

Simple Mindfulness Practices for Classroom (Or Anywhere)

There are numerous wonderful and simple “practices” which can bring an ongoing daily experience of empathy and compassion into your classroom, and beyond. All these practices provide a framework for slowing down and paying attention to the small moments and words and actions that can “water the seeds” of compassion in our lives.

Bell Practice

Small Tibetan bowl bells or chimes offer a sweet reminder to stop, take a breath, come back to our body and breath. There are several fun “games” one can play with the bell with children, which help them to notice their breath, and to concentrate and pay attention to inner states.

1) A wonderfully calming practice, AND elicits great concentration! All close eyes except the bell ringer. The instruction is “*When the bell is struck, listen to the sound as it rings and keeps on ringing, and when you can’t hear it any more, raise your hand*”. After a few moments of stillness, ringer gently taps the bell, and all listen. We often discuss afterwards how we don’t all raise our hands at the same time- we all hear differently!

2) Again with eyes closed, ask child or group to concentrate on their breath, and know when they are breathing in, or out, or just in between in and out. Tell them that at some point you will ring the bell, and they are to notice whether they are breathing in, out, or in between at the sound of the bell. This game provides a playful framework for simply noticing breath for a few moments, and maintaining concentration..

• The bell can also be used as a signal if the teacher, or even a student, feels that the group could use a pause, and a breath! More and more teachers keep a bell at hand, and it can be a classroom agreement that if the bells sounds, all will pause whatever they are doing, and take three mindful breaths before continuing. For more on the mindfulness bell, go to

www.plumvillage.org/practice/bellOfMindfulness.htm, www.clearheartsangha.org/htmlfiles/bell.htm
www.somaluna.com/product.asp?p=778, www.TibetanSingingBowls.com

Council Practice

Many classrooms have some version of “circle time” for bringing the group together for sharing, music, and other community building activities. Council practice can provide a respectful listening structure, and offer children tangible symbols/objects to guide their transitions from listening to speaking. A special object, such as a seashell, a cloth puppet or stuffy, a special stone, or a “talking stick” can be passed around the circle, and the holder has uninterrupted time to share. The “talking item” insures that whoever is holding it is the speaker and everyone else is the listener. The object can also rest in the center of the circle where whoever wants to speak next can pick it up. Council can be used to address a particular topic in the classroom (a difficulty, a challenge, or something wonderful!), or as a check in time.

These core guidelines of council practice can be much simplified/modified for very young children:

Speak from the heart

Listen with the heart

Don’t rehearse or prepare-trust the right words will come

Say just enough- not too much, not too little

No need to repeat what others have already said

Don’t cross talk- whoever is holding the stick is the only one speaking, no advice or commentary.

You can pass

For more on council practice , see <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Fujioka-TalkingStick.html>, and <http://www.talkingleaves.org/node/139>

The following practices, lovingkindness, appreciation, and wise speech, embody a core truth that nurtures empathy: ALL living beings want to be happy, loved, safe, treated with respect. This is our universal humanity, and we develop more compassion and empathy as we weave these practices into our daily lives. Giving children concrete words, tools, and guidelines helps them express their natural empathy and kindness, especially when the going gets tough!

Appreciations (Watering the Seeds of Kindness)

Appreciating ourselves and those around us, like the lovingkindness practice below, opens our hearts to the genuine gifts we receive from others, and reminds us of our own worth. Appreciations are a wonderful way to close a family council session, a meeting, or other group or family time. (“I appreciate how you listened with such care and attention when I was talking”, “I appreciate the way you remember to give me a hug before you go to work”). Appreciations affirm our connection to others, and make real the truth that we all want to be seen, cherished, acknowledged.

Lovingkindness Practice

Also known as “sending good wishes”. This is a heart-opening practice, a simple act of silently, or out loud, sending good wishes to another. Simple phrases that are commonly used include: “May I/you be happy and content”, “May I/you be well, and healthy”, “May I/you be free from sorrow and pain”. This can be a wonderful resource for giving children an action response to upsetting information, or to address a situation within the classroom where there is distress, and a felt need to reach out. For example, if a student’s family or friends has had a loss or upset, the group can send loving kindness wishes to them. Disturbing news from the outside world- violence, hunger, animals in distress, can be responded to with wishes for peace, healing, safety. Wishing others well, whether friend or “foe”, expresses the natural empathy and compassion of the heart. It calls us back to our deeper nature.

More on lovingkindness www.buddhanet.net/metta_in.htm, www.vipassana.com/meditation/facets_of_metta.php

Wise Speech

We often tell children to “use their words”, but we know words can also inflict hurt. A simple set of guidelines, for teacher and student alike, are:

Is it honest?

Is it kind? Is there “warmth of heart” in the communication?

Is it necessary- (could be gossip ,or more info/commentary than is needed?)

Is it the right time?

For a musical easy-to-sing version of wise speech practice, go to www.betsyrosemusic.org and click on “new music”

More on Wise Speech <http://uuss.org/Sermons/sm040502.html>, www.boloji.com/buddhism/00110.htm

FURTHER RESOURCES

Building Emotional Intelligence; Techniques to Cultivate Inner Strength in Children

Linda Lantieri. (for parents, and educators) Sounds True, 2008

Still Quiet Place: mindfulness for young children (CD of mindfulness games and practices for children) by Dr, Amy Saltzman, Holistic Physician, <http://www.foryourselfhealth.com/Mindfulness-Children.htm>

Calm Down Boogie- (Betsy Rose) CD of music that inspires calming, breathing, cooperation and joy in children, And **Heart of a Child**, music for the renewal and encouragement of teachers and parents! **Motherlight**, songs from early motherhood; the inner landscape of parenting. www.betsyrosemusic.org-

Spirit Rock Meditation Center has family practice days, and a summer residential retreat for adults and children. A comprehensive manual for adults interested in bringing more mindfulness practices into their classroom, homes, or community, will be available in 2010. <http://www.spiritrock.org/>

Mindfulness in Education

www.parkdayschool.org (click on Community Outreach)-learn more about this urban Mindfulness in Education project in Oakland California. Info there also on May 2-4 educator conference on Mindfulness in Classroom.

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/16/us/16mindful.html?_r=1&ex=1183608000&en=3d87faf9c47eb9f2&ei=5070&oref=slogin

<http://www.mindfuleducation.org/about.html>

<http://www.mindfuled.org/>

<http://wik.ed.uiuc.edu/index.php/Mindfulness>

My Mind Is A Clear Blue Sky

Betsy Rose (© 1999)

LYRICS

My mind is a clear blue sky

My mind is clear blue sky

And the clouds come

And the clouds go

And my mind is a clear blue sky

My mind is a clear blue sky

My mind is a clear blue sky

My mind is a clear blue sky

And the thoughts come

And the thoughts go

My mind is a clear blue sky

My mind is a clear blue sky

My mind is a clear blue sky

And the storms come

And the storms go

And my mind is a clear blue sky..

And the fear comes...

And the anger comes...

And the joy comes...

(Last Verse)

And I breathe in *(all breathe in)*

And I breathe out *(all breathe out)*

And my mind is a clear blue sky...

HAND MOTIONS

Right hand crosses midline to touch left knee, then arcs up and over to the right like a rainbow

Repeat with left hand to right knee

Two hands/arms extended in front, soft fists, bouncing along like clouds

Repeat rainbow arcing right and left

(Same as above)

(Fingers extend in front, wiggle busily back and forth, or open and close fingers like a chattering bird)

(Use your/their imagination from here on!)

(Hands/arms extend forward like an embrace,, and "scoop" air toward body)

(Reverse process- release air away from body)

This song is inspired by teachings from the Buddhist tradition regarding the clear uncluttered quality of the natural mind, behind/beneath the passing emotions, agitations, and temporary condition of life. I use this song, and the hand motions (below) to help children calm down in a classroom or group setting, and as a way of teaching and discussing how to name emotions, and how feelings come and go like clouds; the clear blue sky of inner calm and quiet happiness is always available to us. Also we explore using weather as metaphor, i.e. anger can be like thunder, sorrow like rain, joy like sunshine. Children make up verses, and hand motions to match the emotions they've named.

Hear this song on "**Calm Down Boogie**", from Betsy Rose, available at www.betsyrosemusic.org, or CDBaby .com

Clouds...

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In Sonyal Rinpoche’s The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, there is a description of thinking of problems as clouds that are passing by. Specifically, they are clouds passing over you, the sky. They are here and then they pass. I liked this idea for myself and for my first grade classroom.

We read stories about clouds (e.g., It Looked Like Spilt Milk), discussed clouds and their shapes. We observed them in the sky as we were coming in from recess. We noticed how they passed over the sky, and that the clear blue sky was still behind the clouds even if it was hidden by the clouds. We drew clouds. We learned that they are all different shapes, move, and pass over us.

We had been talking about conflict resolution. We talked about the fact that some conflicts were like clouds. A conflict was like a cloud because it could pass over, you didn’t need to talk about it or get upset, you could just “put it on a cloud” and let it go.

I gave an example from my own life of putting a problem on a cloud. I talked about visualizing putting a problem (the contractor shutting the door with a big slam after I had spent time finding a doorstop for it to stay open) on a cloud. I drew a picture of the door slamming and the word “door”. Then, I cut it into the shape of a cloud. I then imagined it float past until I couldn’t see it anymore.

I asked students for their own examples, which they gladly supplied. Each student then thought of a problem that s/he could put on a cloud. Students then went to their tables and made their clouds. When most of the students had made their clouds, they shared their clouds briefly. I then collected them to put on the “Can You Put it on a Cloud?” bulletin board near the Peace Table in my classroom.

Students made clouds throughout the year and it seemed to help settle the little conflicts that arose in daily life. If there was not enough time to “put it on a cloud” on paper, a child was asked if s/he wanted to put it on a cloud in his/her head, using his/her imagination. A child could also be asked, “Do you want to put it on a cloud or talk about it?” Children seemed to respond to being given a choice of how to solve their conflicts.

Clouds Lesson Plan

Purpose/Objective: to develop the ability to simply notice minor irritations and disturbances without letting them be disruptive; and to develop the ability to identify and use different strategies to solve a problem

Time Needed: 20-45 minutes depending on class

Materials: It Looked Like Spilt Milk, light blue paper cut into quartersheets (draw a picture of the problem you will talk about on one of these sheets of paper and cut around the edges so that it takes the shape of a cloud), crayons, pencils, scissors, and, if possible, a Cloud bulletin board (entitled “Can You Put It On A Cloud?”, with a dark blue background—resembling the sky) and a Peace Table nearby. (You may want to use the FOSS Air & Weather kit for a more detailed explanation of clouds.)

Procedure: 1.) Read It Looked Like Spilt Milk. Discuss the different shapes and sizes of clouds and that they float across the sky until you can’t see them anymore. You may also want to observe clouds outside. Make sure the clouds are separate, clearly moving and smallish in size. Emphasize their movement.
2.) Ask kids if they have ever had a problem that they were upset about. Tell about a minor problem you’ve had recently. Talk about how you felt. Explain that you drew a picture of what happened on cloud paper and then imagined it float away. [(I felt angry and frustrated when the contractor closed the door with a slam after I had worked so hard getting it to stay open. But I couldn’t find him to tell him, and I knew he wouldn’t use that door again so it didn’t seem worth it to tell him what he had done.) So I drew a picture (show picture) of what happened (the door being closed and me being mad at the contractor) on a cloud, and I imagined it float across the sky until it disappeared].

3.) Ask children to tell you about some of their problems that they could put on a cloud (make sure they understand that these are problems that are easily let go of, not hitting or name calling, but being bumped into or something occurring accidentally).

4.) After you've heard from 3 or 4 kids, have each child think of a situation s/he could make a cloud for. Have children make one cloud to put on the Cloud bulletin board. As they are making them, monitor their understanding by asking about their situations.

5.) After most of the children have made the clouds have each briefly share his/her cloud. Ask them to close their eyes and imagine their problems floating across the sky like clouds and disappearing. When everyone has done this, collect the clouds to put them on the bulletin board later. Tell children that the blue sheets (clouds) will be on the peace table for their use as needed but with permission. Have a place for students to put the clouds until time allows you to put them up—or have students put them up themselves.

Evaluation: By looking at children's first clouds, you will be able to evaluate their understanding. Later by asking, "Do you want to put it on a cloud or do you want to talk about it?", you will be able to monitor and evaluate student understanding. You will also be able to monitor students' interactions by what goes up on the board. You may be able to identify recurring problems and address them.

Extensions: Model further use of the clouds technique yourself, by modeling using speech and thought bubbles, and adding more details to the drawings.

Seeds of Peace--A Musical/Gardening Activity (Accompanying "Planting A Seed of Peace" (on *Calm Down Boogie*)

(Betsy Rose)

Seeds are a wonderful image or metaphor for some deep truths about life and growth.

In this "unit" we start with seeds, compost and the joy of planting, and weave in discussions of how peace starts -with small actions, kindnesses and words and attitudes that may not seem very big or important.

I organized the flow of this unit in the following way (feel free to edit, alter, and otherwise personalize it for your style and your kids' interests and abilities).

First day:

Seeds: what is their nature? What do they represent? Discuss things that start small and get bigger- plants, animals, kids, ideas and creativity, dreams and visions for how we want our world to be. Children may have examples of how their own creative process works- starting a picture with one little shape and then seeing it grow into a whole landscape. Or a poem with just one line, or a story with just a beginning seed of an idea.

(Tom Hunter's song "Seeds" is a perfect song for this opening intro- his website

<http://www.tomhunter.com/store.htm#kids>, leads you to the CD "Handed Down", which contains "Seeds".

Second Day:

Transformation and Soil- what makes the ground ready to grow good plants from seeds. Compost!

I bring in a sample of "raw:" compost (kitchen food scraps) in a yoghurt container, and a container of finished ("cooked") compost/soil. First I sing the song "*Compost Cake*" (recorded on *Calm Down Boogie*) with them, then show them both versions of compost- the "raw" and the "cooked", I spread each out on a plastic sheet for best viewing. We talk about the mystery of how things can actually change form and become something else- caterpillars to butterflies, even enemy or "bully" can become a friend.

Third Day

Seeds of Peace: Teach "*Planting a Seed of Peace*" (recorded on *Calm Down Boogie*) and discuss the widening circle of peace spreading, starting in our own hearts and lives, expanding into our immediate community, and then beyond. I like to keep making the connection with how something as big as an oak tree or sunflower starts very small, just as our seemingly small moments of kindness, sharing, conflict resolution, are creating a big world of peace. Children love to add verses (see song sheet)! They will probably suggest several more to add to the song.

Describe how we will plant our seeds- it will be a special planting where we also express and "plant" our own dreams of what would make our world even more beautiful

Fourth day:

Dreams and Seeds of Peace: Bring in paper cups or plastic plating pots, planting soil, large seeds (peas, sunflowers, beans). Each child gets a cup of soil and a seed.

Before we start planting, I often talk with them a bit about Martin Luther King, who had a dream (and we talk about what it was, and whether it has to some degree come true long after he was gone), and Rosa Parks and Ruby Bridges, who did one "small" thing that led to much more.

Then we go around circle and have each child who is able say one idea or dream they have for making the world a more beautiful, happy peaceful place. Sometimes it helps to start with a little brainstorm about what kinds of activities and beings help them feel happy and peaceful in their hearts. Have each child whisper her/his dream into the seed privately in the circle

Sing "*Planting a Seed*" as they plant their seed. Make the connection that they are planting not just a physical seed, but a dream of theirs, that they can nurture and tend in their own hearts with their daily activities and choices.

Discuss watering and care of seed, including talking and singing to it (scientific research shows a definite improvement in growth and health when plants are talked and sung to -sort of like us!).

Further Possibilities and activities:

- Another fun song that could go anywhere in the sequence is the "*Garden Hokey Pokey*" (See below).
- For grades 3-up, the song "We Still Have A Dream" (recorded on my cassette "*Live From The Very Front Row*") is a great companion to the discussion of Martin Luther King. I use just the chorus of the song, and have students create their own verses (as a class) about what their dreams are for the world. (A few examples, below)
- Observe the growth of the seeds, looking for opportunities to include the concepts of different rates of growth, varieties that are natural differences (among us all); and the reality that some seeds won't grow- that that's OK too, we don't get to absolutely control nature.
- Also interesting to discuss what attitudes, actions, inner thoughts water the seeds of peace and hope within us. How do we "water our seeds" to help us be a seed of peace in the world.
- In some classes, children have kept the plants in school and tended them, in others, they've taken them home.

One great anecdote: I asked the group how their plant tending at home was going- were they watering, singing to them, etc. One girl, Chloe, said " I've been singing to it, and I've been **READING** to it" (an emerging reader here!). "AND", she concluded, " I'm teaching IT to read!" These are the moments that make our times with children glowing and memorable!

Enjoy!! And if you are a parent or teacher, remember that YOU are tending and nurturing the seeds of the future - vital seeds of new life and hope for our world as you work with and play with the children we teach and love.

<p>Garden Hokey Pokey (make up motions!) (©Betsy Rose) You put a carrot seed in You take the weeds all out Put the compost in and you Spread it all around It's gonna be delicious Cause you grew it from a sprout Fresh food's what its all about!</p> <p><i>(Students make new verses with names of veggies/fruits--tomato, lettuce, etc)</i></p> <p>Last verse (for older students) You put the chemicals in Don't leave the pesticides out Use all the grain and water Just to make the cattle stout You use a lot of gasoline to drive to the takeout Fast food's what is NOT about!</p>	<p>We Still Have A Dream (©Betsy Rose)</p> <p><i>We still have a dream... We still have a dream. Every step of the way...brings on a better day And the spirit is willing.. And the journey is long.. And we've to be strong... 'cause we still have a dream.</i></p> <p>(Original Student Verses)</p> <p>Well I have a dream.... No more Styrofoam... Polar bears will be safe... Solar cells for your home... Magnetic cars...No more gasoline... And this is my dream... Our world will be clean...</p> <p>Well I have a dream...No more poverty... Everyone has enough... We can share all our stuff... We'd all be friends... It's not as hard as it seems... Everyone's happy... And these are our dreams...</p> <p><i>(Available on Live From The Very Front Row)</i></p>
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