Integrating Mindfulness in the Classroom

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Objectives
• Participants will develop an understanding and working knowledge of Mindfulness
• Participants will develop an understanding of how mindfulness changes the human brain
• Participants will develop an understanding of the science component of Mindfulness
• Participants will develop an understanding of the benefits of mindfulness instruction in schools
A Few Things You Should Know About Mindfulness

1) Mindfulness is not obscure or exotic. It’s familiar to us because it’s what we already do, how we already are. It takes many shapes and goes by many names.

2) Mindfulness is not a special added thing we do. We already have the capacity to be present, and it doesn’t require us to change who we are. But we can cultivate these innate qualities with simple practices that are scientifically demonstrated to benefit ourselves, our loved ones, our friends and neighbors, the people we work with, and the institutions and organizations we take part in.

3) You don’t need to change. Solutions that ask us to change who we are or become
3) You don’t need to change. Solutions that ask us to change who we are or become something we’re not have failed us over and over again. Mindfulness recognizes and cultivates the best of who we are as human beings.

4) Mindfulness has the potential to become a transformative social phenomenon. Here’s why:

- Anyone can do it. Mindfulness practice cultivates universal human qualities and does not require anyone to change their beliefs. Everyone can benefit and it’s easy to learn.
- It’s a way of living. Mindfulness is more than just a practice. It brings awareness and caring into everything we do—and it cuts down needless stress. Even a little makes our lives better.
- It’s evidence-based. We don’t have to take mindfulness on faith. Both science and experience demonstrate its positive benefits for our health, happiness, work, and relationships.
- It sparks innovation. As we deal with our world’s increasing complexity and uncertainty, mindfulness can lead us to effective, resilient, low-cost responses to seemingly intransigent problems.
CHOCOLATE MEDITATION
(EATING MINDFULLY)

SIT COMFORTABLY, AWAY FROM DISTRACTIONS.
TAKE A PIECE OF CHOCOLATE IN YOUR HAND.
   REALLY LOOK AT IT.
FEEL ITS WEIGHT AND TEXTURE.
LOOK AT ITS COLOR, OR COLORS.
NOTICE HOW YOU ARE DYING
TO SHOVE IT INTO YOUR MOUTH.
DON'T, SMELL IT INSTEAD.
DID YOU KNOW IT SMELLED LIKE THIS?
OK, PUT IT SLOWLY INTO YOUR MOUTH.
LET IT SIT ON YOUR TONGUE.
DOES THE FLAVOR CHANGE AS IT MELTS?
ARE THERE MORE FLAVORS THAN YOU THOUGHT?
HOLD IT IN YOUR MOUTH AS LONG AS YOU CAN.
DOES THIS FEEL WEIRD?
OK, YOU CAN EAT IT.
Mindfulness and the Brain

- The brain is round with lots of lumps and bumps – looks like a walnut. Keeping with that theme, your skull is its shell designed for protection.

- It is about the size of your two fists when you hold them together. Like your fists, your brain is divided into two halves – the right (creativity) and left (logic) hemispheres. Your brain is like all the parts under the hood of a car - each part controls something different.

- One part of our brain is the reptilian brain and it takes care of all of the things we do without having to think about doing them – breathing, swallowing, blinking, your heart beating.

- The Limbic System or emotional brain is responsible for the way we feel.

Today we will focus on three specific parts of the brain's Lymbic System:

- Hippocampus
- The Amygdala
- The Prefrontal Cortex

The Hippocampus is the part of the lymbic system that helps with memory and spatial navigation. It is important to note that chronic stress can shrink the hippocampus. Mindfulness can help us develop neuroplasticity (we can change our adult brains and even our behavior when we are intentionally mindful).
The **Amygdala** is a small almond-shaped clump of neurons deep in the center of our brain. It serves as the information filter regulated by our emotional state. This part of our brain acts as a “Guard Dog” that barks when it senses that something bad or good is happening. It tells us when we need to fight, flight, or freeze. The problem is that the amygdala can make us feel like we are in danger when we really are not.

The **Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)** is the part of the cortical brain just behind your forehead. It is often referred to as “*The Wise Old Owl.*”

The PFC takes in the environment, thinks about it and remembers what you see and hear. It is in charge of thinking, planning, reasoning, problem solving, and making good choices about our behavior. The PFC helps make sure that we do not let your emotions take over and behave inappropriately because we are frustrated, sad or angry.

So when you get your feelings hurt, become stressed out and you “flip your lid (PFC)” mindfulness can help individuals remain in control of their behavior.
Reduced levels of anxiety and stress
Enhances social skills and social competence
Improves overall academic performance
Reduced rates of absenteeism
Reduced rates of in-school and out-of-school suspensions due to gains in regulated behavior.
Decreases lethargy and aches and pains.
Reduces off-task behavior.
Increases focus and attention.

Time to Take a Mindful Minute
Additional Mindful Videos
Additional Resources/Links

Yoga4Classrooms
• 10 Ways to Teach Mindfulness to Kids
• Mindful Schools
• Relax Kids
• Mindup
• GoNoodle