

## Being Here and Now Incorporating Mindfulness in the Classroom

~ Sujata C



Children are naturally mindful; they don't have to learn any technique for it. Just give them anything: a toy or a biscuit, and watch them examine its shape, feel its texture, smell it and taste it (Even the toy has to be tasted). Then they decide whether to play with it or eat it. When we adults get into a mindfulness course we realize that we are simply trying to reclaim our original nature of innocence, purity and simplicity. Children come into the world with all of these, but the complexities and frantic pace of life on the Earth play havoc



with their nature. All these rob them of their inherent capabilities and induce stress into their lives.



In the past decade, there has been a growing interest in mindfulness as life has become much more fast. Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting the feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Regular practice of mindfulness helps a person stay calm and steady when things get rough and turbulent.

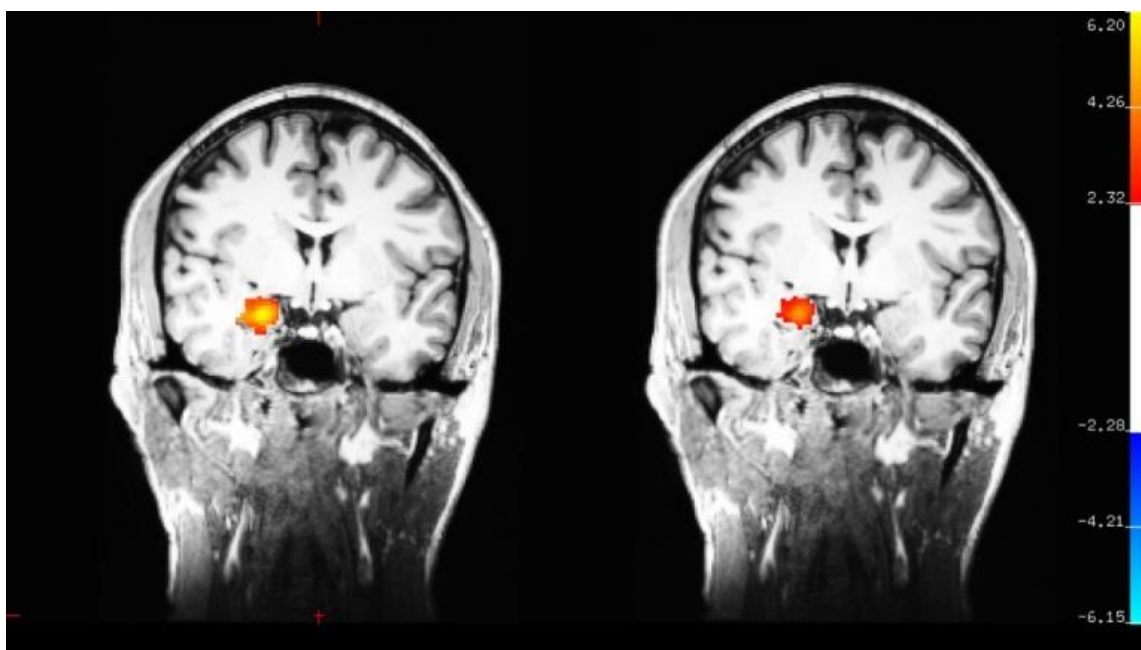
In a world exploding with information, where people are obsessed with social networks, news channels that run 24 hours, and online games like PUBG and Temple Run, children can benefit with a few moments of mindfulness during their waking hours. Since childhood is a time of overall personality development, the skills learnt at this time have a great impact on the latter parts of life, which is why the art of meditation should be taught in the classroom. Learning to be mindful can help children manage their emotions and energies in a better way. They are more likely to respond to situations than react.

Besides, every stage of life brings its own bunch of troubles. School-going children may have to handle sibling rivalry, bullying, competition from classmates, playground squabbles, etc., and learn their lessons from them. And once they reach adolescence, they discover a fresh new set of dilemmas and troubles. Growing up can indeed be a stressful period of life. Increasing volatility and uncertainty in today's world is adding to the woes of children. All the developmental stages of life can be handled smoothly, if children are taught to practise mindfulness. It is a tool to bring down anxiety and increase happiness.

**Scientific evidence:** Rising interest in mindfulness has also triggered a spike in research in the topic as an intervention to help people of all ages with depression and anxiety disorders. Harvard researchers<sup>1</sup> have found that mindfulness helps steady the brain activity. More specifically the amygdala, a part of the brain which

<sup>1</sup> <http://davidvago.bwh.harvard.edu/mindfulness-research-collaborative-mrc/>

reacts to emotional triggers, is less activated in subjects who are trained in meditation.



*Functional MRI (left) showing activation in the amygdala when participants were watching images with emotional content before learning meditation. After eight weeks of training in mindful attention meditation (right) the amygdala is seen to be less activated after the meditation technique.*

*Courtesy: The Harvard Gazette, Gaelle Desbordes*

Another researcher Sara Lazar<sup>2</sup> discovered that the brain tissue actually thickens in those who practise meditation and mindfulness.

Research<sup>3</sup> has shown the effectiveness of mindfulness training for children with ADHD<sup>4</sup> and mindful parenting for the parents.

A study<sup>5</sup> published in the Journal for the Child and Family Studies showed that mindfulness based cognitive therapy is a promising intervention for attention and behavior problems, and may reduce childhood anxiety. It is now known to improve social and emotional resilience.

In the West following a spike in school violence incidents, mindfulness programs are being integrated with physical education in schools. It is also being increasingly used instead of punishments to help students deal with anxiety and

<sup>2</sup> [https://scholar.harvard.edu/sara\\_lazar](https://scholar.harvard.edu/sara_lazar)

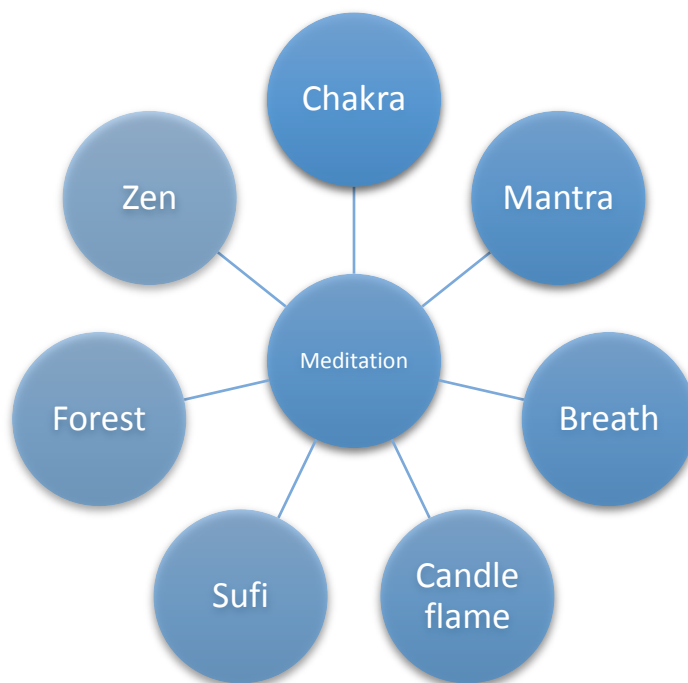
<sup>3</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10826-011-9457-0>

<sup>4</sup> Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

<sup>5</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10826-009-9301-y>

anger. Teachers have reported that when some kind of mediation is practised by students, they are less hyperactive and more attentive in the classroom, and their overall performance improves.

### Types of meditation:



**Crux of mindfulness:** Slowing down is the crux of mindful living. Decluttering the mind and giving space to silence are important. Silence is a prerequisite for most meditation techniques as it aids reflection, contemplation and observation.





Meditation of course has to be done without judgment or attachment. Everything we perceive is to be looked at for what it is. The ideal state of the mind in meditation is quiet, steady, empty but free and inward looking. It is then that the mind can discover the inner silence or the deeper state of consciousness.

Repeated practice of mindfulness makes one aware of what's going on, without allowing it to overwhelm themselves. One who does not practice mindfulness simply gets carried away by the stream of thoughts and feelings that arise in their mind and speak or act without control. With meditation one is likely to be more anchored and steady.

Leading life with a mindful approach means paying 100% attention to the task on hand, and not being distracted. If you are walking, mind every step, obey the signals, and keep your eye on the road to maintain a safe distance from the zooming cars. Any activity done this way can be therapeutic.

*Sujata C is a writer and editor with more than thirty years of experience. She writes on children, environment, society as well as technology. She has also been a copywriter with an advertising agency for almost fifteen years.*

## Lesson Plan: Incorporating Mindfulness in the Classroom

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Since children are generally playful and imaginative, teaching them mindfulness should be done with a creative and fun-filled approach. Lessons have to be short because they may not sit still for too long. Teachers can try some of these in the classroom.

1. Teach children simple yogas. Here are a few easy asanas.

- i. *dhanurasana* (bow pose)
- ii. *bhujangasana* (cobra pose)
- iii. *vajrasana* (kneeling pose)
- iv. *gomukhasana* (cow face pose)
- v. *marjaryasana* (cat pose)
- vi. *mandukasana* (frog pose)
- vii. *sukhasana* (easy pose)
- viii. *savasana* (corpse pose)
- ix. *virasana* (hero pose)
- x. *simhasana* (lion pose)



*Dhanurasana*

2. Introduce them to the meditation techniques followed by the ninja warriors of Japan. They can compare those to the Indian yoga forms and learn to keep themselves calm in difficult situations.
3. Guide your students to imagine themselves as astronauts during meditation. Ask them to visualize themselves rising above the earth, floating in space while being surrounded by the stars.
4. Play a singing bowl, or the sounds of chirping birds, flowing river, etc. in the classroom to create a soothing ambience. It will help students to meditate.
5. Encourage them to play games like chess, scrabble, etc. that increase mindfulness.

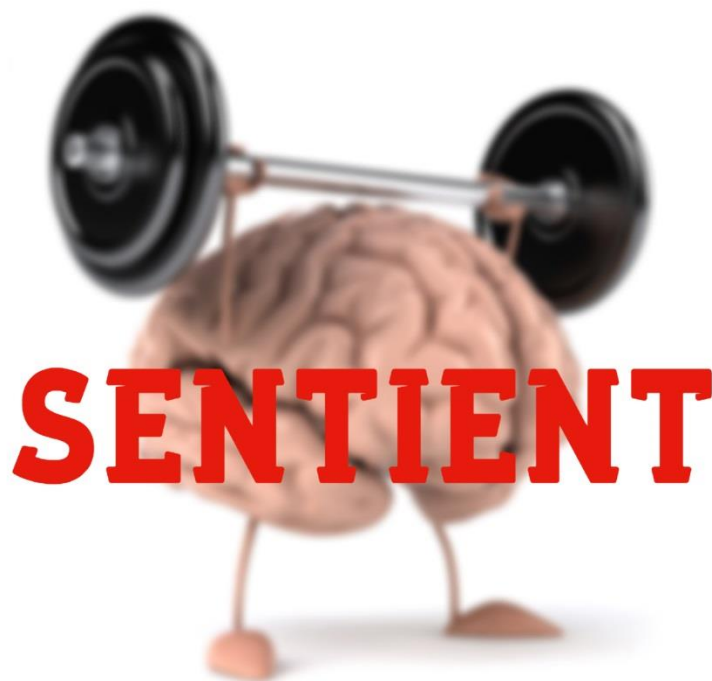


Scrabble Tiles

6. Read and recommend books about mindful living. Here some recommended reads:
  - i. ***Living Mindfully: At Home, at Work, and in the World*** by Deborah Schoeberlein David
  - ii. ***Looking at Mindfulness: 25 Ways to Live in the Moment through Art*** by Christopher Andre
  - iii. ***Unplugged: How to Live Mindfully in the Digital World*** by Orianna Fielding

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## Sentient (*adjective*)



**Pronunciation:** /'sentɪənt/ and /'senʃ(ə)nt/

**Meaning:** Able to perceive or feel things

**Origin and additional information:** The word came into English diction in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, originating from the Latin 'sentient' – *feeling*, from the verb *sentire*. The quality of sentient beings are called *sentience* (noun). It is the capacity to feel, sense and experience subjectively. This concept was used by 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers to differentiate the ability to think (reason) with the ability to feel (sentience). In modern Western philosophy, sentience is regarded as the ability to experience sensations. In Eastern philosophy, sentience is a metaphysical quality of all things that require respect and care. The concept is central to the philosophy of animal rights because sentience is necessary for the ability to suffer, and is therefore held to confer certain rights.



Use over time for: sentient



**Word section:** In the philosophy of consciousness, sentience can refer to the ability of any entity to have subjective perceptual experiences, or as some philosophers refer to them as *qualia*<sup>1</sup>. This is discrete from other aspects of consciousness, such as creativity, intelligence, rationale, self-awareness, and deliberateness. Sentience is a simple way of defining consciousness, which otherwise commonly and collectively describes sentience plus other characteristics of the mind.

Some philosophers, notably Colin McGinn, believe that sentience will never be understood, an outlook known as *new mysterianism*. They do not refute that most other aspects of consciousness are liable to scientific investigation but they claim that subjective experiences can never be explained; i.e., sentience is the only aspect of consciousness that will remain inexplicable. Other philosophers like Daniel Dennett disapprove, arguing that every characteristic of consciousness will eventually be elucidated by science.<sup>2</sup>

Eastern religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism consider non-humans as sentient beings. In Jainism and Hinduism, this is closely related to the concept of *ahimsa*, that is, non-violence toward other beings.

In the philosophies of animal welfare and rights, *sentience* implies the ability to experience pleasure and pain. Animal welfare advocates typically argue that any sentient being is entitled, at a minimum, to protection from unnecessary suffering. In the same way, trees too are sentient beings whom we should protect.

<sup>1</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/quale>

<sup>2</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/materialism-eliminative/>

The term *sentience* is even used in popular accounts of Artificial Intelligence to describe *human level or higher intelligence* (or artificial general intelligence).

**Usage:**

1. Forasmuch as God would that the faculties both intelligent and sentient should predominate in the head [etc.].  
(Source: John Guillim's *Display of Heraldrie*, 1632)
2. Animals (or at least sentient animals) clearly have an interest in not being made to suffer.  
(Source: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sentient>)
3. Yet that is what we, in effect, tell the millions of sentient creatures who are killed in lab experiments.  
(Source: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sentient>)

Contents sourced majorly from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary