



Meditation, Station, Celebration

By Jacquelyn Fizet, 2019 CTI Fellow
Highland Renaissance Academy

This curriculum unit is recommended for kindergarten

Keywords: Social/Emotional skills, Emergent Literacy Skills, and Writing. Social

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: For this unit students will learn that now more than ever, teaching mindfulness in the classroom is a necessity. Our children are stressed and anxious. Teachers and parents are stressed and anxious, too. Our lives are busy, and we often find our thoughts buzzing over the past or worrying about the future. We need mindfulness because it teaches us to live in the present moment, enjoying and experiencing what is in front of us. We as educators know that children learn best when they are comfortable, safe and relaxed. Imagine if giving our students the gift of lifelong learning and the tool to become kind and productive adults. We can teach them to use their breath and mind to lead a happy healthy life. As teachers, we will reap the benefits of mindfulness, as well as knowing that a happy teacher has a happy classroom. Our students will have better understanding of what it means to be mindful and how to achieve mindful bodies and minds.

I plan to teach this unit during the spring 2020 to 23 students in all learning domains in Kindergarten.

I give permission for Charlotte Teachers Institute to publish my curriculum unit in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.

Introduction

Today, children are born into a world full of emotions and feelings, good, bad, confusing among others. It is helpful to become familiar with the meaning of mindfulness, as well as how it relates to meditation. Mindfulness is the quality of being mindful and fully engaged with whatever we're doing at the moment, free from distraction or judgment, and aware of our thoughts and feelings without getting caught up in them. We train in this

moment-to-moment awareness through meditation, allowing us to build the skill of mindfulness so that we can then apply it to everyday life. In teaching the mind to be present, we are teaching ourselves to be live more mindfully, in the present, taking a breath, not beholden to reactive thoughts and feelings, which is particularly helpful when faced with challenging circumstances or difficult situations. The thing that many people find confusing about mindfulness: it's not a temporary state of mind that is present during meditation and then vanishes for the rest of the day. Rather, mindfulness is a way of living in which, when we remember, we are able to step back and be in the present moment in any situation. Mindfulness does not eliminate stress or other difficulties instead, by becoming aware of unpleasant thoughts and emotions that arise because of challenging situations, we have more choice in how to handle them in the moment, and a better chance of reacting calmly and empathetically when faced with stress or challenges. Of course, practicing mindfulness does not mean we never get angry, rather it allows us to be more thoughtful in how we want to respond, whether that's calmly and empathetically or perhaps, occasionally with measured anger.

The ability to read and process feelings and emotions is a necessary part of our educational experience. The teaching of mindfulness to the young child is key for the formation of social/emotional skills, as preschool children get ready for kindergarten and beyond. Mindfulness, social/emotional skills, is now, more than ever, essential for the basic survival on a day-to-day basis. It has been proven, that children who struggle with strong emotions could struggle in all subject areas. This can cause children to have a negative attitude school in general. This is not an outcome any teacher wants to see.

What is the importance of a mindfulness in young children? This unit plan will help to understand the benefits of helping kids be mindful has been gaining attention. Studies have shown that it can help kids improve behavior and focus. Some schools have even started doing mindfulness training in the classroom. Improved behavior and focus is a plus for all kids. However, it can be even more valuable for kids who learn and think differently. That is especially true for kids who are anxious or impulsive. In addition, kids who struggle in school may have negative experiences that can lead to negative thinking. Those experiences can decrease their motivation and make them feel defeated. Being able to recognize those negative thoughts and block them, can help kids stay focused and positive. It can also bring a sense of calm.

Mindfulness books for kids help control those big emotions; throughout this unit, I will be sharing some of my favorite children's books. There is a growing movement to get mindfulness books for kids out into the world, and I cannot tell u how happy this makes me. As someone who has experienced challenges with anxiety, I did not begin meditating until a few months ago, and I wish it had been sooner. The benefits have been tremendous. I want my students to learn what I wish I had learned as a child, and now, with this movement spreading rapidly from coast to coast, I have books to help me help my students learn the art of mindfulness. Mindfulness may not come naturally to most young children. It can be taught,, learned and practiced, by even young children. Let the fun of being mindful begin!

Rational

When I first decided to join this cohort, I asked myself two important questions. First why be mindful? Mindfulness practices can help us to increase our ability to regulate emotions, decrease stress, anxiety and depression. It can also help us to focus our attention, as well as to observe our thoughts and feelings without judgement. Second one was why do we need mindful practice in our school. Mindfulness helps students and staff manage their stress more effectively and work through it more quickly. Frequent mindfulness practice, even mini-sessions of a few minutes or less promotes health benefits.

To promote early mindfulness in the classroom don't make mindfulness seem like something only to be used in times of trouble, use it as a tool to be used in a variety of situations. We often hear about the important role that a calm and responsive adult, and secure adult-child relationship, plays in helping young children learn and grow. We know that these relationships develop through sensitive care and interactions. What can early education professionals do to offer children consistent, nurturing care and responsiveness? How can we build our capacity to stay focused and attentive to all children and families in our care? What helps us notice and respond sensitively to a child's needs and emotions (while we are experiencing strong feelings too)? These are common challenges that arise in caring for children. Similar challenges arise when providing support to parents and professionals working with children. Through the work of scientists, psychologists, teachers, and child development specialists, we are discovering some answers to these questions and how mindfulness practice might help.

I believe that at a very young age children learn best through play. Since I am teaching in an at-risk program, I decided to research how play intervention affects the learning of at risk kindergarteners. In searching for research studies to support my theory that children learn best through play, I found the research conducted by Han, Moore, Vukelich, and Bell, along with the research from the "Foundation for Child Development" to be the most informative and best support my ideas of learning through play. I am creating this unit because I feel play is the basis for so much of the learning that kindergartners do. There are three essential contexts for play: cognitive-exploring, asking questions, and thinking; emotional-expressing feelings within the social context and creative putting together new learning. Through play, children can be responsible for their own learning and they can use language not just to acquire knowledge, but also to demonstrate their knowledge.

When we teach mindfulness to students, we give them the tools they need to build confidence, cope with stress, and relate to uncomfortable or challenging moments. The earlier we do so in their young lives, the greater the opportunity to help them cultivate resilience, develop, and refine their mindfulness practice as they mature.

Teaching mindfulness to kids can also help shape three critical skills developed in early childhood: paying attention and remembering information, shifting back and forth between tasks, and behaving appropriately with others. These abilities are known as executive functions and they are essential for more advanced tasks like planning, reasoning, problem-solving, and positive social relationships.

School and Student Demographics

Highland Renaissance Academy is a Pre-Kindergarten through 5th grade school serving 400 students. HRA, is part of the Renaissance initiative to help impoverished families to better housing, food, jobs, medical, and education.

At HRA, students engage in Literacy, Math, Social Studies, Social/Emotional and Science instruction daily. Our grade level guidance counselor provides daily lessons in the area of social/emotional development to teachers. Teachers engage their students in multiple components of the provided social/emotional lessons provided. This year HRA will also be using the Caring School Curriculum to develop higher-level lessons for our students; this curriculum will be used across grade level. This year, staff members will continue to engage in professional development in literacy.

This year, teachers continue to be fully engaged in the Data Driven Instruction (DDI) process. This includes “at a glance” data, which is asking questions and writing students responses. Our kindergarten teachers also develop checklists to use to track skills that will be used depending on the activity being assessed. Kindergarten teacher’s use Mastery Connect to track data, and use this data to drive instruction and differentiate lesson plans to meet the needs of all children. This year kindergarten through second grade will be using ELI Early Learning Inventory to assess children all year long. This program has a wonderful tool for tracking social/emotional behavior.

Unit Goals

A major goal of our society’s educational system is for children to become socially acceptable behavior. From making friends to dealing with disagreement, the ability to interact successfully with others is incredibly important. Children with strong social skills find it easier to establish good relationships and this has a positive impact on their wellbeing. Social skills might include things like initiating conversations, making friends, having good sportsmanship, and handling bullying effectively. Social skills are one of the most important skills children and adolescents develop, as they often serve as predictors of future success. To be safe and secure children need to be loved, and have a feeling of self-worth. They need to receive attention and to be understood. They need to have a sense of control and predictability along with being able to recognize and be able to handle strong feelings. I feel mindfulness is so important to help children develop their social/emotional skills in a positive manner. . I truly feel teaching mindfulness increases students' empathy by helping them **to** regulate their emotions rather than get emotionally overwhelmed when faced with a difficult situation. As a result, his or her capacity to notice another person is suffering and respond **to** it increases.

The following goals will serve as the basis of my developmentally appropriate mindfulness with my young learners. It is important to remember there is more than one way to practice mindfulness, but the goal of any mindfulness technique is to achieve a state of alert, focused relaxation by deliberately paying attention.

- Following directions
- Identifying and regulating one's emotions and behavior.
- Thinking of appropriate solutions to conflict.
- Persisting on task.

- Engaging in social conversation and cooperative play.
- mindfulness of the body
- mindfulness of feelings or sensations

I believe these will be the easiest for me to do through literature, music, breathing and mindful activities that five to six year olds can comprehend and enjoy.

Mindful Practices in Reading

In the area of reading, remember reading can be a crucial opportunity for mindfulness, the ability to be in the present moment, aware while withholding judgment, both inside and outside of yourself and students. Find a window of time when you can focus on students reading (in my case it would be a shared reading with my kindergarten students), rather than trying to squeeze it into a busy day or get a few pages in dismissal. There are so many appropriate picture books for students to enjoy on mindfulness; I will be supplying you with some of my favorite at the end of this paper.

Mindful Practices in Art

Through drawing and/or writing, we want our students to find their joy, to discover what makes them happy and ready to learn, and the way to do that is through exploration. Creativity and art making can bring our students so much joy, but it is also essential for problem solving. Children learn through all their senses, so don't be afraid to bring other things into their creative practice besides store-bought art supplies and copy what the teacher has done, I call this cookie cutter art and I am not a fan nor do I use it. Writing their own songs, poems, stories for older children, digging in the dirt with their hands, smelling different plants, noticing the shape of cracks on the pavement, the movement of the clouds in the sky, these are all things that open the world for them. Creating art can also have a level of social and emotional teaching, a way to observe their thoughts and feelings. A child might start to compare his drawing to the child sitting next to him and think the other child is better. This can be a teaching moment for both of you. Bringing awareness to this thought, noticing how it makes him/her feel, deciding whether it is particularly helpful or even truthful. We want to create an open explorative environment where there really are no mistakes, only experiments, with the focus on making, rather than the end product. To loosen up the attachment to the result of the drawing, try having your students draw with your eyes closed. Enjoy the sensation and then when they open their eyes, enjoy the shapes you have created!

Mindfulness with Language and Listening.

The highly respected psychiatrist, John H Reitman, once said that, "It takes an average person almost twice as long to understand a sentence that uses a negative approach than it does to understand a positive sentence". Every day since most of us were about two years old we have spoken a countless number of words. It does not matter which language we have spoken. Just the fact that we use words to convey our needs, wants, desires and emotions. As a young child my parents taught me the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt

me.” However, far too quickly, I learned that words could be even more powerful than sticks and stones and that words could hurt the deep psyche that can leave lasting scars. Those lasting scars lead to powerful emotions for most of our lives. As educators, we need to be even more mindful of our words and consider what we are saying and why we are saying.

- **Positive language often:**

- * tells the person what can be done.
- * suggests alternatives and choices available to the person.
- * sounds helpful and encouraging rather than chastising.
- * stresses positive actions and positive consequences that can be anticipated.

- **Examples of Positive Mindful Language choices:**

“Mary is making right choices.”

“Remember Mary, we make the right choice.”

“You have two choices.” (Then give two positive choices which you are willing to compromise on to get the desired behavior. It allows a child to feel in control but in a safe range.)

“I wonder why Mary has hit John.”

“I like it when Mary sits in her place when she comes into class.”

It is also important for you to encourage kindness and positivity in the words the children use to speak to you and others. Give some time to practice HOW we say things, how we use our words and explore how that makes us feel. At the end of the day, we must remember that positive language leads to positive self-esteem. If a child has positive self-esteem, than they are likely to have a more even temperament and a healthy balance of the stress hormone, cortisol. Negative self-esteem keeps a child at a heightened stress point with high levels of cortisol, which keeps them in the constant moment of fight, flight or freeze. Challenge your class and yourself, change one thing you say in a negative way and make it a powerful positive phrase. Let the child’s actions speak for themselves.

These are some hefty goals but I believe all are attainable. I am going to need to be well equipped with a variety of different research interventions to have the most beneficial learning experiences for all my students. Being innovated and flexible to new ideas can bring new attitudes and a new interest to even the most reluctant students.

Content Research

As our nation grows increasingly confusing, it is often difficult for young children to understand their own emotions as well as those of their parents. As children develop into early childhood, they become capable of not only practicing mindfulness with a parent or teacher, but also of retaining some of these skills and turning to them in times of need. By around age 4 children are able to learn skills that they can utilize on their own, practice is the key. All children may experience very stressful events that affect how they think and feel. Most of the time, children recover quickly and well. However, sometimes children who experience severe stress, such as from an injury, from the death or threatened death of a close family member or friend, or from violence, can be affected long-term. The child could experience this trauma directly or

could witness it happening to someone else. When children develop long-term symptoms (longer than one month) from such stress, which are upsetting or interfere with their relationships and activities, they may be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. Because children who have experienced traumatic stress may seem restless, fidgety, or have trouble paying attention and staying organized, the symptoms of traumatic stress can be confused with symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Sadly in the school demographics where I teach this is becoming more apparent. These children often do not have any idea how to regulate their emotions and will act out. As educators, we need to stop just reprimanding or giving them time in the cozy corner, but give them tools that they can use to help with these emotions. Don't make mindfulness something only used in times of stress, make mindfulness exercises a regular part of your daily routine, an activity in and itself just like literacy math, art and playing outside. Present mindfulness as a tool that can help children explore new sensations, including those that are pleasant, neutral and unfamiliar. Children may not have any idea what meditation is but they will see us using it, mimic the behavior, and be interested. Children at this age love to try new things.

Mindfulness vs Timeout

So why mindfulness mediation, what are the benefits? Mindfulness can: help relieve stress, treat heart disease, lower blood pressure, reduce chronic pain, improve sleep, and alleviate gastrointestinal difficulties. Among its benefits are **self**-control, objectivity, affect tolerance, enhanced flexibility, equanimity, improved concentration and mental clarity, emotional intelligence and the ability to relate to others and one's self with kindness, acceptance and compassion. So what should we use mindful practice in schools? Mindfulness can help both teachers, students to reduce stress and anxiety, strengthen attention and focus, support social, and emotional growth, and better resolve the inevitable conflicts that arise. Studies suggest that mindfulness education, lessons on techniques to calm the mind and body, can reduce the negative effects of stress and increase students' ability to stay engaged, helping them stay on track academically and avoid behavior problems. Mindfulness can help students by helping them paying full attention to something. It means slowing down to really notice what you are doing. Being mindful is the opposite of rushing or multitasking. When you are mindful, you're taking your time. Bottom line mindfulness, the power of mindfulness with children help them strengthen their self-control, lowers anxiety and stress, increases positive moods and helps with better decision making. It also helps better decision making, improves regulation skills and improves social skills and communication.

Anxiety or not, mindfulness will improve the behavior and emotional well-being of all children. The research is so powerful and indicative that large institutions and businesses are starting to take action. Top corporations are hosting mindfulness training's and schools all around the world have initiated programs to get mindfulness activities for kids into schools. Here's the good thing when it comes to young children, the power of mindfulness with children is even greater because their brains and bodies are still under development! Sadly, in today's world, rates of anxiety in children are skyrocketing. Children are more stressed than they have ever been due to fast-paced schedules, academic pressures and less time spent in **play** and outdoors. When a child experiences anxiety, it activates the bodies protective stress response, kicking the 'fight or flight' response into motion. As educators, we have all experienced that.

Mindfulness exercises are an extremely effective way to stop the anxiety symptoms in children that result in stomachaches, rapid breathing, fast heartbeat and the need to lash out. Practicing mindfulness consistently is one of the best ways to lower a child's anxiety by keeping your student's baseline stress level down. The ability to regulate emotions means we can effectively manage our moods and upsets in a healthy and productive way.

Mindfulness for Kindergarten

For children, as well as for adults, the word practice is essential mindfulness. When kids practice Mindfulness, there is no end-goal or checkbox; rather, it is the on-going practice of paying attention to whatever is happening in the present moment. When children develop their ability to direct their attention, without judgment, to the present moment, they become less reactive. As children enter school, it is important that they grow out of reactivity and embrace empowerment, choice, and freedom. Because of mindfulness in kindergarten, children begin to learn how to increase focus & attention for the rest of their academic careers. While mindfulness is quickly becoming one of the most effective and well-documented techniques for treating mental and physical health issues, the beauty of the practice is that students can experience the benefits directly in the classroom. In my classroom I will be focusing on six ways to teach my kindergarten students mindfulness;

Mindful breathing- ask you students to sit comfortably and the close their eyes. Draw their attention to their breathing, telling them to feel the sensation of breath coming in and out of their bodies. This is where I will be using their breathing buddies.

Mindfulness sound- have your students begin by focusing on their breathing. After 3 to 5 breaths tell your students they are going to hear a sound, tell them to focus on the sound as it gets softer. Tell students when they can no longer hear the sound they can open their eyes. For this activity you can use a bell, a rain stick or even a singing bowl if you have one.

Mindful eating- If you are able to share a meal or snack with your students, tell them you're going to make it a mindfulness exercise. Start with breathing exercises. Invite your students to be mindful of their food, how does it smell, how does it feel on the spoon? Now tell them t take aa bite and chew slowly. Have them chew slowly for 20 or 30 seconds and ask them to notice the taste and how it feels in their mouth. This one will take some practice on the children's part and patience on the teacher's part.

Walking Mindfully- Go for a short walk with your students and teach them to be mindful while in motion, this will take some practice with the younger grades, do not give up. Have them start with focusing on the breath. As you begin walking, invite them to notice how the ground feels beneath their feet as thy walk. You can also bring their attention to other associated feels of how does their clothes feel while walking, ho does there skin feel or the breeze moving through their hair. Every now and then, you may need to have them pay attention o their breathing.

Mindful Play- this is my favorite with my young students, we all love to play. Put out some finger paint, a water or sand table or any other fun activity children can get their hands into. As

they play, guide them to be present in the moment. Try to get them to focus on their senses, what they see, hear, feel and smell. Invite them to notice how the water slips through their fingers or runs down their arm. Let them feel what it is like how the sand feels through their fingers, and how the colors of finger paint swirls together to make a brand new color. Allow them to play as long as they are engaged in the activity. I like to end this activity with slow breaths to get them calmed down after all the sensory fun.

Last, comes the Hunting Game-What is the state of a hunter? Highly alert but not thinking. That is mindfulness. You can easily play this game with your students to get them in a state of mindfulness. Go out into the yard, or if possible, depending on your school a garden. Tell them they have to be very quiet and slow as they go on their hunt. Guide them to be highly alert and use all their senses fully. Tell them to be very quiet so that they can listen to the world around them so they can discover a creature, or whatever you go on a hunt for. This activity has been a good fit for the boys and those highly active kiddos.

All of these activities have been highly successful with my kindergarten students and you can adjust the length of time according to the needs of you students.

Play Based Research in Kindergarten

So what are the benefits of mindfulness and meditation in kindergarten? How as a teacher can I make learning about meditation/mindfulness fun for my young learners? There is so much research on the benefits of mindful practice elementary. I have chosen six basic principles to follow when teaching this concept and the concept of meditation to young children, like the ones I will be teaching in kindergarten. Mindful play simply uses **PLAY** to practice being fully present in each moment. This concept not only nurtures our student's overall well-being and development but also brings teachers, parents and caregivers into the practice of mindfulness as well! Play is the most effective way for children to learn so I will be supplying you with playful fun mindful exercises to do with your students. The positive benefits of teaching mindfulness to children have been proven across a number of studies. Incorporating mindfulness activities for kids into an everyday classroom context is becoming more and more common. A five or ten-minute daily mindfulness practice can help students reduce stress and anxiety, increase concentration and engagement, sleep better, improve social skills, and develop problem-solving and decision-making skills.

Research dating back to 2003 explains and proves the reason “play based teaching” is an essential component of early literacy achievement (Roskos).

Kindergarten plays a very important role in supporting social/emotional growth and development. Talking is the way kindergartners process all the new information they are gathering as they use their senses (look, hear, feel, touch and taste). Language is the most important tool for interrupting and explaining the information they pick up as they explore and learn. Quality talking and listening support memory and enhance listening. The kinds of talk children engage in as they play foster risk taking, support and demonstrate comprehension and strengthen community. Being able to talk about the art of mindfulness/meditation will be a brand new concept for most of the children. Resnick and Snow (2008) describe four kinds of talk, these forms being narrative, explaining and seeking

information, oral performance, and giving and understanding directions. These are all essential elements in knowing how to read and write.

Per the National Association for the education of Young Children (NAEYC), of which I am a proud member, *any* instruction of young children ought to consider the child's age and their developmental progress. NAEYC & NAECS/SDE (National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education). 2002. NAEYC recognizes that play is a central component of developmentally appropriate practice and a vehicle for developing language, cognition, and social competence. Therefore, all the research on play has the potential to provide guidance for early. Sadly, there is strong evidence that time for play has been dramatically reduced in present day early childhood classrooms (Zigler and Bishop), which contradicts much of what research has told us about what is beneficial to children. Howes and Wishard report that pretend play among 5-year-olds has dropped dramatically in recent years. However, in early childhood classrooms, academic learning and play are not mutually exclusive. NAEYC's recent statement cautions educators, "Rather than diminishing children's learning by reducing the time devoted to academic activities, play promotes key abilities that enable to learn successfully," (NAEYC 2010). I am personally such a strong believer in this idea of play-based learning. I have been teaching 31 years, I have taught both sides of the spectrum, and my students and I learn more and at a faster rate through play because it is so much more engaging.

Research shows that an overwhelming number of children in the United States are not academically ready to begin kindergarten. Education reform during the past two decades, advocates that a crucial step in preparing all children to be "school ready" is to create programs to ensure it. Dogget and Wat reported on data presented by different states in the U.S. that began kindergarten state mandated programs and their effectiveness. The result of this research drives my passion to develop effect play based teaching methods to improve this deficit with young children. The classroom has the greatest capacity, second only to the home and family of a child, to provide quality educational experiences and interactions to support and strengthen cognitive development. Since I am a child's first experience with formal education, I need to have methods in place that will be engaging and inviting to my 5-year-olds. If not, I will miss the opportunity to make a difference in their school lives. All the research I have presented so far points to the importance of early intervention and the success of play based curriculum.

Play based learning is a term that embraces two approaches simultaneously. One is that children are given ample time to carry their own ideas into play, with assistance from teachers as needed. The other is that their knowledge of the world has been enriched through appropriate content offered in interesting and experiential ways by the teacher. This can include reading books, storytelling, puppetry, music and the arts, as well as encouraging hands on activities and exploration of nature. The children's own play and content offered by myself one another. Play is the basis for so much of the learning that kindergarteners do. There are three essential contexts for play: cognitive-exploring and asking questions and thinking, emotional-expressing feelings within the social context, and creative- putting together new learning. Through play, children will be motivated to learn.

Lev S. Vygotsky presented insights as early as 1978 on play that suggested a new role for adults in child's play. Vygotsky believed that children develop an understanding of the world through play and that adults could encourage this development by appropriate intervention. He viewed play as a means for socially assisted learning and scaffolding. In scaffolding, the adult assists the child to perform at a higher level than would be possible without adult support. When the child can perform alone, the adult gradually withdraws and lets the child act independently. This kind of adult intervention helps children expand their learning and knowledge during play. Makes sense, doesn't it?.

Play has been linked to the inquiry-based approach of a scientist because both engage in "what if" thinking. The child is continually trying out new possibilities and learns as much from failure and mistakes as from positive outcomes. The process is of great importance to the child rather than the outcome. Creativity, curiosity, play, and problem-solving are all intertwined in early childhood. Social negotiation is also frequently part of the mix. This holds true for children from all socioeconomic backgrounds. The way we present and teach these skills to young child can be life changing. We need to make it exciting, engaging and most of all fun for a five-year-old.

Instructional Implementation

Teaching Strategies

So how do I use my play-based instruction with incorporating mindfulness and meditation? Start the process by deciding how much information about this idea you feel a five-year-old child will be able to absorb.

Class Norms

First set age appropriate class norms, these will be an important part of promoting inclusion and openness. Be explicit about the ways your class will be respectful to each other and share ideas, opinions and values. Teach even young children how to behave respectfully when learning something new and perhaps silly to them. I like to use Restorative Practices to promote self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and decision-making. I like to do this during morning circle to set the mood for the day. I plan on beginning out our day with a simple one to two minute meditation to get the class settled and ready for the day. I will also use this practice during transitions from when workshop to the next.

Purposeful Planning

Conversations about mindfulness and especially meditation can be uncomfortable for students and sometimes teachers. An important part of promoting the practice of being mindful and how to breathe, and meditate in your classroom is purposeful planning. Planning a lesson is just as important as the execution of the lesson; especially if your class will discuss sensitive topics or ideas. Think about the different styles of learning in the classroom, visual, auditory even kinesthetic when planning, consider how you will differentiate your lessons for various learners and learning styles. This includes having various picture books, music, meditation exercises and differentiating the way students show mastery. Mastery may not come to some of

these young children and that will be okay. Consider using collaborative learning groups that allow students to work in groups within their class.

Setting up your mediation station.

- Find a somewhat quiet place in your classroom.
- Add soft things to sit on or hold on to, I have a yoga mat and a stuffed sloth.
- Ipad or something to play meditation music, I use guided meditation in my classroom because my children are so young.
- I have also added a small Christmas tree, purchased at Goodwill, I have placed multi-colored lights on mine.
- If you teach young children add their breathing buddy, we made ours out of tube socks and placed 3 rubber bands around them to help them count their 3 cleansing breaths.
- I also added mindful coloring pages for them to color when calming down.

All of the above I have either have donated, purchased from Goodwill or the Dollar Tree. My children helped decide what we should put in our station. Let the children know that this area of the classroom is for when they need a minute alone, due to anger, sadness, extremely excited, or whatever emotion they are trying to deal with at the moment. In addition, children need to understand it is not a place to go to escape work they may not want to do.

Unit Lessons

The best way you can incorporate mindfulness/meditation into your classroom is by making an effort to include books and children friendly apps into your curriculum that features fun and engaging ways to use this practice every day. When mindfulness is taught as a separate unit, it is usually confined to one or two weeks and will have little if any impact on our students' understanding and practice of mindfulness/meditation. In this unit plan, I am not going to use a "mindful unit" but I will be incorporating lessons, through literature, music, art and mindful minutes, into my classroom routine. Be sure to use those "teachable moments" to discuss similarities and differences as they arise during large group time. My class and I use meditation 2 to 3 times a week. I find it helpful when its time to transition between activities. I like to use listen to the bell before we make the move to a new activity or lesson. This is a short meditation where the teacher rings the bell and students have to keep their eyes closed until they can no longer hear the bell. When they cannot hear the bell, they open their eyes and wait for classmates to do the same before moving. I even take the bell along with me to the cafeteria and playground. The positive benefits of teaching mindfulness activities to children has been proven across a number of studies. Incorporating mindfulness into everyday classroom activity is becoming more and more common. A five or ten-minute daily mindfulness practice can see students reduce stress and anxiety, increase concentration and engagement, sleep better, improve social skills, and develop problem-solving and decision-making skills.

Books that I will be using throughout the year are:

I Am Peace

After reading this book an activity I would suggest is have the student draw a tree with no leaves. Then together brainstorm words they heard in the book that made them think of mindfulness. Since I teach kindergarten the words the children give me I will write on the board for them to use. Next, have them color some leaves on their tree and add the words from the board onto a leaf.

A Handful of Quiet: Happiness in Four Pebbles by Tich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Buddhist monk and leader in the mindfulness movement. He wrote this book to help kids connect with nature and increase their awareness, concentration, and calm using scripts, activities, and ideas that parents can try with children. Each of the four pebbles in the meditations represents something for children to visualize a flower, a mountain, still water, and space. "Breathing in, I see myself as a MOUNTAIN. Breathing out, I feel SOLID. A great activity for this book is to gather many flat rocks, have the children paint eyes on 1 rock, a nose on one rock and then mouths with different expressions on them. Have them build the face that they are feeling in the moment.

A World Of Pausibilities

An Exercise In Mindfuss*

By Frank J. Sileo, PhD

Illustrated by Jennifer Zivojn

Magination Press

A World of Pausibilities pulls us into a neighborhood on a summer day that could be any neighborhood on any day. There, we see both children and adults applying mindfulness to everyday moments by taking a pause. The illustrations are crisp and active, depicting all sorts of people delving into the richness of moments like eating an apple and taking a slow, silent walk. The words rhyme, child-like in their simplicity. A great activity to do at the end of this story is to take you students on a mindful nature walk, explaining to them how to be aware of how their body is feeling during the walk.

Crab And Whale

Mindful Story time: Breathe, Smile, Be.*

By Mark Pallis, Chrstiane Kerr

Illustrated by James Cottell

Mindful Storytime Press

Crab and Whale tells us the simple story of a crab that helps a whale make it through a tough day by using calming breathing and encouraging awareness of his senses. When the whale is washed up onto the shore, the crab tells him, "I'll stay with you until the tide comes in." I was touched by this gesture and the profound significance of staying with our friends when they are going through a hard time. I found this tiny tale helpful in that it shows how mindfulness can be an offering not only to ourselves, but also to others when they may need it most. This is one of my favorite books. So many of my students want to lash out when they are angry. This book is a wonderful tool for calming down. An activity I like using with this book is a whale cut out and finger paint. At the beginning of the painting I use loud forceful music and

slowly move to quiet calm music, it's amazing to watch the children bodies soften and their painting even changes with the music.

Breathing Makes it Better By Christopher Willard

Breathing Makes it Better is a picture book that describes how breathing can help children experience and overcome a variety of emotions. This book begins with an illustration of six different children with a variety of emotions visible on their faces. The text normalizes experiencing emotions by stating that everybody alive experiences different feelings and emotions at different times. Each child from the illustration then has four pages devoted to their feelings and emotions. The first page introduces the way the character feels in child-friendly language. The next page shows the character stopping to take a deep breath. The illustrations on these pages are simple and help capture the way the character is feeling in that moment. The next two pages for each character are more heavily illustrated, give a name to the emotion experienced by the child, and describe how taking a deep breath helps the character find peace. The end of the book emphasizes the importance of paying attention to your breathing as you move through different feelings. This is wonderful book to read to children while teaching them breathing techniques. This is also a good time to introduce, or revisit their breathing buddy.

My Magic Breath

Find Calm Through Mindful Breathing

By Nick Ortner and Alison Taylor

Illustrated by Michelle Polizzi

My Magic Breath is a colorful manual on how to use breath as a tool that can be practiced alongside specific visualizations in order to work with negative, unwelcomed thoughts. Personally, I am not a fan of the notion that we need to blow sad thoughts completely “off the page,” as I believe there is a place for them in the holistic narrative as well. However, using breath with positive imagery is a very effective way to create space in the psyche for more pleasant thoughts. When I do this one I give my students their breathing buddies, these are socks I filled with polyfil and tied 3 rubber bands around the sock. Each time they breath I have them move their hands down to the next rubber bands. Most of my children have actually named their breathing buddies.

One Very Big Bear by Alice Briere-Haquet

As far as he can tell, Bear is the biggest thing around. He might even be a giant! It's not long before other, smaller animals set him straight in this charmingly illustrated book about counting and relative size. Together, two walruses, three foxes, and so on, are the same size as Bear, each teasing him for foolishly thinking that there is nothing bigger than he. When six sardines arrive to tell Bear that together, they are just as big as he is, Bear has had enough and gobbles them up for breakfast. For this book I have the children lay down on paper and I trace their bodies. I let

the children add faces and clothes to their bodies. Then we line them up to show we are mostly the same size. They love this activity.

Good Night Wiggly Toes by Roda Ahmed, Leandra Rose.

What do you do when it is time to go to bed, but you have toes that are too wiggly, feet that want to run, hips that want to shake, legs that want to jump, and a heart that wants to drum? Good night, Wiggly toes is a fun book that helps you to connect with your wiggly body and helps calm it down. I love sharing this book with my student's parents, who often tell me about nighttime struggles at bedtime.

Mindfulness for Little Ones by Heidi France

This book has really become my “go to” when looking for new activities and ideas for my little ones in kindergarten.

Mindfulness for Little Ones helps children ages 2 through 5 move toward healthy coping skills and behaviors with playful, developmentally appropriate activities. Designed to tap into your child's innate curiosity and boundless energy, these fun activities promote the repetition, sensory play, and positive emotions that develop mindfulness for kids.

- **Learn with fun**—Dance, wiggle, create, and explore with playful activities that engage the senses and nurture positive emotions, empathy, and self-awareness as mindfulness for kids is instilled.
- **Not just for kids**—A co-regulation guide helps parents, teachers and caregivers model mindfulness, even when little ones act out.
- **Mindful organization**—Activities are grouped by themes that support different aspects of mindfulness for kids, from awareness of the body and emotions to cultivating joy and empathy for others.

By developing mindfulness for kids, toddlers and preschoolers alike will acquire the core skills they need to grow and thrive.

There are so many wonderful books on Mindfulness and Meditation be sure to check them out and see what would work for you and your students.

So one of the first mindful activities we used in our cohort was mindful taste. This practice taught me to slow down and enjoy the art of eating with mindful taste, since students love to eat try this activity to help them enjoy it even more.

Activities

Mindful Eating:

In this activity, we will have the kids act as a scientist and use all of their senses to investigate their food. This activity is great to have them slow down and take notice of every part of the experience.

Enjoy a snack! Have a few different kinds of apples to choose from.

1. Look - what colors and shapes do you see?
2. Listen - does your food make a sound?
3. Touch - is it smooth, bumpy or rough?
4. Smell - what does your food smell like?
5. Taste - have them put the food on their tongue but don't let them chew it just yet. Notice how it feels in your mouth. Do you taste anything yet? Start to chew, does the flavor change? How many different flavors are there?

You can use any food you wish, I have used raisins which was good if the student will eat raisins.

Freeze Dance Party

Introduce the activity:

Let students know you are going to be mindful of movement by playing freeze dance. Everyone will dance or move when the music starts and freeze when it stops. In between songs there will be prompts. Let students know they have the option of walking or moving in a way that feels right for them. Remind students to be safe and be mindful of each other.

Before hitting play, check in with students. Ask what thoughts or feelings they're having around participating. Explain that for some, this is a chance to show off some moves but for others, this activity is challenging. Explain part of the game is to notice what they feel.

Start the music and get your kids moving!

Stop the music and freeze.

Ask them to reflect about their experience.

No one is eliminated, as the intention is to bring kind awareness.

Sample prompts:

Ask students to reflect on the sensation of moving and being still.

Prompt your students to freeze or move their bodies in a way that reflects how the song feels to them.

Prompt students to freeze like the shape of a letter, an animal, or a superhero\

Ask students to dance in certain ways—like a ballerina, a famous artist, or an animal

My students love this activity and it is a great brain break.

Mindful Posing

One easy way for children to dip their toes into mindfulness is through body poses. To get your students excited, tell them that doing fun poses can help them feel strong, brave, and happy.

Have the children go somewhere quiet and familiar, a place they feel safe. Next, tell them to try one of the following poses:

1. The Superman: this pose is practiced by standing with the feet just wider than the hips, fists clenched, and arms reached out to the sky, stretching the body as tall as possible.
2. The Wonder Woman: this pose is struck by standing tall with legs wider than hip-width apart and hands or fists placed on the hips (Karen Young, 2017).

Ask the kids how they feel after a few rounds of trying either of these poses. You may be surprised.

Spidey-Senses

While on the subject of superheroes, this can be a related “next step” to teach children how to stay present. Instruct your students to turn-on their “Spidey senses,” or the super-focused senses of smell, sight, hearing, taste, and touch that Spiderman uses to keep tabs on the world around him. This will encourage them to pause and focus their attention on the present, opening their awareness to the information their senses bring in .This is a classic mindfulness exercise and encourages observation and curiosity, great skills for any human to practice.

The Mindful Jar

This activity can teach children how strong emotions can take hold, and how to find peace when these strong emotions feel overwhelming.

- First, get a clear jar (like a Mason jar) and fill it almost all the way with water. Next, add a big spoonful of glitter glue or glue and dry glitter to the jar. Put the lid back on the jar and shake it to make the glitter swirl. I duct tape my jar lids to the jar just to be safe.
- Finally, use the following script or take inspiration from it to form your own mini-lesson:

“Imagine that the glitter is like your thoughts when you’re stressed, mad or upset. See how they whirl around and make it really hard to see clearly? That’s why it’s so easy to make silly decisions when you’re upset – because you’re not thinking clearly. Don’t worry this is normal and it happens in all of us (yep, grownups too).”

Now put the jar down in front of them

“Now watch what happens when you’re still for a couple of moments. Keep watching. See how the glitter starts to settle and the water clears? Your mind works the same way. When you are calm for a little while, your thoughts start to settle and you start to see things much clearer. Deep breaths during this calming process can help us settle when we feel a lot of emotions” (Karen Young, 2017).

This exercise not only helps children learn about how their emotions can cloud their thoughts, but it also facilitates the practice of mindfulness while focusing on the swirling glitter in the jar.

Try having the kids focus on one emotion at a time, such as anger, and discuss how the shaken verse settling glitter is like that emotion.

Safari

The Safari exercise is a great way to help kids learn mindfulness. This activity turns an average, everyday walk into an exciting new adventure.

Tell your kids that you will be going on a safari: their goal is to notice as many birds, bugs, creepy-crawlies, and any other animals as they can. Anything that walks, crawls, swims, or flies is of interest, and they will need to focus all of their senses to find them, especially the little ones (Karen Young, 2017). A similar exercise for adults is the mindfulness walk. This exercise provokes the same response in children that a mindful walk elicits in adults: a state of awareness and grounding in the present.

Breathing with a Pinwheel

- With a pinwheel for your students and yourself, sit with your back straight and your body relaxed. You can get these at the Dollar Tree or they are really easy to make, I have my students make their own and they love it.
- Blow on your pinwheels together using long, deep breaths, and notice how you feel. Do you feel calm and relaxed? Is it easy or hard to sit still?
- Now blow on the pinwheels using short, quick breaths. How does your body feel now? Do you feel the same way after breathing quickly as you did after breathing slowly?
- Now blow on the pinwheels normally. How does this feel?

Three-Minute Belly Buddies

- Ask students to bring in a small stuffed toy, or provide a class set of small, light-weight objects such as small bean bags or wooden blocks.
- Students lay on their backs and place the toy or object on top of their belly buttons.
- Take students through the guided breathing activity above, asking them to watch the object as it moves up and down with their breath.

The Shark Fin

The Shark Fin is a fantastic tool that you can use during any quick moment in your day. It will help to calm your class, or individual students, when their minds and bodies may be fighting against them.

- Place the side of your hand on your forehead, with your palm facing out to the side.
- Close your eyes.
- Slide your hand down your face, in front of your nose.
- Say “shhh” as you slide your hand down your face
- If you are sitting down, you do the 5 S’s while you move your hand: Sit up straight, sit still, sit silently, soft breathing, shut eyes.

- If you are standing do the same but you are standing straight, still, silently, using soft breathing and shut eyes while you move your hand down your face.

Breathing Colors

Your spoken instructions may be along these lines:

1. Imagine you are surrounded by the relaxing color. No longer is the air clear, it is the relaxing color.
2. You can still make out shapes, but your world is now a different color.
3. Imagine that as you breathe in, you breathe in this color too.
4. See the color filling up your lungs.
5. Imagine as you breathe out, that your breath is the color of stress.
6. See the stress color mix into the relaxing colour around you. Watch the stress colour slowly disappear.
7. Breathe in your relaxing color.
8. Breathe out the stress color.

This one takes some practice so don't get discouraged. I like to follow up this activity with some sort of painting activity, usually its finger paints but any type of painting is fun for them.

Breathing Hands

- Spread one hand out like a star.
- Use the index finger on your other hand to trace the outline of your star hand.
- Take a deep breath in as you move to the top of your thumb.
- Breathe out as you move down between your thumb and first finger.
- Take another breath in as you move to the top of your first finger.
- Breathe out as you move down between your first and second finger.
- Repeat until you have taken five slow, deep breaths.

The children love this activity; it can cause a lot of giggles. After the exercise I have them trace their hand and color it the color that makes the happy.

Back to Back Breathing

I would not start out using this one with young children because something about leaning up against another person makes them silly. It is a good activity for later in the year.

- Students work in pairs for this partnered breathing activity.

- Sitting tall, with their back resting against their partner's back, begin the mindful breathing from activity #1.
- Encourage students to notice their partner's breath.
 - Is it shallow or deep?
 - Fast or slow?
 - Can they feel their partner's back moving as they breathe?
- After a little while, students may find that their breath falls into sync with their partner.
- Or it may not! These are all talking points for bringing awareness to the breath, in the present moment.
- You could incorporate your Mindfulness Pinwheels into this activity too.

Body Scan

This is a fantastic activity that students can “take home” with them. It can be particularly useful to do a body scan to help relax before sleep. This is another one I would wait to use it's a bit more involved for the young ones. I will say I have had children fall asleep during this meditation

- Students lay on the floor, with their eyes closed if they are comfortable (or they may prefer to look at the ceiling).
- Encourage students to pay attention to their feet for 5 or 10 seconds.

Questions to ask during a body scan:

 - How does this body part feel?
 - Is it cold or warm?
 - Does it feel tight or relaxed?
 - Is all or part of that body part touching the floor?
 - Or clothing?
 - What does that feel like?
- Move on to their toes, then ankles, then calves and knees. Continue body part by body part until you reach the head.
- Question how each part of the body feels to bring students' awareness to their body in the moment.
- If there is tightness or stress, imagine breathing the stress out of that part of the body with each exhale.

Mindful Sounds

As I stated earlier I like to use this for transitions, it's fun, easy and you can make a classroom job called “keeper of the bell.”

For this mindfulness activity, you will need something that makes a bell sound. There are some great meditation apps that have recorded bell, meditation cymbal and singing bowl sounds, however, if you can have one of these small instruments in real life, the sound is much better!

- Begin this practice with three deep breaths, or the Shark Fin activity (#4 above).

- Give the following instructions before ringing the bell:
 - When I ring the bell concentrate on the sound that you hear.
 - Pay attention to whether you hear it louder in one ear than you do in the other.
 - Keep your eyes closed until the sound is completely gone.
 - If you notice your thoughts wandering, just bring your attention back to the sound of the bell.
 - After you open your eyes, remain silent until you hear my voice again.
- Students close their eyes, while the teacher rings the bell.
- The activity is finished when the sound has completely dissipated.

This is one of the very first meditations I taught my students because its engaging, and short.

Senses Countdown

Besides meditation, this could be a great science lesson.

A great one for olde/and younger students, this is an extension of the Spidey Senses activity that can be used to help calm a busy mind and bring our awareness to the present moment.

Think of:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Add a Touchy Feely Focus

You might like to begin your class journey towards mindfulness with some of these more tactile activities.

Provide students with a prop to hold, touch, balance or focus their eyes on during one of the above activities.

- small soft toys
- small bean bags or beany pillows
- stress balls
- pieces of furry fabric

There are so many exercise to do with young children, teens and adults. I have chosen just a few that have worked well in my kindergarten class. I could go on and on but I want to encourage you to do some looking around the many mindfulness activities to see what would be the best fit for you and your students. Have fun with this unit. I have seen a great deal of growth and self-

regulation with my students and I am confident you will to. Remember to practice before starting with your students.

Conclusion

By attending this class and listening to my instructor and classmates, I was so inspired to make my classroom a happier place to teach and learn. I realized I needed to do some research into picture books, apps for children's meditation and mindful activities for my classroom that would help my students by more compassionate, accepting and be able to relate to the stories they were hearing. In my kindergarten classroom, I am required to do ongoing assessments, and snapshot assessments with the students. For this unit, you can make a simple assessment chart with the targeted skills across the top and children's names down the side. Your target goals should align with your teaching standards and unit goals. I have enclosed an example in the teacher's aide appendix.

The objectives are aligned with the Common Core Standards, and state early learning guidelines. These objectives are at the heart of the system; teachers use them to focus their observations as they gather information to make classroom decisions. An ongoing assessment is happening during regular, everyday activities. It is implemented on a continuous basis throughout the year, helps teachers meet children where they are, helps children meet challenging and achievable learning goals and give a broader more meaningful picture of development.

Appendix 1: Teaching Standards

Our teaching standards come from North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development. All the standards I have chosen will directly relate to my unit content, as well as being measurable and will be ongoing. Besides language and literacy goals, I have chosen music, arts, and social/emotional goals. I have incorporated language into all my activities to demonstrate the children can use mindfulness every day, every way.

APL-1 Children show curiosity and express interest in the world around them.

APL-5 Children are willing to try new and challenging experiences.

APL-8 Children maintain attentiveness and focus.

ESD-4 Children form relationships and interact positively with other children.

LDC-1 TO 5 Children understand conversations with others. Children participate in conversations with peers and adults in one on one, small group, and larger group interactions. Children ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood. Children speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly. Children describe familiar people, places, things and events.

DC-13 Children use writing and other symbols to record information and communicate for a variety of purposes.

CD-2 Children recall information and use it for new situations and problems.

CD-5 Children demonstrate self-expression and creativity in a variety of forms and contexts, including play, visual arts,

Appendix II

Student Resources

Go Noodle is a wonderful to use in the classroom because it is playful but calming. The meditations only last a few minutes and it is interactive with the students. A few of my favorites are Breathe a Rainbow, My Bring It down and I Am Melting.

With Bring it Down, children Learn how to gain control of your stressful energy with this calming mindfulness exercise.

With Breathe a Rainbow children learn how to raise your energy and face your day with this empowering exercise.

With I am Melting children practice melting away that icky frozen feeling you get when you're scared, frustrated, or angry.

The best part is my students love all of the Go Noodle meditation and it is free!

Calm App is just now building more child friendly meditations, this app is wonderful for children when they need a break in the calming down station.

Mindful Powers is a good app for introducing grade-schoolers to mindfulness. It guides kids through a series of meditations, called “stories”, that each build on each other.

Smiling Mind offers hundreds of mindfulness activities for all ages. In addition to breathing meditations, the app has sensory exercises, like listening to music. There are programs for kids in different age groups, as well as for schools, workplaces, and sports. The app also keeps track of when kids meditate.

This free **Sesame Street app** is not specifically for meditation, but it is great for introducing very young kids to the concept of calming down through breathing. The app teaches kids the “Breathe, Think, Do” method. Kids help an animated monster facing a frustrating situation to calm down by taking long, deep breaths. Afterwards, they help the monster think of a solution and do it.

Headspace was one of the first meditation apps on the market. It has a sleek, cool look, and it uses fun cartoon videos to teach how meditation works. The app has tons of guided meditations, read by a voice with a British accent. Headspace now has specific mindfulness activities for kids with five themes: Calm, Focus, Kindness, Sleep, and Wake Up. Each activity is customized for three different age groups: Under 5, 6-8 and 10-12; each having a role for parents and teachers for use in the home and classroom. I have used Headspace not only for meditation but for research as well.

Teacher Resources

Teachers Pay Teachers is a wonderful resource for mindfulness ideas in most areas of the classroom

[Confessions of a Homeschooler](#) is a great resource for additional activities to complement the unit.

I have used all of the above apps in my classroom with my students.

Notes

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Cody Wiggins is a therapist and mindfulness coach. He has been facilitating transformations for the last decade in a variety setting from school counselor, wilderness therapy, in psychiatry and is now bringing social and emotional learning and mindfulness to K-8 students worldwide.

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