



Toward an Authentic Writing Classroom: Mindfulness and Literacy

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- ▶ All teachers are literacy teachers regardless of their curriculum expertise.
- ▶ Increasing literacy in both the reading and writing form is essential in developing students who are critical thinkers.

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- In my science classroom I presented what I call “mindful moments”
- Students were taught simple breathing exercises.
- Students were taught mindful vocabulary.
- Students were given an opportunity to participate in reflective writing about their experience with the mindful vocabulary and their breathing exercises.



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- **What is mindfulness?**
- “Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention in a way that creates space for insight” (Salzberg, 2015, p. 1).
- **Why use Mindfulness?**
- Mindfulness allows the participant to accept the situation and feel empowered rather than a victim to the experience.

Salzberg, S. (2015, April 05). What Does Mindfulness Really Mean Anyway? Retrieved from <http://www.onbeing.org/blog/what-does-mindfulness-really-mean-anyway/7431>

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- The mindful vocabulary is based on Jon Kabat-Zinn's Seven Attitudinal Factors.
- 1 Non-judging
- 2 Patience
- 3 Beginner's Mind
- 4 Trust
- 5 Non-striving
- 6 Acceptance
- 7 Letting go/letting be

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2004 edition),
[*Full catastrophe living: How to cope with stress, pain and illness using mindfulness meditation*](#), London: Piatkus



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- **Who is Jon Kabat-Zinn?**
- Dr. Kabat-Zinn has a Ph.D. in molecular biology from MIT.
- He is a Nobel Laureate in physiology and medicine.
- He created Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) therapy which has helped thousands of people outside of the scientific community experience stress reduction by engaging in mindfulness practices.

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► Why the Seven Attitudinal Factors ?

- * These seven essential factors help engage us in a way that helps us to be aware and to come to terms with our situation as they exist. In many ways this practice helps to cultivate less stress.
- * When we understand and practice to participate from this mind set, we are being mindful. We are also able to be aware of our situation without judging the situation in any particular way.
- * These seven attitudinal factors are how we should engage with others but also it is important to engage these with ourselves.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). Full catastrophe living: The program of the stress reduction clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center.



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- **Who has Stress?**
- Studies show that school children have a lot more stress than we may realize.
- These studies show that students face tremendous amount of stress not just while in school but also during their time away from school such as when they are on summer break and weekends.
- The research also shows that children living in poverty have even greater amounts of stress than their higher SES peers.
- Bradley, R. H., & Corwyn, R. F. (2002). Socioeconomic status and child development. *Annual review of psychology*, 53(1), 371-399.

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- **What I did in my action research:**
- I introduced my classes to mindful breathing.
- The students would be seated at the start of the class period and we would engage for less than two minutes in deep, Diaphragmatic breathing that I would instruct and model.
- **Let's try this breath together now:**
- Eyes can be closed or gazing downward.
- Hand on belly or not
- Inhale deeply through the nose
- Exhale deeply and longer through the nose

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- ▶ **What I did in my action research:**
- ▶ Every Friday in my 8th grade Physical science class we would have “Literacy Friday”. We would engage in reading about science and students would engage in written and verbal discussions about the reading assignment.

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- **What I did in my action research:**
- Once a month during a Literacy Friday, I would have all of my students, both my 8th grade Physical science students and my 7th grade Life science students, participate in individual reflective writing time.

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- What I did in my action research:
- The reflective writing for my 7th and 8th graders was based on their experience with the breathing exercises as well as some of the attitudinal vocabulary.



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- **What I did in my action research:**
- I taught yoga study Hall. This was a yoga class offered to my study hall students from my own team at the middle school. It was offered twice a week in a study hall that met every day.
- We started yoga study hall class checking to see how everyone was “feeling” and finding out if anyone had any thoughts that they wanted to share.
- At the end of the school year, we ended yoga study hall with one reflective writing assignment.

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- Who were the participants?
- All participants were 7th and 8th grade students enrolled on my middle school team.
- The yoga study hall participants were also students enrolled on my team. The yoga study hall students participated in all the reflective writing assignments during science class and then also participated in the one additional reflective writing assignment that asked about their yoga experience.



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► Questions that I asked: Assignment #1

Non-striving means to accept things as they are right now.

► Please respond to the following: please remember there is no right or wrong answer

► How are you non-striving in your own life at school?

How does non-striving fit into some part of the Scientific Method? Please explain this answer.



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- ▶ Questions that I asked: Assignment #2
- ▶ What do you think you are learning by doing focused breathing?
- ▶ How can you use mindfulness to speak differently to your peers and adults?

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Questions that I asked: assignment #3

- One of the Mindfulness vocabulary word is Trust. What does trust mean to you?
- Read this quote below. It defines Trust, as a mindfulness term.
- **“Learning to trust one’s own experience, feelings and intuition — loosening oneself from the tyranny of authority and inner harsh judgement — has the ‘taste of freedom’, a key hallmark of a genuine practice and essential for individual development.”**
- What is the message of this quote by using an example of a freedom you have due to trust?

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[*Full catastrophe living: How to cope with stress, pain and illness using mindfulness meditation*](#), London: Piatkus

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Questions that I asked: assignment #4

Please read and then reflect.

- ▶ Letting Be: Allowing things to be as they are and not as we want them to be is a form of letting be. “Letting go is not such a foreign experience. We do it every single night when we go to sleep. We lie down on a padded surface, with the lights out, in a quiet place, and we let go of our mind and body. If you can’t let go, you can’t go to sleep” Please write what you think this means to you.
- ▶ Please write if you do or do not apply this component into your own life since you have participated in mindfulness this school year.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2004 edition),

[*Full catastrophe living: How to cope with stress, pain and illness using mindfulness meditation*](#), London: Piatkus



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- Questions that I asked my Yoga Study Hall students:

Please reflect on your yoga practice this year.

- Can you think of ways that this practice has benefitted you as a student?
- Can you think of ways that this practice has benefitted you outside of school?



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- Themes that emerged from the students responses about understanding non -striving: (assignment #1)
There were 91 students that responded to this question.
 - To accept things as they are even if you don't like it, and to keep going and trying.
 - The students wrote these themes the most often:
Truth seeking and not giving up .
- Students applied non-striving to their grades, to friendships and to following school rules.



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- Themes that emerged from the students responses about mindfulness and focused breathing : (assignment #2)
- There were 98 students that responded to these questions.
- The students wrote these themes the most often:
- Both mindfulness and focused breathing helped to maintain calmness and self-control

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- ▶ Themes that emerged from the students responses about Trust:(assignment #3)
- ▶ There were 90 students that responded to these questions.
- ▶ The themes that emerged were those of self-trust, reliance and belief in the goodness of others.
- ▶ A student wrote “To trust others you must first trust yourself.”



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- Themes that emerged from the students responses about understanding letting go and letting be: (assignment #4)
- There were 79 students that responded to these questions.
- Students most frequent themes were about accepting things as they are and not letting them linger in order to move forward.
- This practice helped them to reduce anxiety and worry. It helped them to recognize that peace comes from not worrying so much.

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- Themes that emerged from the yoga study hall students' responses: (yoga study hall assignment)
- There were 7 students that responded.
- Students reported that they felt more relaxed in school, more focused for school, felt feel smarter in school, more prepared for school, and more calm while in school,
- Practice of yoga including breathing exercise increased outside of school. Students also stated that this helped with problems they had with falling a sleep at night.



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- **Take Aways from my Action Research:**
- It is possible to fit this into a busy and curriculum filled class period
- It helps students to “reset” and focus while in class
- It can benefit students in the short and long term
- It empowers students to self regulate even outside of the classroom and school



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- ▶ Thank you for attending
 - ▶ I will happily respond to any questions or comments that you may have
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