

Mindfulness in Special Education

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MORNING WORK



- 1.) You have 3 minutes.**
- 2.) Read your article**
- 3.) Be ready to answer questions and discuss.**



Let's try that again. . .



- 1.) Take a seat
- 2.) Relax/close your eyes
- 3.) Breath In
- 4.) Breath Out
- 5.) Clear your mind



How do you feel?

-Where is your mind?

-Are you relaxed?

Let's compare...

1.) How did you feel when you first entered room?

ANXIETY

According to the National Institute of Mental Health: “Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the United States affecting over 40 million adults” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Effects of Anxiety:

- + People can channel their stress to help them be more productive
- It can be debilitating condition that has severe physical and mental effects.

How did you feel when you entered room for the 2nd time?

-More relaxed?

-More focused?

-More in control of your emotions?

-More in control of your mind and body?

CONGRATULATIONS!

You just experienced the benefits of mindfulness.

Personal Connection to mindfulness:

WHO AM I?

-3rd year as high school Special Education Teacher at Cotting School

-Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education and Human Development from Boston College

-Masters in Severe Special Education from Boston College

-Division 1 Student Athlete

-Have severe anxiety.

In college anxiety began to affect every area of my life...

Swimming Life: After every important race....my body would shut down, stomach would swell, my skin would turn ghostly white, my body temperature would drastically fluctuate from hot to freezing, get sick, and sometimes even pass out.

Social life: - Overthink every social situation, didn't want to go places, be around people, talk to anyone

Academic life: -Inability to focus in class
-Get sick or have mental breakdown during exams
-Panic attack when writing papers or giving presentations

How did I
overcome my
anxiety?

Sports
Psychologist
taught me
mindfulness
meditation
practices.

What about my students?

- I am typically functioning.
- I live on my own and fully support myself financially
- I have the cognitive, physical and emotional ability to make responsible life decisions

On the other hand---My students have obstacles put in front of them, not by their choosing, which prevent them from functioning typically in this way.

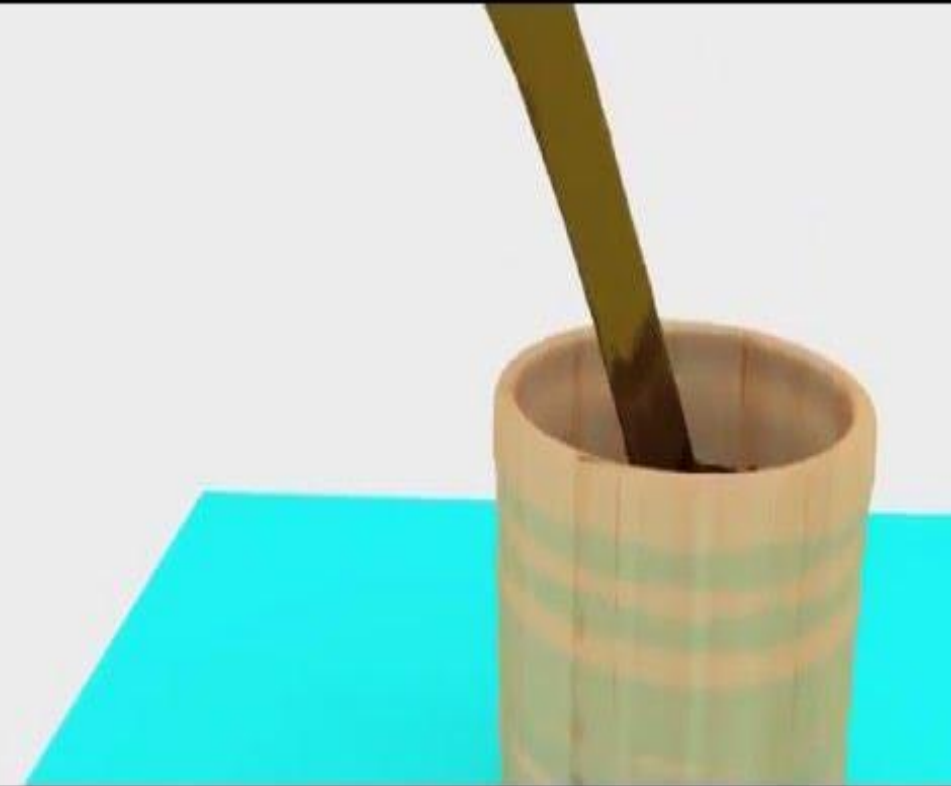
Got me thinking...

If I am typically functioning and have these extreme reactions to anxiety...how does it affect my students?

Anxiety **A M P L I F I E S** any other disability.

- It is extremely taxing on the brain and body
- Makes it very hard to focus
- Causes difficulty processing new and unfamiliar things
- Causes difficulty distinguishing big problems vs. small problems
- Causes difficulty in making rational decisions

When anxieties are too high,
learning and rational decision
making cannot take place.



Imagine our students as a cup and their emotions are the coffee.

Walk into class....

- 1.) Didn't sleep well
- 2.) Got into fight with sibling or friend
- 3.) Stuck in traffic
- 4.) Social Anxiety with peers
- 5.) Didn't do well on homework
- 6.) Worried about school trip/work

Begin teaching lesson....

EMOTIONAL OVERFLOW

=HOT MESS

How can I help
my students
overcome their
anxiety?



Mindfulness

What is Mindfulness?

According to Jon Kabatt-Zin (2003), creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society at the UMASS Medical School:

Intervention based on eastern meditation techniques that teaches:

- how to still the mind**
- live in the present moment**
- reduce automatic responding**

Mindfulness AKA “Relaxation Response”

“**Relaxation response**” term coined by Dr. Herbert Benson: founder of Harvard’s Mind/Body Medical Institute, as:

“Personal ability to encourage your body to release chemicals and brain signals that make your muscles and organs slow down and increase blood flow to the brain,” (Mitchell,2013).

=it is essentially the counter reaction to the “fight or flight” response.

How does mindfulness work in the brain?

How? By focusing on what is going on in your body through deep breathing, meditating and being present....causes millions of neurons to make connections between 4 different parts of your brain:

- prefrontal cortex

- limbic system: hippocampus and the amygdala

- brain stem

=These connections cause us to feel good, make it easier to concentrate, make good decisions be kind, and be more aware of what is happening.

What happens in our brain when we practice mindfulness?

Attention association area

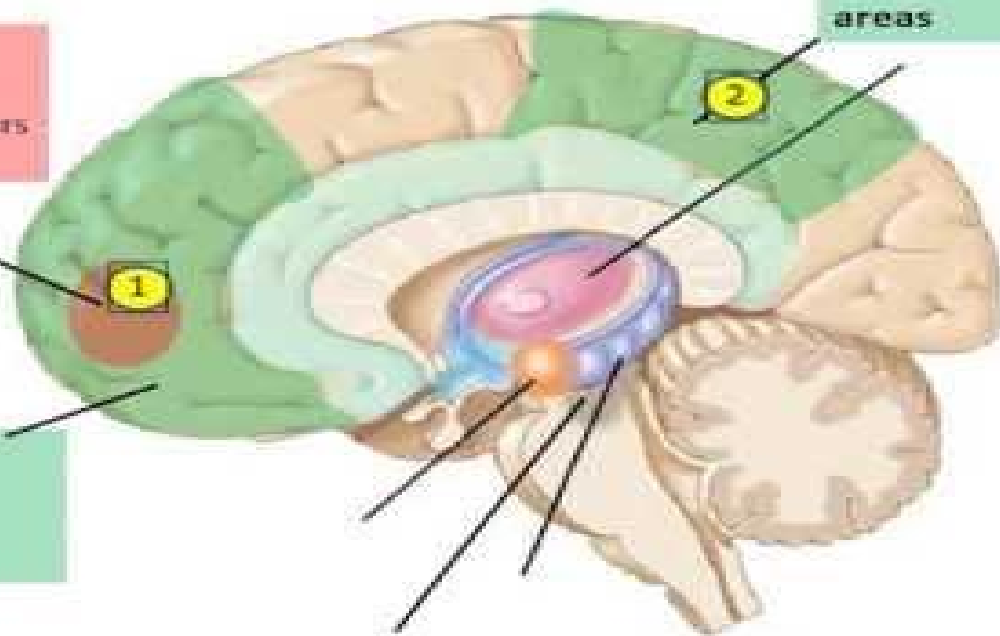
- goal-oriented behaviours and actions

Decreased activity

Increased activity

Prefrontal cortex
(Emotional responses, decisions, planning, judgement)

Orientation association & Visual association areas



Need to train the brain to combat anxiety with the relaxation response.

How do we do
that?

Make mindfulness
practices part of
everyday routines.

Mindfulness Practices in Room 210

- Relaxation Corner
- Morning Meditation
- 3-5 minutes of deep breathing after every transition
- 1 minute breathing breaks during lessons
- Assign 20 minutes of mindfulness relaxation time
_____for HW

Create a “relaxation space”

A safe place where students can go to take a break and “turn off.”

One that encourages them to quiet the mind.

Be still. Be calm. Recharge.



Create a calming environment conducive for learning.

Relax every sense



Sight

-“Digatillay Unplug”, dim lights, close eyes, candle light



Smell

- Diffuse natural oils into air, incense, scented pillows



Touch

-Weighted pillow, eye mask, blanket



Hearing

-Relaxing music, nature sounds, guided meditation, peace and quiet



Taste

-Warm flavors like herbal tea, milk, honey

Make mindfulness part of classroom routines

Morning routine: unpack, eat snack, mindfulness meditation, begin day



Transition routine: sit down, begin deep breathing, bring mind and body back to class, begin lesson

Bring Mindfulness Home

Mindfulness Homework: Assign 20 minutes of relaxation time for HW every night.

Afternoon Routine: Get home, unpack, have snack, do 10-20 minutes of mindfulness, do HW

Bedtime Routine: Brush teeth, put pajamas on, do 10 minutes of mindfulness, go to bed.

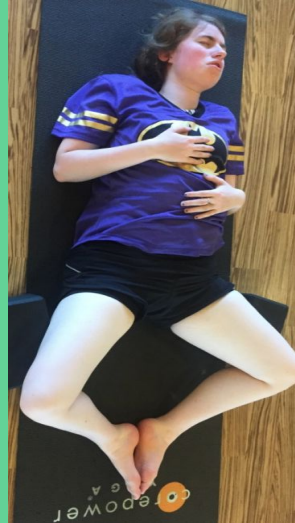
Ideas for relaxation time:

- Coloring
- Listening to Music (NO VIDEOS!)
- Dance
- Do Yoga
- Deep Breathing
- Think of Happy Place
- Read/Listen to a book
- Go for a walk (outside or inside)

My discoveries

After incorporating these routines into my classroom I found students had...

1. Improved focus
2. Improved emotional awareness and regulation
3. More compassion and empathy towards each other
4. Increased flexibility and ability to deal with schedule changes.
5. Overall greater sense of calmness and happiness



If students practice mindfulness every day, then when they start to have strong feelings...the ability to activate their “relaxation response” becomes instinctual.

Conclusion

If mindfulness interventions can become part of students' school culture and be engrained in their daily routines, then the students would repeatedly be exposed to mindfulness practices and better be able to apply the strategies into their daily lives.

Hurry has become the master. We have stopped sensing the stillness, the stunning fullness and beauty and divine perfection of the moment. Most barrel through life, unaware of their senses and surroundings, deaf and blind to the magical qualities of...this...very...moment. We are not supposed to miss it all, this life, but we do, all frazzled, stressed, and stripped away from Now.”

— Brendon Burchard, *The Motivation Manifesto*

Resources

Video of the Middlesex Mindfulness Program

<https://www.mxschool.edu/mindfulness>

Video of another school in DC who incorporated Mindfulness practices school-wide.

<http://www.nbcwashington.com/multimedia/285537921.html>

The Association for Mindfulness in Education is a collaborative association of organizations and individuals working together to provide support for mindfulness training as a component of K-12 education.

<http://www.mindfuleducation.org/>

[Calm.com](https://www.calm.com) Relax with Calm, a simple mindfulness meditation app that brings clarity and peace of mind into your life.

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Goals

Participants will be exposed to many different components of mindfulness including:

- Specific mindfulness practices

(relaxing every sense, deep breathing, finding "happy place", being present, and more)

- Research findings that support mindfulness practices in the classroom

- How to create a "relaxation/mindfulness place" in your classroom, school or home

- How teachers can help students/parents bring these mindfulness practices home

Please come with an open mind and an open heart. Be ready to find your "zen" space and learn how to create it for your students!