

Mindfulness and Movement Breaks



What is a movement break?

- Movement breaks are opportunities to change environment and position. To reset, let out energy and regain focus before the return to class.
- They can take different shapes such as a walk around the school, dancing to music, following along to yoga or playing outside.
- They can be set within the structured timetable of the day but can also be spontaneously actioned based on the behaviour of a student.
- When students are showing signs of restlessness, losing focus or disrupting the classroom it can be beneficial to withdraw them from that setting.

What is mindfulness?

- Mindfulness is the act of being consciously present of your actions and setting at that current point in time.
- It involves letting go and simply observing to ground yourself in the reality around you rather than becoming lost within yourself.
- This ties into movement breaks as they provide a means to refocus upon your body and the environment around you instead of fixating on anxieties.
- In place of being stuck within that same situation and headspace a movement break can directly cut through the repetitive noise both internal and external to provide a calming respite.

Why have I chosen this topic?

- I have a personal passion for mindfulness and have often enjoyed the benefits from mindful practices.
- I have been inspired to pass on these benefits and find ways to optimise mindfulness within movement breaks.
- Students I have worked with suffer from signs of anxiety and restless agitation, often building up in intensity within the classroom.
- I wished to explore how movement breaks help to address these issues and how mindfulness can be best practiced within that context.

Studies into mindfulness and movement breaks

- **Booth et al. BMC medicine (2020)**

- A study into short physical activity breaks and the effects on cognition and wellbeing

- Found that 15-minute self-paced outdoor activity was more beneficial for school pupils' wellbeing than just sitting outdoors.

- **Christian Müller et al. (2021)**

- A Study into the effects of physical activities and mindfulness interventions on attention and reading comprehension.

- Found improved attentional speed and accuracy after physical exercise.

- As well as positive effects on reading comprehension after a mindfulness intervention.

Studies continued

- **Gotink RA et al. (2016)**
- A study into mindful walking interventions and effects on mood.
- Mindful walking resulted in significant improvements of both mood and mindfulness.
- Found it had an increased positive effect in individual's susceptibility to rewarding situations in daily life.
- Discovered an "upward spiral" effect: moments of increased mindfulness led to higher levels of positive emotions.

My observational research

- Whilst observing students' stress and mood before, during and after a movement break, I was able to reflect upon the effects found in a direct way.
- Fixations and demands such as wanting to "go home" or "go park" reduced significantly after taking the student for a short walk around the school.
- Their attention and focus shifted to the new task at hand as seen by their interest in the environment.
- Instead of stating repeated phrases that reflected their anxious thoughts the students would often begin to react to the new setting around them.

My observational research

- I decided to increase the switch in focus by pointing out and highlighting things of interest within the environment.
- I would do this by describing or stating items around us which led the students to further observing their surroundings.
- I would ask them questions about what was around them in order to engage their focus on it.
- They would comment and react to certain things such as pictures of students out on trips or even other students engaging in physical activities around them.
- Instead of dwelling on their future anxiety-based desires they were concentrating more on what was occurring at that exact moment in time.

My observational research

- I tried to let the students take the lead in the walk by asking them which direction they wished to go in.
- They would then process this question for a short time before answering and deciding which way to go.
- This helped to move their focus away from obsessions in the mind and into the task at hand.
- Rather than just going along for the ride with their focus not being fully on the present task they were made to act and addresses the current experience.

Conclusions

- Upon revisiting the classroom after a movement break the students often showed signs of a calmer mind and increased focus.
- Drawing the students' attention to their present surroundings further enhanced this positive outcome.
- However, a movement break did not always result in a calmer mood every time as they were too fixated upon anxieties and needs.
- Despite this the exploration into mindfulness and movement breaks has still allowed me to further enhance the experience with a direct benefit for the students.

References

- Booth et al. (2020). A citizen science study of short physical activity breaks at school: improvements in cognition and wellbeing with self-paced activity. BMC Medicine. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12916-020-01539-4?utm>
- Christian Müller et al. (2021). Short breaks at school: effects of a physical activity and a mindfulness intervention on children's attention, reading comprehension and self-esteem. Trends in Neuroscience and education. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354534934_Short_breaks_at_school_effects_of_a_physical_activity_and_a_mindfulness_intervention_on_children's_attention_reading_comprehension_and_self-esteem
- Gotink RA et al. (2016). Mindfulness and mood stimulate each other in an upward spiral: a mindful walking intervention using experience sampling. Mindfulness (N Y). <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5010615/>