

The Argument for Mindfulness Training in Schools

Mindfulness is a skill and a mindset that can permeate everything one does. It can be taught to young children through simple activities and can be something they take with them as they continue through their lives. Mindfulness can be used as a tool to help children with anxiety and impulsive behaviours. The fact that mindfulness practices can help reduce factors that can potentially impede learning makes it easy to form an argument to superiors for why time should be spent on it. On top of these benefits from learning how to adopt mindfulness practices, it can also help with creativity.

For a long time in history, creativity was not a valued skill in the working population. Ritchart and Perkins say that “for generations, educational philosophers, policymakers, and practitioners have decried the mindlessness of schools and their tendency to stifle creativity, curiosity, and enthusiasm while nurturing passivity and superficial learning” (2000). In the industrial era, the wish was to create factory workers who would do the same thing over and over again with no variation. They were forced to move fast and not think, all while acting passively, exactly as is described above. However, there has been a shift in the thinking of employers as of late. Creativity has become a valued resource and thus there has been large shifts towards teaching people how to regain creativity or find space in their lives where a creative mindset can flourish.

One problem people in today's society may have with creative capacity, is no longer that it is discouraged, but that many people have forgotten how to allow themselves to be creative. People are extremely busy with constant stimulation from technology in the palms of their hands. It can be very easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of what should be done and forget about the importance of being present in the moment. The wish to be a creative person and to engage with

creative thinking is present in many people, but they do not allow time for creative thinking to occur. Michael J. Formica says that “creativity... is a headspace that we have to enter into” (2015). In order to enter this headspace, we need to learn to slow down, take a moment to clear the mind and focus on the here and now. Mindfulness entails not being “distracted by any intrusive thought brought about by the experience of any internally or externally generated stimulus.” (Napoli, Krech & Holley, 2005). This space is where opportunities for creativity can occur.

One skill that is often overlooked is the ability to sit still. A key of mindfulness is to “...be aware of what is happening in the moment without judgment or attachment to any particular outcome” (Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005). When you take a couple minutes to stop and really observe and absorb everything around you with “all types of sensation awareness: Visual, auditory, gustatory, tactile, cognitive, consciousness, and emotional human sensory features” (Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005), it can be surprising what you find. Noticing the details of everyday objects that have been overlooked can be a shocking and grounding experience. It forces you to see your everyday environment in a different light. “Seeing the world in new ways is one of the greatest avenues for creativity” (Ritchart & Perkins, 2000) and is something that mindfulness can help people with.

Another benefit for mindfulness, other than taking careful stock of what you are actually looking at, is how it forces a person to pause. A moment of being still and silent can provide our brains with the chance for “preparation, incubation, illumination and verification” (Formica, 2015). Many thoughts and ideas are not perfect when they are first produced, but can grow into something amazing if we are given enough time to incubate that thought. Often times things in life are rushed and are completed as quickly as possible so that the next task can be started.

When a person learns how to slow down and allow ideas to realize their full potential, great things can emerge. It also provides that opportunity to evaluate how a project is going. The fact that mindfulness practices can be used for more than one aspect in life makes it a practical mindset to develop.

Different mindfulness practices can help people deliberately stop and focus on one task. One quick activity to help people see things in a new way that was mentioned by Ritchart and Perkins (2000) was to get students to stand on a chair and ask them to notice how their viewpoint has changed. There are also many different mindfulness exercises that can help quickly ground people in the present. One exercise that I have been taught in multiple psychology classes is finding 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can feel, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. However, this exercise can be easily adapted to fit the activity that is going to come after it. An example of this could be to ask students to find 5 colours they can see, 4 shapes they see and 3 patterns they see around the room. This example could help students to focus on details around them that may help them prepare to create a piece of art.

Another way to enter into mindfulness is through meditation. One of the ideas behind meditation is to stop thoughts of the future and the past and focus on what is happening in the now. George Hofmann says, “Meditation quiets the mind, and a quieter mind is more likely to have room for new and better ideas about the challenges one faces in life, business, and art” (2018). It can help an individual focus better and “even short meditation can effectively stimulate creative abilities” (Lebuda, Zabelina, & Karwowski, 2016). Meditation that is focused on mindfulness may also help reduce “cognitive rigidity via the tendency to be “blinded” by experience.” (Hofmann, 2018). This follows with the idea that sometimes we are unwilling to see things that fall out of our norms and do not consider what someone else’s experience may be. It

can also relate to seeing an object, like a cup, and only thinking that it can be used to hold a drink since that is what its main intended purpose is.

For some people the idea of sitting still and trying to clear their head of thoughts sounds impossible and like a method of torture. This feeling comes from trying something they have no practice with and not being willing to give it a try. Meditation may seem like a difficult activity to some; however, I have personally witnessed an entire grade 2 class participate in a guided meditation. Being able to still oneself for meditation is a skill that needs to be developed. For this reason, I found the experience of witnessing a class of children meditating to be incredibly inspiring. It was a reminder that it is something that needs to be practiced and a reminder that many adults need to learn it just like children do.

Lebuda, Zabelina, and Karwowski (2016) stated that “it is very likely that such mindfulness-based interventions, especially ones based on open-monitoring meditation, may be beneficial for creative abilities as well as for creative self-concept”. Creativity can consist of three different forms of thinking; convergent, divergent, and critical thinking. Convergent thinking can often come easily to people as it is when someone takes an idea and looks more closely at it. A lot of art actually consists of convergent thinking as it is careful and detailed reproductions of what is seen in life. Divergent thinking is typically what people picture when they think of creativity. It consists of thinking of many different things that may only have one small relation. This kind of thinking can sometimes be difficult to embody as one could argue that you cannot think of something if you do not know about it. Divergent thinking is important in creativity as it helps one come up with novel ideas. Critical thinking is full of questions. It helps refine ideas and projects. Critical thinking can be the voice of perfecting something, but can also be the voice that makes it difficult to be happy with what you have created. The one aspect that all of the methods

of thinking have in common is that they involve the aspect of creativity that is “the ability to produce ideas that are both novel and appropriate” (Lebuda, Zabelina, & Karwowski, 2016). In order to think convergently, you need to think of a detail of an object that may be overlooked. To think divergently you need to think of many different, mostly unrelated things. Critical thinking forces you to ask new questions to push what is happening forward, otherwise, things would be stagnant and not improving. All of these ways of thinking require a lot of attention to do them well. This is one of the reasons why mindfulness and learning how to give things your full attention can help with the creative process.

While it is important to consider the multiple different ways to achieve mindfulness, it is imperative to “keep in mind that the trait of mindfulness, and not merely the conditions that promote it, is our ultimate goal” (Ritchart & Perkins, 2000). Practicing mindfulness is not done for the experiences of doing mindfulness activities. These activities are completed as a way to introduce people to the mindfulness frame of mind. Being mindful of your surroundings and embodying mindfulness is a constant practice. For this reason, teaching mindfulness “means helping students to become aware of the value of mindfulness and the consequences of mindlessness”. There are many examples of how mindfulness is valuable. It can help reduce stress and anxiety through grounding a person in the present, instead of allowing them to think of an unpredictable future event. It can cause a student to think twice prior to saying something hurtful. It can introduce a student to an interesting fact or object that they may have originally overlooked. It can also help them to use more ways of thinking creatively, which may help them solve problems they face. Without teaching some of the ways that mindfulness has value in a student’s everyday life, it just becomes a word connected to a fun activity that can be forgotten

until the next time there is a little activity. Without a tangible purpose to use a way of thinking, it may be set aside as a time-consuming task that impedes with the quick flow of todays society.

Mindfulness is clearly a skilled frame of mind that should be taught to students in schools. The impacts of it are numerous and can have a large positive impact on a student's life. The link between mindfulness and creativity is one that should be nurtured in schools as creativity is an important skill for all people to have. Creating something novel, be it an idea or a product can be an extremely rewarding experience. Creativity is used in most areas of life and subjects of study, as is evident through the creative process of critical thinking. Mindfulness is a skill that creativity and conscientiousness can build off of. It is a great way to produce a classroom environment that is accepting of all.

References

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