

Katelyn Murdoch

## Mindfulness and Creativity

When the word creativity is used, many people instantaneously think of it in the areas of art, music, acting and other things involving the arts. However, creativity is valuable and an important aspect in all parts of a child's educational experience as well as in their daily lives. Fostering this capacity within every child allows them to reach their full potential. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines creativity as simply the ability to create (Merriam-Webster, 2019). If the definition of the term is that simple, then why are children not given ample opportunities in every subject to take control of their learning? In order to nurture this inner ability in children, we also must provide opportunities for them to prepare their minds. To achieve this goal, it must be acknowledged that mindfulness practice is of high importance and has an impact on creative capacity therefore, it should be implemented into every classroom (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2000). Often creativity is associated with personality traits as well as personal characteristics and is often used as a word to describe someone (Capuso, Fabbro, & Crescentini, 2016). Increasing an individual's creative capacity can have the ability to also increase their self-esteem, therefore it is very necessary to validate its importance (Language Classroom, n.d.).

Many of us take breathing for granted as it is something we do subconsciously just to survive, but what if we were conscious of each breath. If just for a moment of the day we acknowledged how it felt to breath in and out and the way our bodies are feeling in that moment, would we realize a change in our abilities? Michael Phelps, 28-time Olympic medalist, is a huge advocate for incorporating mindfulness practice in daily routines (Brueck, 2019). He is extremely well known for his ability to swim at incredibly fast speeds, but how did he get to that point? How is he able to focus and ignore outside distractions? Well, Phelps actually uses

breathing techniques as a way to help his mental health when he's both inside and outside the pool (Gallo, 2016). He can recognize that when he is stressed or upset, he needs to refocus and it benefits him greatly to take a few long deep breaths to calm himself down (Gallo, 2016). This is a very important technique to implement in education as it allows the children to relax their minds and bodies. This allows them to use their minds creatively and produce work in a calm and focused mental state. Now I would like you to take a minute, pause what you are doing, and then take a deep breath in and out. Do this a couple of times but really focus on how each breath feels throughout your entire body. While most of us don't often focus on our breathing, Phelps does this quite often. You might be thinking, he's an Olympic athlete who holds his breath for long periods of time, why would I ever need to think about this? Phelps, now a retired Olympian, continues to use many of his mindfulness practices in his everyday life (Brueck, 2019). His breathing techniques are a form of meditation which help him calm down, relax, and ultimately cope with his depression. Although not everyone deals with depression or anxiety, everyone experiences stressors in their daily lives.

Today it is understood that meditation can take on many different forms, anywhere from yoga to a relaxing day on the beach. You don't have to be an experienced meditator to see or feel the immediate benefits to practicing meditation (Leiden, 2014). There are many different forms of meditation that can be performed, as simple as a more focused breathing. Meditation has been shown to have long-lasting impacts on human cognition, including how people consider new ideas (Leiden, 2014). By practising mindfulness like Phelps, it can help children identify what is causing them stress and is a great tool for them to learn how to cope with and handle those stressful feelings. If a child has the capability to self regulate and calm themselves down, they are better prepared for learning. Children then become more aware of their feelings and

surroundings. Once you are aware of your surroundings it can increase your creative capacity to levels you did not know existed just simply by calming your mind and body (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2000).

Expressing creativity is important in all subject areas and it is very simple to offer plenty of opportunities within the classroom. Mindfulness practices have been shown to promote increased creativity and these are two very important aspects of education to consider. When a child has the resources and support needed to work at their full potential, they can truly blossom as individuals. Some children cannot learn if their creativity is placed under certain limits and constraints. Encourage students to explore what is important to them and create and expand their knowledge in the way they feel they need to. Giving children choice in what they do and how they learn can foster their inner creativity. For example, allowing the children to explore and choose different descriptor words for their English paper encourages them to be creative and really make the paper their own. The alternative to this would be to provide a distinct list of description words that the teacher wants them to choose from. The alternative example doesn't allow students to think for themselves and thus doesn't encourage a wide range of creativity. Another example of an easy way to implement and encourage creativity would be in a science class. Perhaps having children choose a topic but have them investigate and present it in whatever form they feel displays their work the best. In most cases, a person will become more motivated and inspired if they can create something of value to them. Why are there not more opportunities in classrooms for children to stand out, be different, and express their individualities through creativity? This is something that needs to change and simple modifications to ordinary lesson plans can allow these changes to make a positive impact on the education system.

Implementing mindfulness practice into the classroom is easier than one may think. It is possible to do at all grade levels and in all subject areas. There are a few considerable suggestions that would be simple additions to the daily classroom schedule. For elementary school aged children, recess is often a time of high intensity exercise and high energy expenditure. When the students return to the classroom following a recess period, their minds are often not ready to learn. They are not focussed and have a flowing stream of energy rushing through their little bodies. Perhaps implementing a mindfulness practice following each recess would be the most beneficial to this age group. This is a simple way to incorporate a new practice into a busy daily schedule. First, have the children come into the classroom once recess is over and find a spot in the classroom where they feel comfortable. Inform the children that they can sit on the floor or lay down on their backs, whatever is most comfortable for them, and wait for everyone else to join. Once all the students have settled into a comfortable and quiet place in the classroom, you can begin the mindfulness practice. It is recommended that the teacher participates in this practice as well. The teacher can then play a short 5-minute online recording that is kid friendly but promotes the children's relaxation. The teacher should find a recording that specifically explains to the students to relax their minds and focus on their breathing. Once the recording is complete the teacher can encourage the children to take three more long deep breaths before returning to the meeting mat or to their desks to begin the next lesson. If the students are in middle school or high school, there are several ways in which mindfulness could be incorporated into each period. At the beginning of each period, the teacher can practice two mindful minutes. Transitions between classes at these grade levels can be quite busy and distracting. It is important, as a teacher, to help refocus the students onto the topic ahead. This can often times be difficult as they are usually transitioning from a different teacher

and a different subject. However, by implementing mindfulness practice to the beginning of each class, you are helping to alleviate some of these distractions. Perhaps having the children sit in their desks with their hands on their laps and their eyes closed, if they feel comfortable doing so, would be a way to begin each class session. Much like at the elementary level, the teacher can simply play a recording that encourages relaxing the mind and body along with focusing on breathing. The teacher once again is encouraged to participate as well. Another alternative to playing a recording for the students would be to have the students attempt some form of yoga. If this is something that the teacher feels comfortable trying with the students, they could do three very easy yoga poses to begin their class. Of course, this would be dependent on the space available in the classroom and the willingness of the students to participate in the older grade levels. Another possible mindfulness practice that can be easily incorporated into the classroom is to end each class with a mindful moment. This would involve having students focus on their breathing and relaxation while reflecting on what they learned that class and what they may have accomplished (Beach, 2019). This practice would only take a short period of time, approximately five minutes, and could potentially be quite beneficial.

It was determined that mindfulness has a positive impact on creative capacity, and thus this further emphasizes its importance (Garey, Claire, & Nyu). If mindfulness practice was a mandatory practice by all teachers throughout the education system regardless of grade level or course subject, we would see some great advantages. I believe we would be creating a world of innovative, creative, and imaginative learners. What an amazing future we could create if we encouraged students to think for themselves and take their learning into their own hands. This is a shift that is so minute in terms of adjustment yet will have an everlasting impression on how education is taught and discovered. If teachers simply encouraged their students to create things,

build things and find inspiration in what is important to them, we would have a world of children who love to learn and what an amazing world that would be.

References:

Beach, S. R. (n.d.). 5 Mindfulness Practices to Bring to Your Classroom. Retrieved 2019, from <https://leftbrainbuddha.com/5-mindfulness-practices-bring-classroom/>.

Brueck, H. (2019, April 24). Michael Phelps teaches his 2-year-old son a special 'lion's breath'

technique - part of the mental-health routine that Phelps says saved his life. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/michael-phelps-breathing-technique-for-mental-health-relaxation-2019-4?fbclid=IwAR08WhWeQMaLknlGQN-XsZsNIM0rFwYuzUqjZcqWwpp6ppTermUS4qD7JXo>.

Capuso, V., Fabbro, F., & Crescentini, C. (2016). Mindfulness meditation and creativity. *Psychology of Creativity: Cognitive, Emotional, and Social Processes*.

Creativity in the language classroom. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/creativity-language-classroom>.

Creativity. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/creativity>.

Franklin, J., & Theall, M. (2007). Developing creative capacities. Retrieved October 1, 2019, from <https://www.ideaedu.org/Resources-Events/Teaching-Learning-Resources/Developing-creative-capacities>.

Gallo, C. (2016, August 8). 3 Daily Habits Of Peak Performers, According To Michael Phelps' Coach. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carminegallos/2016/05/24/3-daily-habits-of-peak-performers-according-to-michael-phelps-coach/?fbclid=IwAR1BoDAfsA3Fue0Vqnpj1uAkIHp0RYeuDkmpyEmWy4Cdz9r9OZ1QF61Spqo#7e4caac5102c>.

Garey, J., Claire, M., & Nyu. (n.d.). Mindfulness in the Classroom. Retrieved from <https://childmind.org/article/mindfulness-in-the-classroom/>.

Meditation makes you more creative, study suggests. (2014). Leiden University.

Ritchhart, R., & Perkins, D. N. (2000). Life in the Mindful Classroom: Nurturing the Disposition of Mindfulness. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(1), 27–47. doi: 10.1111/0022-4537.00150