

MINDFULNESS



MAY, 2019

#2

HUMAN RESTORATION PROJECT

PROMOTING WELL-BEING
AT SCHOOL.



Control is the threshold that often defines "good teaching":

"Your students are so *well behaved!*"

This runs contradictory to what could be seen as "bad teaching":

"Your students are all over the place!"

Of course, some control is necessary. Without any control, the classroom may become an unsafe environment. However, are we acting as guides or bending others to our will? Are students being ruled over? Are we allowing for organic behavior or holding the reins so tightly that nothing can go wrong?

Teachers are constantly worried that their class who may be louder than normal, or running around, or possibly rough-housing, will have a snapshot negative experience when someone walks by. For any teacher, this is normal - we teach children.

These breaks are necessary. Not silent study halls, but a time to relax, decompress, and socialize.

Almost all adults do the same at their jobs (and those who don't often are riddled with anxiety and stress.)

Teachers tend to vision their class as the only one each day. "It's only 45 minutes, I need time to get through the standards!" It isn't until we come together and realize our time usage (in and out of school) that we see the overburdening of students. Students who feel stressed perform worse.

Despite ample resources to control students' behaviors and "get them to learn," we need more focus on how to *do less*. How can we structure breaks and free time that doesn't devolve into mass chaos? Of course, mass chaos is one outcome that's not necessarily horrible - teacher training and PD aside, as long as no one is hurting each other or anything, why not let kids be kids?

In fact, our obsession with controlling students has bled over to their daily lives. It's not uncommon for children to have

RESEARCH

[Recess: Its Role in Education and Development](#)

A heavily researched account which emphasizes that our tightening of school schedules (which often eliminates recess) has diminishing effects on learning. This is applied to *all grade levels*.

[The Value of Play](#)

This resource outlines the purpose of play and emphasizes why "free play" is needed for children.

[Less-structured time in children's daily lives predicts self-directed executive functioning](#)

A research article outlining how the over-structuring of students' lives makes them more prone to not being able to manage their time.

[The Effects of Mindfulness on Students' Attention](#)

A research journal on how positive mindfulness such as relaxation, breaks, and reflecting, showed improvements to students' daily lives.

10-14 hours of straight work: from school to homework, extracurriculars, practice, events, sports, jobs, performances, tutoring, internships, and more. Teachers decry that students won't complete their homework (even for completion!), but are shocked (if they inquire) to find that their schedule - as an overworked, underpaid educator - is more free than their students.

This is especially the case for children aiming to be at the top -

those looking to enter college at the top of their class ([Lambert, 2010](#)). Students have little time to be creative, they don't pause and think, they don't reflect on their actions.

It's readily apparent how many children suffer from "rigorous" preparation. Stress, depression, anxiety, and not "measuring up" are common sentiments of overscheduled kids ([Pope, Brown, Miles, 2015](#)). Although not every student finds

themselves in this situation, by not focusing on the emotional well-being of all we are doing children a disservice.

Children learn through play and socialization. Part of adopting this mentality is accepting that learning is not solely measured by the content of one's class, but the whole child's growth. Students will be healthier, reflect more, and will have more time to be creative - no matter how silly the activity may seem.

"THE PARADOX IS THAT STUDENTS NOW LIVE IN SUCH A BLUR OF ACTIVITY THAT IDLE MOMENTS FOR SUCH INTROSPECTION ARE VANISHING."
[CRAIG LAMBERT](#)

How can a teacher express, deliver, and execute positive mindfulness in their classrooms? Of course, taking breaks is the first step - but there's much more to it than that. Activities, discussions, and games are all ways to build a community of learners and more cohesive relationships. And as we know, relationships are the foundation of learning - the more a teacher builds them, the more a child will learn.

The following is a list of (mostly) free resources: games, activities, discussion topics, that may be useful for developing positive mindfulness. They could be used during some breaks (however, don't forget about free time!) or simply as a normal classroom activity. That being said, not every room will look the same. Be sure to listen to your students - these activities should be fun!

RELAXATION AND MEDITATION

[Making Caring Common Project](#) Harvard University

- A list of simple relaxation practices, with even further links to meditation and discussion topics.

[Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program Handbook](#) MaineHealth

- An overview of mindfulness, aimed at adults, which defines terminology and provides relaxation practices.

DISCUSSION

[Mindfulness in Plain English](#) Bhante Gunaratana

- A fantastic overview of the importance of mindfulness with examples, and could be excerpted and discussed.

[Multimedia: Mindful Schools](#)

- A selection of videos about mindfulness and handling emotions, which could be watched and analyzed.

GAMES

[The Jackbox Party Series \(\\$5-\\$20\)](#)

- Various party games that can be played using a projector + student smartphones/iPads/laptops. Although one needs to watch for adult content (there is a filter!), students love interactive games.

[Werewolf \(or Mafia\) \(free-\\$15+\)](#)

- Games that involve a lot of communication are great for team-building.

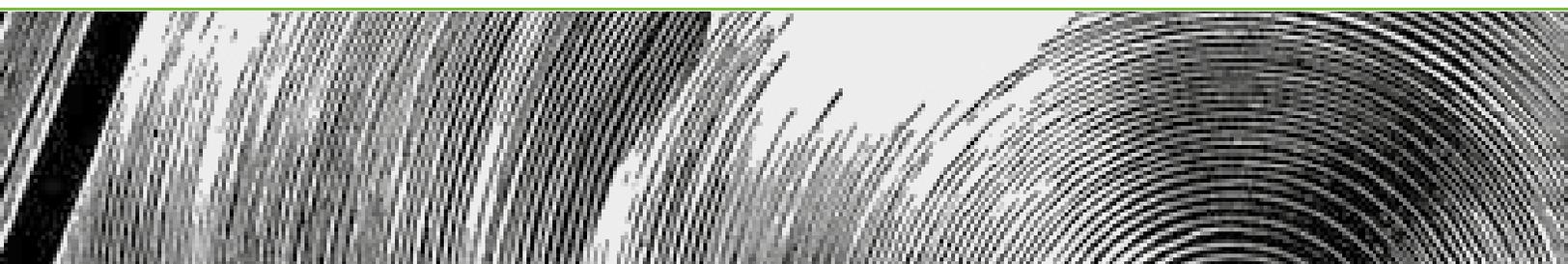
STRUCTURAL CHANGE

[How to Add More Activity Into the School Day](#)

- A guide for parents and teachers to demand a wellness program (both structured and unstructured active time) at their school.

[Tolerance.org: Articles Toward Building a Positive School Climate](#)

- An all-encompassing list of how to ensure that every child is advocated for in the building for a safe, loving environment.



Of course, all mindfulness practice is for naught if educators aren't taking active steps to eliminate systemic inequity in their building and community. We can develop a vast number of techniques to make students feel "content" in the short-term, but if constant stressors remain, our efforts are useless.

At school, these anxiety-ridden practices can be common. Sadly, many mindfulness techniques are co-opted to lessen the problems these practices cause. Such systemic problems include:

- A testing culture focused on "academic achievement".
- A lack of focus on the individual's desire for learning and present knowledge/skills.
- The use of grading which sorts winners and losers in our education system.

- An (often) lacking support structure for at-risk youth (via school clubs, professional development, and school events.)
- School lunches that provide little to no nutritional benefit.
- Overscheduled students and emphasis on AP coursework which may require hours of draining work.

Without an intense look at these issues, and educators working together to solve them, any mindfulness technique is useless. Our role in presenting these techniques is for classroom educators to have tools to introduce well-meaning practice, but this should expand into a greater movement for student rights. Educators should work together to analyze and implement systemic change.

Further, many students face problems beyond school which put them in traumatic positions counter to their learning.

Educators have a role to play in advocating for their school and community. There are many barriers: time, resources, energy, fear, and administrative support, but if everyone is apathetic or unwilling to these problems, they will never be solved.

To organize, educators should band together with their supportive peers and seek dialogue with their building administrator. A research-based, student supported mission shouldn't be set aside.

Many existing groups exist to help educators in their pursuits:

[The Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools](#) seeks equitable and democratically-controlled public schools.

[The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network \(GLSEN\)](#) supports teachers in local chapters throughout the United States.

The National Education Association has [compiled a list of resources and organizations](#).

Local organizations such as [Erase Racism](#) (NY) and [Social Equity Educators](#) (Washington).

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR PATRONS THAT MAKE THIS WORK FREE AND AVAILABLE TO SHARE:

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