHTS and the other FEELINGS. The students will classify them and clarify the differences.

WHAT IS PEACE?

Materials
Posters or pictures of kids in conflict and in peace
Tibetan bells/ Singing
Chart paper
Markers

Purpose
To discuss different ways that each person can solve problems when there is conflict.

Activity
It will start with the sound of the bells or a bowl. The students will sit mindfully and close their eyes in order to start breathing, guided by the teacher.

After a minute or two, depending on their ability to maintain their focus, they will open their eyes and the teacher will talk about a different conflictive scenarios and possible solutions.

At the end on a paper chart the teacher should write both, the problem and the solutions given by the students.

Examples of problems:

I want the same toy that my friend has.

Someone pushed me while I was in line.

He always skips in line.

I want the pink / blue scissors and so does my friend.

She doesn't want to be my friend and I feel very upset.

Possible Solutions

Breathe and think.

Respond instead of screaming or yielding (reactions).

Talk about it after breathing and feel calm.

Sharing.

Taking turns.

WHAT IS COMPASSION?

Materials
Chart paper
Markers
Tibetan bells/ Singing bowl

Purpose
The students will experience through role play how we can show compassion towards others.

Activity
At the sound of the bells or bowl, the students will seat mindfully at their desk or in the carpet in a circle. The teacher will lead the mindful breathing and after a few minutes she/he will introduce the topic by asking what compassion is?

If the students doesn't have an answer, she/he will explain with an example and after the concept is clear, the group could be divided in small groups of three or four students, with instructions to act out different scenarios and what they will do to help.

Possible situations:

Everybody is playing outside and one kid is by himself.

You get home and Mom is making dinner, what could you do?

Your friend is absent because he or she is sick.

When you get in the bus, the driver doesn't seem to be having a good day.

The students will come up with different ways of showing compassion to others and will become more aware of situations where they can show compassion.

GRATITUDE JAR

Materials

A big Clear Jar
Different color pre-cut hearts
Pencil, crayons or thin marker
Tibetan bells/ Singing bowl

Purpose

To be aware of all the things that happen every day that we can be grateful for.

Activity

At the sound of the bells or bowl, the students will seat mindfully at their desk or in the carpet in a circle. The teacher will lead the mindful breathing and, after a few minutes, the bells will sound again to finish and open their eyes.

The teacher will give them a heart or two with a crayon and ask them what mean to them to say thank you. From this interaction the students will understand what is to feel grateful of and will write a grateful word in their hearts and put them inside the jar.

At the end of the day those words will be read to share.

This jar is open to be filled up every day. Have fun, because this is a lovely activity.

Resources

Daniel Rechtschaffen, *The Way Of Mindful Education,* W.W.Norton & Company, 2014

Patricia Jennings, *Mindfulness for Teachers,* W.W. Norton & Company, 2015

Meena Srinivasan, *Teach, Breathe, Learn,* Parallax Press, 2014

Mindful Schools

Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence,* Bantam, 1995

FOR IMAGES

CARE: Visual thinking strategies Lesson Plans

National Geographic photographs

Google Images - Visual Thinking Strategies Images

Collection.mam.org- Milwaukee Art Museum Collection

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