The nature of mindfulness

COOL AUSTRALIA IS AN AWARD WINNING NOT-FOR-PROFIT THAT HELPS TEACHERS INSPIRE THEIR STUDENTS THROUGH REAL-WORLD LEARNING. THEY PROVIDE FREE-TO-ACCESS UNITS OF WORK AND LESSON PLANS THAT INTEGRATE TOPICS SUCH AS SUSTAINABILITY, ETHICS, ABORIGINAL HISTORIES AND CULTURES, ECONOMICs AND WELFARs ACROSS SUBJECT AREAS. COOL AUSTRALIA IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PLANET ARK HAS CREATED THE NATURE OF MINDFULNESS SERIES TO CELEBRATE SCHOOLS TREY DAY. THESE LESSON PLANS PROVIDE SECONDARY TEACHERS WITH A RANGE OF ACTIVITIES THAT HELP THEIR STUDENTS CONCENTRATE, REGULATE THEIR EMOTIONS, EXERCISE EMPATHY AND EXPERIENCE HAPINESS THROUGH CONNECTION WITH NATURE. THE RESOURCES WERE WRITTEN BY JENNY ETTY-LEAL, A HIGHLY EXPERIENCED EDUCATOR WHO DESIGNS MINDFULNESS PROGRAMS WITHIN SCHOOLS.

Teacher preparation

Choosing learning goals: The aim of these activities is to deepen personal connections and relationships with nature-based mindfulness. These activities provide opportunities for students to focus, feel and experience contentment, empathy and happiness through connection with nature. Students cultivate present moment awareness so that their consideration of conscious choices can begin to replace impulsive, unconscious reactions.

Teacher background information:

The benefits of mindfulness

We are a culture increasingly becoming addicted to instant communication and over-pressurized technologies. While technologies such as mobile phones bring us closer together, they are also contributing to a feeling that we are missing out on what is happening around us. Having more time and energy time being passively engaged in these technologies rather than actively engaging in the world around them. This includes the natural world and our environment. There is growing concern about the lack of young people steeped in nature and the consequences of this disconnection.

The practices of mindfulness and meditation offer people of all ages an effective way to develop healthy responses to the chaotic world around them and in times of stress. This key benefit of meditation and mindfulness is developing self-knowledge, or awareness of what is going on inside. This positively influences student well-being, emotional intelligence and resilience. Other benefits include improved concentration, sharpened focus on tasks and simply being calm and still. It is important to clarify the differences between relaxation and mindfulness. Relaxation activities such as reading a book, eating a substantial, or lying in bed are the common relaxation activities. Mindfulness: these are relaxation activities that can become mental activities by becoming more aware. Learning to observe the breath and focus attention fully to the present moment is key to mindful activity. Mindfulness requires practice (although some would argue that this could be said of relaxation).

By practicing mindfulness activities outside, students can enhance their focus, emotional regulation, empathy and happiness through connection with nature.

Nature provides us with limitless, enjoyable opportunities for focus and to be absorbed in the moment, and otherwise count our breaths to improve our minds.

Teaching sequence

Activity 1: Planting seeds
Resources:
- Clear plastic cups, cotton wool, water
- Seeds that will germinate rapidly. Choose are type to use in all cups (corn, alfalfa, beans, etc.).
- A container of water with labeled cups for mixing liquids to match with seed containers.
- Activites, such as soil, nutrient, and seed, meatbodies: sprouts.
- Sticks, labels and pence to identify each cup.

Preparation: Find a suitable space for this activity and assemble all necessary ingredients and containers. Note: To speed up the germination process, soak seeds overnight in water.

Procedure:
Step 1. Place one-seed growing cup with pure water added in dark corner with no access to light.
Step 2. Place in a dark corner with no access to light.
Step 7. Place one-seed growing cup with pure water added in dark corner with no access to light.

Inside feedback/reflections

Ask students what this activity means to them in the way they conduct industry and manage the environment.

ACTIVITY 2: The natural interconnected web
Resources:
- Soil or sand or soil
- Keep whiteboard to record ideas from students that relate to this activity.

Introduction: Emphasize the concept of interdependence/connectedness to students. You may not have the power of these web. Where are the plants of the web? Where are the plants that we do not, we do not exist. All things are bound together. All things are connected. - Chief Seattle

Read Chief Seattle’s quote to your students to allow them to understand the concept of the natural elements: air, water, fire, earth, sea, and land. Examine to students that in this activity they will be starting with a natural starting point, e.g. sun, water, earth, or fire. They will explore the interconnectedness of natural elements by observing this working environment the room and how each seed starts out a sequential connection and then throws the seed to another classroom.

For example, starting with the trees — trees providing shade, protection (wind, rain, sun), cooling environment, soil (source), oxygen, resources such as time. How network/interconnected for humans and other beings/ foods/food for all human.

The details of this activity will emerge more clearly as you follow the procedure below.

Procedures:
Step 1. Amaze students in a large circle.
Step 2. Ask for someone to start the web, by holding the end of the starting point (e.g. trees) and throwing it across the circle to a classmate.
Step 3. The next student connects the idea and throws it to another classmate across the circle.
Step 4. Keep going as a topic becomes covered and new processes appear and flow as you move onto other connected elements. Continue until all students are holding onto the web.
Step 5. Ask everyone in the circle to change their position on the web, stop. Create a mindful moment. Ask everyone to practice a quiet, standing meditation and just stay put their hands, backs, and tongues be completely still. Pause for a few moments and experience the way every thread of the web can become connected.

Involve feedback/reflections

Ask students how they experience the interconnected web of their life. Consider social, emotional, performance, connections among and between humans and the imposibility to connect and link after nature.

Australian curriculum links:
General capabilities: Personal and social capabilities.
Content: Coherence and empathy. Sustainability: BL2.
These activities can be used with subject areas to enable student deep focus and engagement. They are also directly linked to the following Australian Curriculum content descriptions:

Year 7: 8 of Health and Physical Education:
- Plan and use health practices, behaviours and resources to enhance the health, safety and wellbeing of their communities (AHCED700).
- Plan and implement strategies for connection to and build natural environments to promote the health and wellbeing of their communities (AHCED701).

Year 9 & 10 Health and Physiology:
- Plan and implement strategies for connection to and build natural environments to promote the health and wellbeing of their communities (AHCED710).

Time required: 50 – 60 minutes for each activity.