How to Incorporate Mindfulness in a Noisy Classroom?

By Sahana Srinath | Feb 17, 2020

Mindfulness is a state of being; of being in the present without any thoughts/feelings of the past or the future. It is about focussing attention in the present and being aware of one’s current thoughts, feelings and state of mind and body. This would be very beneficial in a classroom set-up since it helps in ensuring that the children and facilitator alike are present in the now; the points below highlight some key benefits that mindfulness can induce:

- Reduced anxiety and stress
- Reduced impulsive behaviour
- Improved self-regulation
- Improved awareness of self and others
- Improved calmness
- Improved attention
- Increased interest to learn

So, how do we incorporate this into our classrooms?

Oftentimes, we find children and, sometimes, even ourselves being pre-occupied with invasive thoughts because of which we end up feeling dissatisfied with the session. Other times, the noise in the classrooms makes us feel that the learning flow is disrupted, both for the child and the teacher. However, incorporating mindfulness could make a huge difference here; some simple ideas that can bring about a marked difference in how we interact with children and how they respond to us are:

- Communicate Your Call for Attention! Unless we effectively communicate that we are calling for everyone’s attention, any effort is futile.
  - Use a Sound: Whenever you feel that the noise is disrupting, having a sound that calls for attention works well. Get your group used to a sound (a bell/ a knock/ a jingle, etc.), so that, whenever it is heard, everyone’s focus shifts to that.
  - Sing an Action Rhyme: Singing an action rhyme and ensuring everyone joins in also helps. This usually works well with younger children.
  - Harness the Power of Silence: Sometimes, just keeping quiet or placing an object in the middle of the room and saying nothing can be effective in converging the group’s attention.

Once you have their attention focussed on an object/ sound/ action, introduce the group to a mindfulness activity to further bring their mind and body into the present.
- Participate! Always remember to participate as much as possible; this approach makes the child feel at ease and encouraged to get involved.
- Accommodate These Activities Even When the Group is Calm! It is, in fact, beneficial to do these activities even when the children are already calm or quiet because it helps them learn and internalize these ideas and even use them voluntarily when they feel overwhelmed.

Some mindfulness activities that can be incorporated into a classroom are:

- Five Deep Breaths: Tell the children that we will all close our eyes, put our hands on our stomach and take five deep, slow breaths. Guide them to breathe in and out and to notice how their stomach rises and falls. This is a sure shot way of bringing everyone into the present.
- Pebble Focus: Keep a set of pebbles handy with you. Distribute them (in groups or individually) and ask the children to observe them and think of 3 things that they can understand/ derive from them. They can share this with the group in turns. Pebbles can be replaced with any other object as well.
- Draw Your Emotion: Mindfulness includes awareness of what we’re feeling as well. Children sometimes have difficulty naming their feelings, but drawing them can be a great way for a child to pay attention to what he/ she is feeling at a given moment. This also serves as an entry point to work with them and really understand what might be distracting them.
- Simon Says! This classic game integrates mindfulness of the body and mind in the simplest yet fun way. Tell them that we will all do different actions by saying “Simon Says” followed by the action. They are to do the action only when they hear “Simon Says.” If you name an action without saying “Simon Says,” one need not do it. You can even give the children turns to call out actions.

Drawing out how they feel is a great way for a child to pay attention to what he/ she is feeling at a given moment.
Giving them object(s) and asking them to explore what they can derive from them is a great way of focusing in the present.

When we speak of incorporating mindfulness, it is for both the students and the teacher. A mindful student adds energy to the classroom which becomes infectious but this coupled with a mindful teacher makes the session fun and fulfilling for everyone. More importantly, the benefits of mindfulness go beyond the classroom; it improves the overall quality of life so children or adults, mindfulness is for everyone!