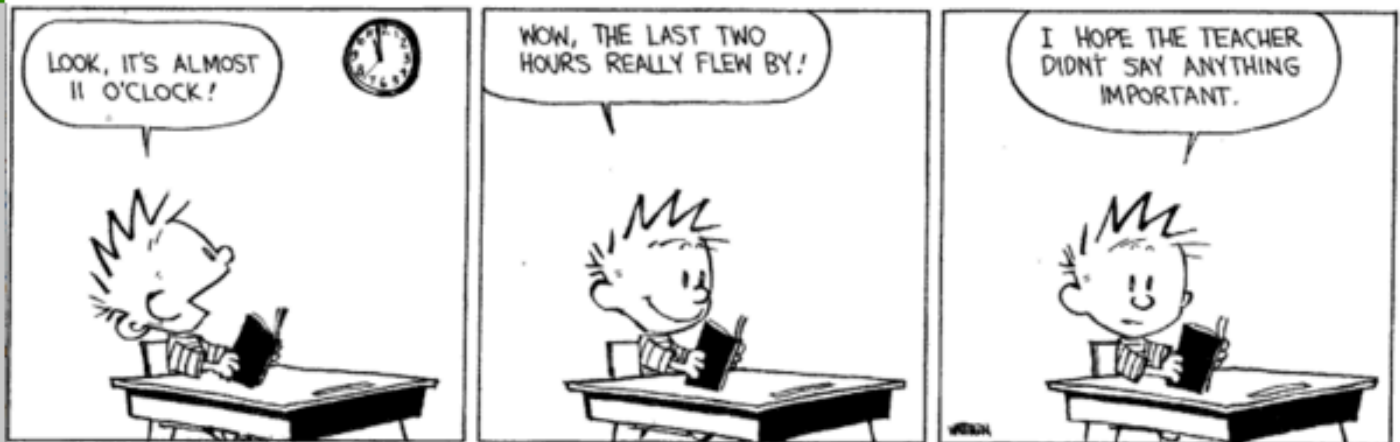


Inner Explorer
Beyond The Program for Teachers
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supporting our teachers

an  **inner**EXPLORER[™]
publication

Pay Attention



(Cartoon: Calvin & Hobbes by William Boyd "Bill" Watterson II)

Dear Inner Explorer Teachers,

Welcome back to school! All of us at Inner Explorer hope you had a lovely summer.

Now that we've launched our school year it's time for our students to "pay attention" right? That may be easier said than done. Is it easy for you to pay attention? For many of us, it's not easy. Most adults were never taught to pay attention and we have so many things happening in our lives inside and outside of school that we are constantly distracted. Our mobile devices exacerbate the problem. A journalist recently mentioned that she no longer has the attention to read a book; surfing the web has greatly hampered her ability to sustain concentration for long periods. The hundred billion neurons (brain cells) in our heads are busy connecting to each other. Every second fifty neural activities occur in our brain; all that neural activity can make it very difficult to decide where to put our attention. The good news is mindfulness, awareness of the present moment without judgment, improves attention. Practicing with Inner Explorer daily will help you and your students pay attention more effectively.

We believe that learning how to pay attention should be foundational in schools. Our research indicates that practicing mindfulness daily with Inner Explorer increases grades and test scores. Students often relay that when they practice mindfulness before reading or doing homework, schoolwork becomes much easier. It follows that if you practice mindfulness with your students before doing a lesson, it may be easier for them to pay attention to whatever it is that you are teaching. When students are able to focus on what they are learning, naturally they perform better academically. By listening to Inner Explorer daily, you and your student are developing a daily mindfulness practice.

When we focus on our breath, that is bringing our attention to each in breath and each out breath again and again and again, we actually train our attention. You may decide that you'd like to further explore this practice of mindfulness on your own. If you would like to do so, we recommend that you make a commitment to sit every day at the same time for a week for five minutes with your phone turned off.. After you have sat for seven days you can assess if dedicating this time to practicing is beneficial for you and you can add time as appropriate. Choosing a time of day to sit and practice every day; perhaps first thing in the morning, when you arrive at school, the first five minutes of lunch, or as soon as you get home will make it more likely that you will remember to practice. We suggest you spend a few minutes checking out for yourself where to best find your breath, perhaps it's at your nose, or in the rising or falling of your chest or perhaps in the movement of your abdomen. Once you decide where it's easiest for you to feel your breath, sit in a comfortable posture with your back straight and eyes closed or cast downward. You may want to set a timer for five minutes. You begin by simply noticing each inhalation and each exhalation. Repeat. Repeat. And repeat again. The mind will wander, no big deal, once you notice that has occurred,

gently redirect your attention back to the breath. In a two-minute practice, you may need to bring your attention back ten times. That's great attention training. Sometimes people who practice mindfulness judge their practice; they feel they aren't "good at it" because their minds are too active. Rest assured, no matter how many times your mind strays, the mindful moment is when you realize your mind has strayed. As soon as you realize your mind has wandered to wondering how many more minutes remain before the timer rings, you simply return your attention to each inhalation and each exhalation, and then to the next inhalation and exhalation. Try not to judge your practice. It is what it is. You may find that some days, it's easier to focus than others. Simply notice that.

If you find at the end of the week, that the practice is beneficial to you, you might extend the practice by five minutes a week until you get to practicing 20 minutes a day. The hardest thing about practicing mindfulness on your own is remembering to do it! Have fun exploring and if you have questions, please don't hesitate to email us!

Activities for Inside the Classroom and Outside the Classroom

1. Counting Breaths: this is a great way to practice focusing on the breath. You count each inhalation & exhalation as one and you continue until you count ten breaths and then you start over at one again. The tricky part is that at two and a half breaths your mind might wander to being hungry or needing or your to do list. Whenever your mind has wandered you start over at one again. You might try this once a week with your students and have them write about the experience week to week.

2. Another great tool for focusing on the breath is setting a timer for two or three or five minutes saying to yourself breathing in.....breathing out.....when your mind wanders, gently return it to the breath. You might offer both tools to your students and have a discussion about which one is more helpful.

3. Use any bell you have available in the classroom. (Vibratones from Amazon are awesome). Ring the bell and have your students listen to it. Next ring it again and have them listen to the bell with their eyes closed. Finally, ask them to close their eyes and raise their hands when they cannot hear the bell anymore. This is a fabulous listening exercise. For younger students it's really fun to see how the hands stay down longer as they really listen to the sound of the bell.

4. Give your students an assignment to listen to their favorite song. Ask them to practice singing along with the song to see if they can get through the entire song without thoughts appearing while they sing. When they have a thought, they start over again. Try it yourself. This is may be harder than you think!

5. Have kids talk to each other and tell each other 5 things they like, films, food, places. See how many things kids can recall. This is a simple concentration game. After they do the exercise, have them listen to a bell and practice mindfulness for two minutes. Then have them do the exercise again. Have a discussion about the difference between doing the exercise the first time and the second time.

6. Give an assignment to students to play a video game, do a puzzle or read something. Then ask them to practice mindfulness for five minutes. Ask them to repeat the activity. Is there a difference between time one and time two?

7. Hand out drawing materials. Ask your students to draw mindfully, to notice choosing a color, to notice picking up the drawing instrument, to noticing each line they draw. Discuss students' experience.

8. Pebble game: Put look alike pebbles (you can buy these at art stores) in ziplock baggies. The pebbles should look alike but have some distinguishing feature. Break the kids up in groups of four and distribute a packet to each group. Have students name the pebbles and take turns picking out a certain number, letting their classmates look at them for 15 – 30 seconds. Then have the student take away one or more pebbles and ask the other students to say which pebbles have been removed.

For Young Students

9. Have students look at you. Tell them to close their eyes and change something about your appearance; move a scarf, move a ring to another hand, put on a sweater, etc. Ask the kids to tell you what changed. Then have them do this with each other.

10. If you have a bell in class, have the students close their eyes. Ring the bell a few times. Have them put up the number of fingers to represent the number of times the bell rings.

BASIC BRAIN FACTS TAKEN FROM THE WORK OF RICK HANSON

The average adult brain weighs about three pounds.

In the first four years of a child's life, the brain reaches 80% of its eventual adult size. As we all know, brain development is a completely different story.

The brain uses 20 – 25% of the body's oxygen and glucose despite the fact it is such a small percentage of the body's weight.

Brains are comprised of tissue that contain over a trillion cells including 100 billion neurons. Each neuron has about 5,000 synapses, the place where they connect with other neurons. Is it any wonder that it is difficult to pay attention?

Neurotransmitters are chemicals which transfer signals across synapses from one neuron to another.

Neurons fire between 5 – 50 times a second. Conscious mental events occur when groups of synapses connect. Psychologist Donald Hebb said that neurons that fire together wire together. When they wire together again and again they create neural pathways. Mental activity can create new neural structures.

By practicing mindfulness every day we strengthen neural pathways which strengthens our ability to pay attention.

WE WANT TO HEAR & SHARE YOUR STORIES!!!

One of the most rewarding aspects of being involved with a mindful awareness program is listening to the heart-warming stories of how the program affects students and teachers. Some of the most important learning occurs from hearing others' stories. On that note, we'd like to feature your stories and photos in our Beyond the Program monthly newsletter! Please send your stories and photos to Tabitha at totoole@innerexplorer.org.

(If you send a photo, we will need a completed consent form. [Click here to print the photo release form.](#))

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