Mindfulness in the Classroom: Exercises for Your Students to Focus on Class Content

by Katie Jostock
Today we will...

- Define mindfulness and its relevancy to educational contexts
- Discuss evidence-based research supporting the efficacy of mindfulness in educational contexts
- Practice mindfulness exercises which may be used in classrooms or educational contexts
Why do I care about this?

- My history
- My question: Why do we spend so much time and energy educating students on textbook material and not becoming mentally and emotionally healthy?
- What about you?
Exercise #1
Exercise #1 (cont.)

- What were you thinking while listening?
- What were you feeling?
- Did you notice how your body responded?
- How do you feel after listening to this?
- You’ve just engaged in mindfulness!
What is mindfulness?

- “Awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

Your body is present.  
Is your mind?

Past  
Present  
Future
What is mindfulness? (cont.)

- Eastern Buddhist origins (expect Western resistance)
Religious conflict?

I like to think of mindfulness simply as the art of conscious living. You don’t have to be a Buddhist or a yogi to practice it. In fact, if you know anything about Buddhism, you will know that the most important point is to be yourself and not try to become anything that you are not already. Buddhism is fundamentally about being in touch with your own deepest nature and letting it flow out of you unimpeded. It has to do with waking up and seeing things as they are. In fact, the word “Buddha” simply means one who has awakened to his or her own true nature.
So, mindfulness will not conflict with any beliefs or traditions—religious or for that matter scientific—nor is it trying to sell you anything, especially not a new belief system or ideology. It is simply a practical way to be more in touch with the fullness of your being through a systematic process of self-observation, self-inquiry, and mindful action.

-Kabat-Zinn, 2005
Mindfulness Timeline

- **1979**: Development of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)
- **1992**: Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn develops Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
- **EARLY 2000s**: MBSR in more than 200 medical centers, hospitals and clinics; more than 1,300 published studies show symptom reductions across a wide range of diagnoses as well as neurobiological impacts
- **2004**: First round of formalized mindfulness in education interventions training teachers in self-care, resiliency and wellness and training students in mindfulness techniques
- **2007**: Inaugural Mindful Schools in-class program
- **2010s**: MBCT endorsed by the United Kingdom’s National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence
- **2013**: More serious research designs initiated. Publication of first meta-analyses of mindfulness in education
- **2015**: Students and teachers worldwide have access to mindfulness programs
Mindfulness and meditation’s positive effects on focus development and stress reduction have lead a number of college instructors from business, accounting, sociology, and nursing to incorporate its practice into their pedagogy (Borker, 2013; Helber, Zook, & Immergut, 2012; dos Santos et al., 2016).

Specific outcomes may include:
- Staying focused in learning situations
- Moving from fear to curiosity in academic learning
- Finding an inner source of calm
- Feeling more self-acceptance when facing difficult situations (Hjeltnes et al., 2015)
Room to Breathe (2012)
Megan Cowan - Mindful Schools
How to Start the Conversation

- You can be as elaborate as creating a “Road Rage” audio clip, or you can simply engage in a group reflection about how your students are feeling about an upcoming assignment.

- Discussions regarding emotion awareness may help, too.
Spock and Captain Kirk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion Mind</th>
<th>Rational Mind</th>
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Benefits? Problems?
Wise Mind

- We need both emotion and rationale to engage our wise mind
Dealing with Negative Thoughts and Emotions

- Identifying the Thought: “I can’t finish this assignment.”
- Identifying the Feeling: Shame, anger, guilt, fear, etc.
- Identifying the Judgment: “I suck at this.”

- Challenge: “You finished and received a high grade on the last assignment. That’s evidence that you can do it again.”
- Affirmation: “It makes sense you would feel nervous approaching this assignment. It is new and unfamiliar, but that doesn’t mean you can’t do it.”
- Your Toolbox: “Which mindfulness tool can you use to reduce your stress and retain focus to complete your goal?”
10 Growth Mindset Statements

What can I say to myself?

INSTEAD OF:
I’m not good at this.
I’m awesome at this.
I give up.
This is too hard.
I can’t make this any better.
I just can’t do Math.
I made a mistake.
She’s so smart, I will never be that smart.
It’s good enough.
Plan “A” didn’t work.

TRY THINKING:
1. What am I missing?
2. I’m on the right track.
3. I’ll use some of the strategies we’ve learned.
4. This may take some time and effort.
5. I can always improve so I’ll keep trying.
6. I’m going to train my brain in Math.
7. Mistakes help me to learn better.
8. I’m going to figure out how she does it.
9. Is it really my best work?
10. Good thing the alphabet has 25 more letters!

(Original source unknown)
Exercise #2: Focusing on Taste
Exercise #2: Focusing on Touch

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTGqo_ScI6Y
Exercise #3: Focusing on Sight
Mindfulness for School Leaders

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVA2N6tX2cg
Final Debrief

- What are the benefits of including mindfulness into your class? What are the potential problems?
Questions for me?
Resources for You
References


Room to Breathe. (2013, April 16). Megan Cowan. [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AYiojxBg4g
