

Chapter 21

Mindfulness in Education: The Need of the Hour

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ABSTRACT

Complexity of the modern era has led to increased difficulties of people, especially the youth. Living in the current stressful, uncertain, and highly stimulating technological era is not very easy for the young ones. Hence, there is an urgency to teach skills of stress management and resilience among children through mindfulness-based practices. This change in the present scenario has attracted the attention and interest of psychologists and educationists to the practice of mindfulness-based interventions with children and adolescents for enhancing their overall well-being. The last few years have observed a growing number of research and applications of mindfulness in educational settings because of its effectiveness and the urgent need of prevention and interventions of the youths' problems. In this chapter, the author has discussed research supporting the idea of mindfulness in education for both students and teachers and its usage to increase the academic performance, enhance overall wellbeing, and reduce the stress level of youth.

INTRODUCTION

Today's generation is much more stressed, distracted, and vulnerable to the negative influences of the fast-paced modern world than the previous generation. There are number of research indicating to a very higher level of stress among children and adolescents (Barnes et al., 2003; Fisher, 2006; Mendelson et al., 2010). From numerous researches, it is also very apparent that the modern youth and educators essentially need to develop new skills and understanding to deal with such situation. Technology leaves a very strong impact on children and adolescents in terms of images and sounds because of the continuous over exposure. This continuous surplus of exposure leads to overburdening and challenging children's thinking capacity as well as becoming an obstacle to their learning (Fisher, 2006). These environmental factors are considered to be the cause to a series of undesirable and damaging effects in children and

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adolescents such as socio-emotional problems, behavioural difficulties, and decreased academic performance (Mendelson et al., 2010).

Kabat-Zinn (Mindfulness in Education, 2013) rightly says, “We do not know what specific knowledge our children are going to need ten or twenty years from now, because the world, and their work when they come to it, will be so different from ours. What we do know, is that they will need to know how to pay attention, how to focus and concentrate, how to listen and learn, and how to be in wise relationship with themselves – including their thoughts and emotions - and with others”. The concern and worries are very much evident from this statement which makes it an urgency to plan on the preventions and interventions. Hence planning to educate the youth and developing the skills of focused attention is very important. Researchers, educationists, and academicians are focusing on the research which can integrate mindfulness practices in education for enhancing the overall well-being among children and adolescents as well as teachers. Mindfulness can help them to develop skills of resilience, flexibility, concentration, calmness, empathy, and compassion which are important to deal with the fast-paced modern world’s complexity in an effective and efficient way. This can also help them to learn to live harmoniously with nature and people in their surroundings, make them responsible global citizens and positively contributing members of the society. The concept of mindfulness is considered abstract and complex which needs detailed understanding. This will be defined and deliberated in the subsequent discussion.

UNDERSTANDING MINDFULNESS

The word “mindfulness” has its origin into word ‘sati’ of Pali language, which translates it into having awareness, paying attention, and being able to remember (Bodhi, 2000). The eastern meditative practices have a strong notion of mindfulness particularly in Buddhism which is used as one of the essential meditative technique. Mindfulness training is given to increase the individual’s awareness, be attentive to present moment and to observe his thoughts and experiences without reacting or being judgemental about them.

There are number of definitions given by different researchers keeping the base of mindfulness described in eastern meditative practices. Some of them are contemplated here. Mindfulness is defined as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). This definition has given the importance to three aspects of mindfulness which are intention, attention, and attitude (Shapiro et al., 2006). It is also reiterated as “nonjudgmental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise” (Baer, 2003, p. 125), as “moment-by-moment awareness” (Germer et al., 2005, p. 6) or as “a state of psychological freedom that occurs when attention remains quiet and limber, without attachment to any particular point of view” (Martin, 1997, p. 291). Mindfulness comprises of two components: self-regulating attention and adopting an open and accepting one’s experiences (Bishop et al., 2004), being conscious to one’s present experience (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2006).

In simple words, mindfulness is paying attention to things and accepting as they are and not how we expect them to be. As Shapiro and Carlson (2006) note, the key feature of mindfulness is to be aware and deliberately giving attention in an open, gentle, and judicious way as it helps in recognising one’s thoughts and emotions and make an individual open to change (Dreyfus, 2011). After looking at all these definitions, it establishes that there are some common components of mindfulness which are: purposeful, give concentrated attention, focused on ‘here and now’ of the human experience without any judgment.

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