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Mindfulness for Children with Exceptionalities: Linking Research and Teaching
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I am Sheila Scott and I am a professor in music education at Brandon University in Brandon Manitoba Canada. I am also author of the book *Music Education for children with autism spectrum disorder: A resource for teachers* published by Oxford University Press in 2017. I am happy to hear from anyone who has questions or would like to share comments about this presentation or about my other work with children with exceptionalities.

Today I am going to talk about mindfulness for children with exceptionalities, with an emphasis on children with autism spectrum disorder.

Bringing mindfulness to students means that teachers need to be mindful. That does not mean that teachers need to be yoga gurus; rather, we have an experiential understanding of mindfulness and how mindfulness can contribute to well-being.

Many of us live in very busy communities. We have rewarding but often demanding jobs, we take care of our families and others in our communities. Sometimes taking care of ourselves is a neglected priority.

In North America, mindfulness found its way into popular culture including the introduction of this concept in health care, most significantly by Jon Kabut-Zinn.

Zinn's secular definition guides my work:

Mindfulness is “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment-by-moment” (2003, p. 145).

-paying attention on purpose – mindfulness requires conscious effort;

-in the present moment – focused on the now, not the past or the future;

-not making judgments – accepting what is.

- In this sense, mindfulness practice is a secular adaptation of Buddhist practices meant for the medical, psychological, and educational benefits provided to practitioners.
- In some articles about mindfulness in education, authors use the term *contemplative practice* (Ergas, 2015, p 205) to refer to mindfulness and activities such as mindful breathing, yoga, meditation, and visualization.

Breathing Activities

1. Count in on breathing

2. Hoberman Ball

I begin by demonstrating how following the Hoberman Ball can help us to slow our breathing and calm our minds. After initial demonstrations all children are invited one-by-one over time to lead the class with the Hoberman Ball.

3. Words – breathe in peace; breathe out calm

Students provide suggestions and we use different combinations of words; students choose the word that works best for them.

4. Colours – breathe in blue, breathe out green

We discuss colours and how some colours can help us to feel calm or help us self calm. Students choose the colours that work best for them.

5. Polished Rocks

We talk about how some people may want to use a special object to help them to self calm. Each student is invited to choose a special polished rock.

I am fortunate in that I live close to the Souris Agate Pits. This is North America's largest deposit of semi-precious gems. This activity becomes a special relationship builder for me as I gather and polish these gifts for the students.

Teachers can substitute small objects from their own environments for students to use as an entry point for quiet reflection.

6. Mind Jar

I model the mind jar by shaking it up and asking the children to focus on their breathing by watching the mind jar. We talk about how we may have many thoughts bouncing around in our head but, when we are still, our minds can become calm. Background music guides the activity by delineating the beginning and the end. Suggestions for making mind jars and music to use with this activity are included at the end of this document.

Literature to Support the value of these activities in schools

Mindfulness in Education

“There is now an increasing body of research showing that mindfulness practice has a substantial effect on both cognitive and affective aspects undergirding teaching, learning, and school life” (Ergas, 2015, p. 206).

“Targeted school-age populations that could benefit from participation include students challenged with internalizing disorders, externalizing behaviors, learning disabilities, problems with executive functioning and ADHD” (Felder et al., 2013, p. 538).

“Symptoms of psychological distress and poor emotional regulation skills are often observed in ... children [with special educational needs], impacting not only school engagement and overall academic success but also the decision-making skills and psychological and social functioning at home and in school” (Malboeuf-Hutubise et al., 2018, p. 33).

ASD and Anxiety

- Various findings in anxiety rates in children with ASD (11% - 84%, White, Oswald, Ollendick, & Scahill, 2009: close to 40% (van Steensel, Bögels, & Perrin, 2011).
- Many individuals with ASD struggle with issues around anxiety;
- Symptoms of anxiety emerge in children as young as 3 to 5 years (the onset of ASD);
- Raised levels of social fears and compulsions in youth with ASD;
- Anxiety in adolescents with autism is at rates similar to non-autistic individuals who are diagnosed with anxiety disorders (Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005);

- “Mindfulness practice has a substantial effect on both cognitive and affective aspects of teaching, learning, and school life” (Ergas, 2015, p. 206).
- “Children who participated in mindfulness training reported positive changes in behavior, mood and attitude after being taught to pay attention to their breath. . . . [They] reported feeling more relaxed, and experienced reduced tension and anxiety” (Napoli, cited in Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005, p. 105).

Soles of the Feet Meditation

- Singh, N. N., Lancioni, G. E., Manikam, R. et al. (2011a). A mindfulness-based strategy for self-management of aggressive behavior in adolescents with autism. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 5*, 1153-1158.
- Singh, N. N., Lancioni, G. E.; Singh, A. D. A., et al. (2011b). Adolescents with Asperger syndrome can use a mindfulness-based strategy to control their aggressive behavior. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 5*, 1103-1109.

Children in Schools

- Teachers experience increased sensitivity, creativity, and innovativeness when they design their classroom instruction using mindfulness practices and perspectives (Capel, 2012, as cited in Erwin & Robinson, p. 279).

In Summation

The consistent reinforcement of using the mindfulness activities in each class will have long lasting effects and can filter through the children’s school experience and personal lives (Napoli, Krech, Holley, 2005, p. 114).

How to Make Mind Jars

- I suggest a plastic container for school use (peanut butter containers work well).
- Mind jars contain water, clear glue, glitter. I find that fine or extra fine glitter works best. Larger glitter tends to clump together at the top of the water/glue mixture. This is especially the case if too much large glitter is used.
- A mind jar can be made with just water and glitter. Without the glue, the glitter quickly falls to the bottom of the jar. I use this type of mind jar as a starter activity – children are successful, in part, because the activity lasts for less than 30 seconds.
- When using glue, I fill a glass jar with hot water to about 2/3 full; add clear glue to the top, leaving a small space so the contents can be shaken. After it cools, I transfer contents to a plastic container.
- Single colours may be used but I prefer a combination of colours. For example:
 - Blue with a small amount of silver
 - Green with a small amount of gold
 - Red with gold or silver
- Add glitter sparingly, shake and observe, and add more glitter if necessary. I start with 1 ½ teaspoon of blue and ¼ teaspoon of silver, for example. Then shake it up and add some more glitter if I think it needs it.

Music to accompany mind jar activities

composer	artist	title	duration	album	label	number
Corelli, A.	Capella Istropolitana	Concerto No. 8 in G Major (#4 – vivace)	1:10	Concerto Grossi Op. 6 (7-12)	NAXOS	8.550403
Poulenc, F.	Anne Queffelec	Trois mouvements perpétuels – tres modéré	1:12	Satie Gymnopédies, Gnossiennes Poulenc Concerto for two pianos	BBC music	--
Corelli, A.	Capella Istropolitana	Concerto No. 11 in B flat Major (#6 – giga: vivace)	1:15	Concerto Grossi Op. 6 (7-12)	NAXOS	8.550403
Ravel, M.	Trio Verlaine	Prélude pour piano	1:16	Fin de siècle- The music of Debussy and Ravel	Skylark	SKY0801
Poulenc, F.	Pascal Rogé	Suite Française d'après Claude Gervaise 16 ^e siècle) FP 80 Complainte (calme et mélancolique)	1:20	Poulenc piano music volume 3	DECCA	460 329-2
Poulenc, F.	Pascal Rogé	Improvisation no. 2 la bémol majeur	1:27	Poulenc	DECCA	417 438-2
Corelli, A.	Capella Istropolitana	Concerto No. 1 in D major (# 3 – largo)	1:32	Concerti Grossi Op. 6 1-6	NAXOS	8.550402
Tchaikovsky, P. I.	Viktoia Postnikova	Album pour enfants, op. 39 – Priere de matin	1:33	Tchaikovsky complete piano works cd 3	Warner Classics and Jazz	2564 69675-1
Poulenc, F.	Pascal Rogé	Suite Française d'après Claude Gervaise 16 ^e siècle) FP 80 Sicilienne (très doucement)	1:47	Poulenc piano music volume 3	DECCA	460 329-2
Couperin, F.	Angela Hewitt	Book iv: Vingt-Unième Ordre – La Petite Pince-sans-rire	1:48	François Couperin Keyboard Music - 2	Hyperion	CDA6748 0

composer	artist	title	duration	album	label	number
Poulenc, F.	Pascal Rogé	Française d'après Claude Gervaise 16 ^e siècle) FP 103	1:52	Poulenc piano music volume 3	DECCA	460 329-2
Ravel, M.	Louis Lortie	Menuet sur le nom de Haydn – mouvement de menuet	2:05	Ravel piano music volume 2	Chandos	8647
Poulenc, F.	Pascal Rogé	Suite Française d'après Claude Gervaise 16 ^e siècle) FP 80 Brasle de Champagne (modéré, mais sans lenteur)	2:08	Poulenc piano music volume 3	DECCA	460 329-2
Debussy, C.	Daniel Ericourt	The snow is dancing	2:18	Debussy – complete solo piano music	IVORY Classics	73006

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