

Educating for Sustainable Well-Being Concepts, Issues, Perspectives, and Practices

A Middle Years Meditation Practice: One Teacher's Story

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Today's Presentation

1. Introduction to meditation and my intentions in bringing it to the classroom
2. Current Research in the field- a brief overview
3. This teacher's story:
 1. How I came to meditate
 2. My classroom meditation practice
 3. What I have learned and understood- the evolution of my teaching and meditation practices

Let's Meditate- A How-to Guide



- Choose a soothing meditation music piece between 4 and 5 minutes long
- Have students get as comfortable in their seats as possible. Encourage feet flat on the ground (when tall enough), backs as straight as possible and eyes closed
- Alternately, students may be invited to put their heads down to avoid distraction or calling attention to themselves. In this case, encourage students to hinge forward at the hips, still keeping their backs as straight as possible
- Once students are comfortable in their seats, challenge them to maintain total body stillness, as well as silence , throughout the meditation
- At the same time turn off the lights and start the music





- Begin by reminding students that this is their time for them, to breathe, to focus inward, let go of whatever is on their minds and simply be.
- Further remind them that they are welcome to think whatever they want of this practice. They can choose to believe in the benefits of meditation and give it a try, or not; what they cannot do, is make that decision for anyone else. They do not have the right to disturb anyone else
- I often say that regardless of what they may think, sitting for 4 to 6 minutes in silence will never hurt anyone and that the only way to meditate wrong is to bother someone else
- For the first month, I use the same track and the same guided meditation technique every day.
- The meditation focuses solely on a breath count. I count aloud throughout the track, inhale, 2, 3, 4, hold (your breath), 2, exhale, 2, 3, 4, repeat.
- I remind the students that they may not get it right away, they may have it for a breath or two and lose it, or it may be difficult, but to stick with it, do their best, notice what they are thinking and let it go. Keep coming back to the next inhale
- As the music ends, slowly start to bring the students back to the room. Remind them any tingling, floating, or other bodily sensations are natural, especially if they were really still and silent throughout. I also invite them to share any feedback or ideas; though I rarely get a response
- After the first month, I open the practice to various meditation techniques depending on the needs of my students or what we are studying. I also enjoy meditating with them and the stillness and silence we experience together immensely.



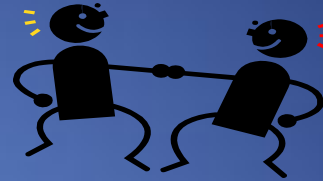
What is Meditation?

- Meditation is bringing the mind to stillness, to one focus, through breath
- Nathaniel Needle (1999) defines meditation as a “quality of calm, one-pointed concentration, while maintaining awareness of what one is feeling, thinking, and doing, (that) can be extended to our daily activities,” in order to cultivate mindfulness (p 12).
- Kabat-Zin (1994) defines meditation as a “process by which we go about deepening our attention and awareness, refining them, and putting them to greater practical use in our lives” (p.xvii).
- There are many techniques to reach stillness and centeredness of mind, including but not limited to, visualization, guided meditation, mantras, breath counts, focusing on an object or light, transcendental meditation, vipasana, and many others



The Potential Benefits of Meditation

- Decreased stress
- Increased feeling of calm
- Improved Concentration
- A greater sense of overall well-being
- Improved ability to foster positive emotions
- Improved ability to handle negative emotions



Summing Up the Current Research in the Field

- Research in the field of education has been conducted with primary students (Binder, 1998, McLean, 2001; Viarengo, 1998), middle school students (Swaminathan, 2004), high school students (Leoni, 2006, Schoeberlein 2009), university students (Bai, 2001, Holland, 2004, 2006, Miller, 2010), adult learners (Lin, 2007, Palmer 1993), and teachers (Miller, 2006, Schoeberlein, 2009).
- With rich anecdotal evidence, these studies have begun to demonstrate positive connections between the practice of meditation and improved learning in the classroom, on physical, emotional, mental and spiritual levels.
- Miller (2006) sums up the necessity of a classroom meditation practice stating, “Our main argument for including contemplation and spiritual practices in the curriculum is that they offer an opportunity to make our education truly holistic” (p. 42).

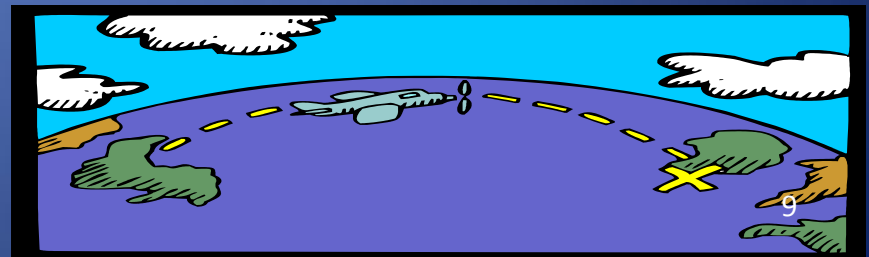


- Regardless of the form of meditation, a meditation practice allows educators to create opportunities for each student to explore his/her classroom experience, his/her learning and his/her understanding in relation to him or her self as an individual, and as a part of his/her surroundings, beyond just the mental and physical. Each student has the opportunity to gain the ability to contemplate, reflect and grow mentally, emotionally and spiritually.
- The potential benefits of implementing a meditation practice in the classroom are supported physically, emotionally and mentally, regardless of one's spiritual beliefs or religious affiliation.
- Whether motivated by the desire to better support Brain-based learning, or better help the development of the child as a whole, including his/her spiritual self, or simply to provide a relaxation technique and a method to cope with stress, the opportunity for a student to grow within his/her meditation practice goes far beyond the imagination of the educator.
- While there is constantly new research being generated, and still much research to be done in the area, holistic educators and others in the field have paved the way to supporting the work of educators like me, and my classroom meditation practice

My Journey- The Beginning



- My sister's miraculous recovery from a near fatal illness led me to live in Jerusalem and begin my spiritual journey almost twenty years ago
- Life's journey led me to many spiritual practitioners and meditation became a part of my life, and has remained so, though some times more fragmented than other times.
- Years later, life brought me back to Canada (2001) and teaching. I immediately loved it.
- I knew I had to bring meditation to the classroom.
- I knew it was good for me and so it would be good for my students, and at that time, I didn't really want or need to know anymore.
- I felt that it was something I could implement without impeding on my other teaching responsibilities, and even if I couldn't actually prove it was good for my students, sitting in silence for 5 minutes, listening to music, could never cause any harm.
- The fact that it was beneficial and important to and for me, was going to be good enough reason for me to bring a daily meditation practice to the classroom
- I found one article in *The Globe & Mail* (2003) about a parent promoted school meditation program in Edmonton, stuck it on my bulletin board, and began my classroom meditation practice with my grade 8 students.
- I have continued to meditate with each of my classes, both homeroom and switch classes, almost every school day, each year



- As I continued to meditate over the years I received a lot of informal feedback from students, verbally and year end written reflections
- While I was, and am still, aware that there are always one or two students who dislike meditating, most come to value the time
- I noticed that inevitably by the winter, every class asks if we can meditate for longer stretches at a time; I usually respond with the challenge, “Can you?” At least once a year I have had the chance to meditate with a class for 20 or 30 minutes
- When I began my Masters studies, from the first course I was reluctantly drawn to the topic of meditation and spirituality in the classroom
- I wasn’t thrilled about the idea, as it was not my intention to draw attention to what had always been a quiet little practice, but I kept coming back to the subject with each paper in each course
- In the summer of 2009, I was lucky enough to participate in a summer study in India , which further informed my teaching and classroom meditation practices, and helped them to evolve.
- The meditations became more focused and I began to solicit more feedback from my students, inviting them to reflect more deeply on our practice in writing
- I also began research on the topic of meditation in the classroom in more depth, which was encouraging and supported both my teaching and meditation practices.



My Experience with Meditation in my Classroom

With My Students:

- Grounds a classroom culture of respect because the only way to meditate wrong is to bother someone else
- Opportunity to ground my students and their focus based on their needs as individuals and the needs of the class each day
- Build relationships- creates opportunities to build trust and demonstrate compassion, empathy and understanding
- Supports Learning- complete participation in most assignments and all presentations

As a Teacher:

- Helped grow my teaching practice and listen to my students better
- Bringing my best self to the classroom
- Allowed me to take care of myself in my classroom

Within my school:

- Always been a quiet little practice
- Never hidden, but also never advertised
- Rarely received questions or feedback from administrators or parents
- My classroom practice was and still remains a simple daily meditation practice, for which I am forever grateful



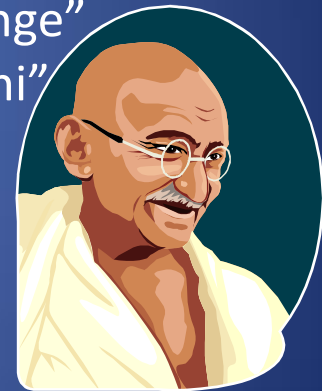
Curricular Connections

Health

- Connections to Cluster 4: Personal and Social Management and Cluster 5: Healthy Lifestyle Practices
- Creating a Spiritual Curriculum

Social Studies

- Connections to Cluster 2: including Universal Human Rights and Acknowledgement of positive contributions of individuals
- The Gandhi Meditation: Meditation with MC Yogi's "Be the Change"
"Be the change that you wanna see / in the world, just like Gandhi"
"Because he understood that we're all equal
he became a spokesman for the people /
a karma yogi devoted to service to spread truth
& peace was his purpose"



I make curricular connections at the beginning of every class regardless of subjects area simply by beginning each class with a meditation and setting the intention for each class

We Are What We Breathe

Focused Meditations: Inhale/Exhale

Focus/Distraction

Confidence/Doubt

Energy/Fatigue

Calm/Nervous, Excess Energy

Clarity/Confusion

Students have the opportunity to find what they need

META-Loving Kindness Meditations

My Vision for the Future



Working with Students

Designing and implementing middle or high school courses on spirituality, with meditation as a cornerstone

Working with Teachers

Designing and implementing workshops on meditation and holistic education to support new and existing classroom practices

Working with teachers in their classrooms to implement classroom meditation practices



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