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Mindful Breathing in the Classroom to Increase Academic Scores

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Mindful Breathing in the Classroom to Increase Academic Scores

Summary

Novel education research focuses on studying how teaching methods affect academic performance. A few minutes of mindful breathing during the beginning of each school day will help teach the students to better cope with daily stressors and reduce their overall anxiety. Mindful breathing is an experience of relaxing the body, quieting the mind, and awakening the spirit. It encourages a deepening of consciousness or awareness and facilitates deeper understanding of self and others. Studies have shown that teaching students about feelings and social interactions can increase their academic success and enhance the school experience in general. Mindful breathing can help students manage time, practice mindful eating, control addictions and cravings, reduce stress and enhance sleep, achieve academic success, achieve athletic success and body satisfaction, enhance the immune system, and develop a deeper sense of compassion for others and self. A 2008 U.S analysis of roughly 300 studies involving more than 300,000 students in elementary and middle school found that students who received social and emotional course (including mindful breathing exercises) scored 11 to 17 percentage points higher on achievement tests than peers who did not take part in any courses. Also, behavior issues decreased. This session is designed to inform teachers/instructors about the use of mindful-based practices in the classroom.

Keywords

academic scores, breathing, novel

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Objectives

Why do you want to talk about this issue?

I believe that learners are our future and it is our responsibility to provide proper guidance and tools for their success since they will be the next leaders. Over the past decade depression, anxiety, suicide and bullying rates have skyrocketed throughout elementary and secondary schools across North America and these issues need to be addressed immediately – potentially through the use of mindful breathing exercises. This practice is also very applicable to higher education classrooms as well.

How might talking about it benefit your colleagues?

Talking to educators about mindful breathing practices in the classroom will be beneficial because putting it into practice will make their teaching experience more pleasant because the children may be more inclined to learn, have more self-motivation and co-operation.

This talk will also benefit the teachers because no teacher education program in North America requires a course in social-emotional development, even though studies have found that new teachers identify it as a key area where they wanted more instruction.

Why should they come out to this session?

Teachers/Instructors/faculty members should attend this session to better their student's future. It is important to help learners achieve academic success *and* develop emotionally, interpersonally, and spiritually. For example, music, theater arts, and meditation increase a child's motivation and success in tests of academic achievement.

What will participants be able to do by the end of your session?

- ❖ Conduct his or her own mindful breathing practice
- ❖ Take away the message that mindfulness-based practices can help increase children's academic performance.

Summaries of Main References

1. Mendelson, T., Greenberger, M.T., Dariotis, J.K., Gould, L.F., Rhoades, B.L., & Leaf, P.J. (2010). Feasibility and Preliminary Outcomes of a School-Based Mindfulness Intervention for Urban Youth. *J. Abnorm Child Psychol*, 38, 985-994.

The article's focus is on mindfulness practices that cultivate capacities for attention and awareness, and how they have beneficial effects on the ability to respond to stress without adverse psychological or physical outcomes. The authors stated that mindfulness-based practices train capacities for attention and enhance the ability to inhibit cognitive and emotional processes. The author's findings suggested that mindfulness-based intervention programs for urban youth is (1) feasible to implement in schools and is likely to be attractive to students, teachers and administrators and (2) may reduce problematic psychological and cognitive patterns of response to stress among youth.

From this article, I will emphasize that these practices have been effective in enhancing self-regulatory capabilities and in reducing worrying thoughts for the youth. This increases the children's ability to focus on the task at hand and increase their academic performance.

2. Powell, L., Gilchrist, M., & Stapley, J. (2008). A journey of self-discovery: an intervention involving massage, yoga and relaxation for children with emotional and behavioral difficulties attending primary schools. *Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties*, 13(3), 193-199.

This article discusses how various therapies including deep breathing can be used by children as a means of relaxing themselves during times of stress. The children will be able to consider their response from a place of stillness rather than reacting automatically with aggression (persuasion). The therapies have help children improve their eye contact, self-control, and be calmer in class.

This article had two focus groups; (1) control, and (2), intervention group. The intervention group was composed of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. From the therapies including relaxation and deep breathing, the results indicated that the children in the intervention group showed improvements in self-confidence, social confidence, communication and contributions in class. This finding is relevant to my lecture and will be used to help the participants of the lecture better understand why mindfulness-based practices are beneficial to all children's academic success.

3. Stueck, M., & Gloeckner, N. (2005). Yoga for children in the mirror of the science: working spectrum and practice fields of the training of Relaxation with Elements of Yoga for Children. *Early Child Development and Care*, 175(4), 371-377.

Stress-related behavior and experiences of stress in children has begun to be highly researched. Children need to be taught how to self-regulate themselves to reduce stress and to optimize their reactions related to high psychological demands and pressure in everyday life. The participants who took part in this study were confronted with yoga and breathing exercises. They learned to use the exercise before, during and after stress situations. One of the results from this study was that mindful practices could stabilize the ability to cope with stress. Thus, the participants could more efficiently cope with stress in school and reduce overall anxiety. Also, the researchers found that to use of mindful-based practices are suitable and effective for school-aged children.

Content and Organization

Break down of the 45 minute session:

1. 10 min = Introduction

Discuss:

- ❖ What is mindful breathing
- ❖ Why this is important for children in elementary school and middle school
 - Taken from the first summary article
- ❖ Mindfulness-based practices also help children with emotional and behavioural difficulties
 - Taken from the second summary article

- ❖ Mindful-based practices are appropriate for school-aged children
 - Taken from the third summary article
- 2. 15 min = how to practice mindful exercises
 - ❖ Sit down in a comfortable position
 - ❖ Close your eyes and be as still as possible
 - ❖ Bring your attention to your breath
 - ❖ If your mind wanders, that's okay, just bring the focus back to your breath
 - ❖ Feel your stomach rising and falling
 - ❖ After a set period of time, slowly open your eyes.
- 3. 10 min = get into smaller groups of 7 and discuss how you felt after the practice
- 4. 5 min = large group questions/answer
- 5. 5 min = Closing summary

Reiterate:

- ❖ The importance of mindful breathing in the classroom
 - Reduce anxiety
 - Calm sporadic emotions
 - Help academic performance
- ❖ Verbalize how to practice mindful exercises
- ❖ Acknowledge and thank everyone for attending the session

Presentation Strategies

Combination of approaches:

I have included a combination of approaches for my lecture to target many people's attention and preference as to how a lecture should be conducted.

1. Lecture to the audience

I will lecture to the audience for a total of 20 minutes. I believe this presentation style is the best way to convey information to the audience. I will be able to keep the audience's attention because the first lecture is 10 minutes and the second/third is 5 minutes. This time span is short enough to maintain the audience's attention. This section will be relatively formal, giving the audience confidence that the information being presented is valid.

2. Large group activity

There are two large group activities during the 45-minute lecture. The first is a 15 minute mindful breathing exercise. I believe the audience will most enjoy this part of the lecture because they will experience what it feels like to have a mindful-based practice. This hands on experience is the best way to convey the message that this type of practice is effective. The second large group activity involves the whole audience participating in a discussion about how they felt during and after the exercise. This will allow people to share their experience and how they feel about conducting this type of exercise with school-aged children. This activity will last for 5 minutes.

3. Small group activity

The small group activity will last for 10 minutes. People in close proximity will gather together in groups of 7 to discuss their experience of the mindful practice. The smaller group

size will hopefully make people more comfortable to discuss how they truly feel and if they would actually use this practice in the classroom. The interaction with other people may target some people's likes about a lecture.