

Mindfulness in the Classroom: some helpful suggestions

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Teaching mindfulness to children is a rewarding pursuit. Yet, like anything else, it comes with its challenges.

While most children take readily to the core practice of seated mindful breathing, not all do. The challenge is how to involve the whole class in the practice- even the distraction-prone kids who are wriggling around with their bodies, flitting around with their eyes and struggling with a runaway mind.

How do we involve them? How do we draw all children into the joys and benefits of sitting quietly and following the breath?

BREATHING BUDDIES

Lying down is of course an easy option, and a good one. As a training and preparation for seated practice, it is also a wonderful relaxation practice in its own right. The children will ask for it again and again. As a breathing practice, have the children lie down with a 'breathing buddy' on their tummy. I collect (and wash) soft toys from op shops for this purpose.

Give your imagination free reign as you guide the practice. For younger children, the buddies could be pretend boats going up and down on the waves of the breath; or an interesting creature on an up-hill down-dale exploration. Mix this in with simply talking children through the focusing on the breath itself.

The guided relaxation journey is a further approach. My favourite audio journeys at the moment are from Global Kids Yoga (<https://www.cdbaby.com/cd/globalfamilyyoga>). I love their 'Magic Carpet Ride' and a body relaxation, 'Shining Star'.

BALANCING

Balancing is another excellent preparation for, or accompaniment to, seated meditation. Want to settle a gangly, wriggly, all-over-the-place 9-year old boy? Give him something to balance on his head during the meditation, such as a small beanbag or soft thickish book. Make it a challenge. His eyes will still be moving but his body will be delightfully still.

Engage the whole class in a balancing relay. The golden oldie egg-and-spoon race might get a little messy for the classroom, but carrying a spoonful of water in the relay is a great alternative. Susan Kaiser Greenland of Inner Kids fame, sits small groups of kids in a circle, carefully trying not to spill a drop as they pass around a cup brimful with water. (link to video). You get the idea.

Or, you can just ask the kids to stand on one leg.

FEELIES

Even with the preparation of the lying down practice, some children will still struggle with sitting still for three minutes and upwards; not all will feel comfortable closing their eyes and going within.

Get creative with your solutions!

I find that soft material, luscious to the touch, works wonders. When distracted kids stroke the 'feelies' that I provide, it engages their attention and their senses and slows them down. Restless minds are magnetised by the sensation of touch: we can't think and feel at the same time. The stroking and feeling itself becomes the meditation, in place of the breath awareness focus.

(I use soft furry material from spotlight called, weirdly, a "fur fat quarter" that comes in a 75x50cm wide piece, for approx. \$15. I cut it into long strips 38cm x 14cm: six pieces per fur fat quarter. It is synthetic but it feels divine. For a natural fabric alternative you could use lambswool.)

HAND-BREATHING GAME

A great way to engage the kids who are on the edges and lure them into mindful breathing is an eyes-open 'game', or practice, called hand-breathing.

In fact, hand-breathing will engage and settle the whole class. Even you!

Stand opposite your group of kids (they can be in rows or just mingled; they can be sitting at their desks). 1. Slowly raise both your arms, elbows slightly bent like conducting an orchestra. Instruct the kids to breathe in as you raise your arms upward. 2. Slowly lower your arms and instruct the kids to breathe out as your arms lower.

The children can either be motionless or raising their arms along with you.

Start with at least three slow, calm rounds. Then you can start to vary the speed and the height of the arms. Have fun with it. You can pause the arms mid-raise: the breath is held in. You can stagger the breath by climbing imaginary stairs with your hands. There are limitless possibilities and variations for this practice to engage the attention of children.

But always come back to the basic three slow, calm, even rounds.

Before too long, the kids will delight in taking turns to lead the session themselves.

I learned this practice from the creative and experienced teacher Gopal Amir Yaffe when attending his

Rainbow kids Yoga (<http://rainbowkidsyoga.net/index.html>) 3-day training a few years ago, and have used it successfully in my classroom mindfulness sessions ever since.

MEDITATION MARATHON

Who can sit still for the longest and follow their breath? In the Meditation Marathon, kids pair up and sit opposite each other (it's best for older children.)

A third child can be the observer, to make sure the contestants stay on track. The competitive spirit will train kids to sit and focus a lot longer than they might otherwise.

As a wonderful teacher said to me recently: competition works! Exploit it!

Enjoy your forays into classroom mindfulness. Keep it light and pleasurable and you will certainly achieve the harmonious classroom of your dreams.

Watch Shakti Burke at work in the classroom with Mindfulness in Education at Dunoon Public School

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ry-sRjRFIW8> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ry-sRjRFIW8>)

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Cassandra (<http://Www.dreamchildren2915@gmail.com>)

17/11/2015 09:15:09 pm

Great activities

Reply

Ash (<http://ahakidsbooks.com>)

18/5/2016 01:04:17 pm

What an amazing website! Excellent activities for engaging kids in breathing techniques. Thanks very much for sharing.

Reply

Kristin Ginty

3/1/2017 01:31:00 pm

Reply

Maggie (<http://www.upwardspirals.org.uk>)

22/3/2017 10:19:38 am

Lovely ideas in the video - makes me wish I was little again and joining in!

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