**Here, Now:**

**The Transformative Powers of Mindfulness & Contemplative Education**

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**What is Mindfulness:** the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally (from Jon Kabat-Zinn)

**Partial List of Scientifically Proven Benefits for Students (and You):**

Reduced stress Increased Academic Performance Increased Cognition

Improved Focus Emotional Intelligence Better Relationships

Improved Memory Emotional Regulation Better Sleep

Greater Empathy Improved Communication Skills Better Mental Health

**Tools & Practices of Mindfulness:**

Reflective Writing Breathing Exercises Expressive Arts

Meditation Guided Imagery Dialogue & Active Listening Movement

**Introducing Mindfulness:**

* Start small
* Make it fun, appealing, and relatable.
* Lead by example through modeling and vulnerability.
* Stay consistent; mindfulness is a skill and needs to be practiced to develop and be effective.

**Implementation Tips:**

1. **Relate Mindfulness to Student Interests and Pop Culture:** Connect meditation to things they care about. For instance, if they’re into sports, explain how meditation can help them stay focused and perform better. If they like video games, frame meditation as a way to "level up" their brainpower and handle challenges more effectively. **Show clips of famous musicians, actors, and athletes introducing or using mindfulness practices.**
2. **Remind Students that Mind Control is a Superpower:** Avoid jargon and keep explanations straightforward using analogies and success stories. For example, you might say, “Meditation is like a superhero training for your mind. It helps you stay calm and focused, so you can handle anything that comes your way.”
3. **Keep It Fun:** Use playful language and activities to make meditation enjoyable. Incorporate games, apps, and creativity.
4. **Incorporate Creative Elements:** Use music, art, or movement to make mindfulness more dynamic. For example, you can pair meditation with drawing or movement.
5. **Adaptation**: Tailor practices to fit the age and developmental stage of the students. Younger children might benefit from more engaging, playful activities, while older students may be ready for longer and more structured exercises.
6. **Promote Accessibility**: Ensure that resources and practices are accessible to all, including those with disabilities or limited resources. Adjust when needed.
7. **Make It Social:** Group activities make meditation feel like a team effort.
8. **Show Immediate Benefits:** As human beings we are interested if we experience quick results. After a meditation, ask them if they notice any changes in how they feel or how they handle situations. Positive experiences can encourage them to continue.
9. **Lead by Example:** Children often mimic the behavior of adults. If they see you practicing meditation and enjoying its benefits, they might be more inclined to try it themselves. Do the activities and share alongside your students.
10. **Create a Routine:** Consistency will help meditation become a normal part of their day. Set aside a specific times so it becomes a regular part of their routine.
11. **Provide Resources**: Offer resources, such as handouts, links, apps, and videos, for students to use outside of school. Let them get involved in choosing activities and apps.
12. **Encourage Questions and Exploration:** Let them ask questions and explore meditation in their own way. There is no right or wrong; their experience is their experience.

**Bonus: Celebrate Progress:** Acknowledge and celebrate efforts, no matter how small. Positive reinforcement boosts motivation.

**Best Practice for Educators** (Only 3-10 minutes daily will benefit you.)

1. **Mindful Moments**: Take short breaks throughout the day to practice deep breathing or simply observe your surroundings without judgment. Use the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 method. This can be done before or after class or a meeting to reset and refocus.
2. **Guided Meditation**: Use guided meditation apps or recordings to practice mindfulness. This can help with stress management and focus.
3. **Mindful, Deep Listening with Students**: Practice active listening with students, giving them your full attention with ears, eyes, and body language while validating their feelings.
4. **Mindful Movement**: Integrate simple stretches, yoga poses, or a walk into your routine to relieve physical tension and improve overall well-being.
5. **Reflective Journaling**: Keep a journal to reflect on your day, noting your emotions and thoughts, challenges and successes, ideas and inspirations. This can help process experiences and set intentions for improvement.
6. **Classroom Mindfulness Practices**: Incorporate mindfulness activities into your classroom routine, such as starting or ending the day with a brief mindfulness exercise. Using mindfulness for transitions.

\*For support with your own mindfulness practices visit—barredowlretreat.com—to get my free guide, *Gift of the Present: Mindful Awakening to Improve Your Life*.

**Props, Tools, and Techniques to set the Tone for a Mindful Space:**

**-Sound Machines**: These devices produce soothing background noise, such as white noise, nature sounds, or gentle ambient music, to help reduce distractions and create a peaceful atmosphere. Did you know, just 6 minutes of bird song reduces anxiety and depression.

**-Classroom Music**: Play soft, instrumental music during independent work or transition times. Choose music with a slow tempo and calming tones to help students stay focused. Besides classical music, you can play singing bowls, binaural beats, or pink and brown noise tracks. Let Spotify be your friend.

**-Bells, Bowls, and Chimes**: Softly ringing bells or chimes can signal transitions between activities or for a minute or two of silence. Use the sounds to remind students to take a deep breath. I love Tingsha chimes, for example.

**-Calming Corners**: Designate a space in the classroom where students can go to self-regulate and calm down. This space can be equipped with tools like stress balls, calming jars, sensory toys, or a listening station.

**-Breathing Exercises**: Teach students simple breathing exercises to calm themselves. Like: box breathing, dynamic breathing, 1:2 breathing, or lion breathing.

**-Soft Lighting**: Use soft, warm lighting or lamps with adjustable brightness; natural light creates a more relaxed atmosphere.

**-Aromatherapy**: Essential oil diffusers with calming scents like lavender or eucalyptus can create a soothing environment. Just be mindful of allergies and sensitivities.

**-Mindful Moments**: Incorporate short mindfulness activities into the daily routine. This could be a moment of silent reflection, a guided meditation, or a short yoga session.

**-Mindfulness Apps and Audio Recordings:** Use apps and audio for kids and teens that offer mindfulness practices, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques. (See a list of apps below.)

**-Mindfulness-Based Games and Crafts**: Incorporate games and activities that promote mindfulness, such as "mindful listening" or "mindful walking" exercises, gratitude jars, graffiti walls, word webs, etc…These can be adapted to different age groups and stages of development.

**-Breathing Tools**: Breathing balls or visual aids, like a "breathing flower" or a "smile breath" card, can help students practice deep breathing techniques. I love hour glasses or glitter jars.

**-Mindfulness Journals**: Provide journals for students to write or draw about their feelings, thoughts, and experiences to encourage self-reflection and emotional expression.

**-Visualization Cards**: Cards with simple imagery or prompts can guide students through mindfulness exercises. These can be used for quick visualizations or to spark discussions.

**-Fidget Tools**: While not strictly mindfulness tools, sensory fidget items like stress balls, tactile toys, and spinners can help students stay calm and focused during mindfulness activities.

**Sample Mindfulness Activities**

**Ages 4-6**

1. **Bubble and Balloon Breathing**: Have children imagine they are blowing bubbles. They take a deep breath in and then slowly exhale as if they are blowing bubbles, focusing on the feeling of the air leaving their mouth. Or, have them visualize a balloon blowing up in their belly and deflating as they belly breathe.
2. **Teddy Bear Breathing**: Children lie down with a small stuffed animal on their belly. As they breathe in and out, they watch the stuffed animal rise and fall. This helps them visualize and feel their breath and learn belly or diaphragmatic breathing.
3. **Mindful Listening**: Use a bell, singing bowl, or chime and have students listen carefully to the sound until it fades away.
4. **Sensory Exploration**: Provide children with different sensory objects (e.g., smooth stones, soft fabric). Encourage them to explore these objects mindfully, describing their texture, temperature, and sensations.
5. **Mindful Coloring**: Offer coloring pages with simple designs. Encourage children to color slowly and attentively, focusing on the colors and patterns. Use music to color by.

**For Ages 7 and Up:**

1. **Guided Imagery**: Lead students through a short, guided imagery exercise, such as imagining a peaceful or favorite place or a happiest memory. Ask them to focus on sensory details, like sights, sounds, and feelings.
2. **Gratitude Circle:** At the end of the day, have children sit in a circle and share one thing they are grateful for. This practice encourages positive thinking and reflection. Or start the day with an **Intention Circle**; have each share how they intend to show up and behave for the day, or share a kind, considerate act they will perform.
3. **Emotion Faces**: Show children pictures of different facial expressions representing various emotions. Discuss what each emotion feels like in the body, and practice making those faces. They can paint, draw, or color emotions. Pair with My Many-Colored Days by Dr. Seuss.
4. **Body Scan**: Guide children through a body scan where they focus on different parts of their body, noticing any tension or sensations. This helps them develop body awareness and relaxation.
5. **Progressive Muscle Relation:** Tense for a few seconds, then let go of muscles from toe to head in an effort to connect mind and body, focus, and relax.
6. **Mindful Journaling**: Encourage students to write or draw about their feelings, experiences, or things they are grateful for. Students can reflectively write on any experience or skill you are trying to establish or reinforce.
7. **Visualization Exercises**: Lead children through a visualization exercise, such as imagining a peaceful scene or envisioning themselves achieving a goal. Discuss the details and feelings associated with the visualization.
8. **Mindful Eating**:During snack time, have students eat mindfully, paying attention to the taste, texture, and smell of their food. Encourage them to eat slowly and savor each bite. You may even have them draw and write about their snacks.
9. **Movement Mindfulness**: Incorporate simple yoga poses or mindful movement exercises like **Mirror, Mirror** with a partner or **Mindful Walking**. Focus on slow, deliberate movements and breathing, helping students connect with their bodies.
10. **Mindful Observations**: Take a walk outside to observe surroundings mindfully with all their senses engaged. Ask students to notice details like colors, textures, and sounds, and share their observations afterward. Practice the **5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Method** using their senses outside to calm themselves.
11. **Mindfulness Challenges**: Create weekly or monthly mindfulness challenges, encouraging students to try different techniques and share their experiences.
12. **Digital Detox**: Encourage regular breaks from screens to reduce digital overload and improve mental clarity. **Mindful Social Media Use**: Promote awareness of how social media affects mood and stress levels and encourage setting boundaries for use.

### Additionally:

#### **There’s an App for That: GoNoodle, Chill Panda, Headspace,** Smiling Mind, Calm, and Breathe, Think, Do

**\*Ten Percent Happier & Insight Timer** (best for older students and helping professionals)

**Implementation**: Allow students to choose an app that resonates with them and use it during designated mindfulness time or recommend it for use at home and have them log their use. Encourage students to use these apps regularly, especially during high-stress times.

#### **Some More Useful Breathing Techniques**

* **4-7-8 Breathing**: Involves inhaling for 4 seconds, holding for 7 seconds, and exhaling for 8 seconds. This technique helps reduce anxiety and improve focus.
* **Alternate Nostril Breathing**: Balances the nervous system and promotes calmness by inhaling through one nostril and exhaling through the other in alternating patterns.
* **Dynamic Breathing**: A standing breath with goordinated movements for expelling excess energy or getting energized. Find a video on line for instructions.
* **Box Breathing**: Involves inhaling for 4 seconds, holding for 4 seconds, exhaling for 4 seconds, and pausing for 4 seconds before repeating. This technique helps calm the nervous system. Great to use before a test or writing activity for calm and focus.

*Titles from My Bookshelf to Get You Started*

*The Mindful Teacher* by Dennis Shirley

*Mindfulness for Teachers* by Patricia A. Jennings

*Contemplative Practices in Higher Education* by Barbezat & Bush

*The Mindful Twenty Something* by Holly Rogers, MD

*The Mindful College Student* by Eric B Loucks

*Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development* by Gillie Bolton

*Mindfulness for Teens* by Jennie Marie Battistin

*The Mindful Education Workbook* by Daniel Rechtschaffen

*The Mindfulness Toolbox* by Donald Altman

*Start Where You Are: a Journal for Self-Exploration* by Meera Lee Patel (Expressive Arts)

*Favorite Websites*

Mindful Schools

Mindful Teachers

Greater Good Science Center

**Post Session Reflection…**

* My take-a-ways:
* What I have tried:
* What I am excited to try:

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**My Mindfulness Plan** (How To)

**Purpose:** ***Why*** I am implementing mindfulness philosophies and techniques in my school or classroom:

**3 Goals for Me:**

**3 Goals for My Students:**

***My* 2 Daily Practices/Activities:**

**2 Daily Practices/Activities for My Students:**

**Assessment and Reflection**

* **Personal Reflection:**
* **Students Reflection, Feedback, & Assessment:**

**List of resources I will use, (**including books, websites, apps, and local consultants)**:**