

Inner Explorer
Beyond The Program for Teachers
December 2015

supporting our teachers

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publication

Mindful Movement



Dear Inner Explorer Teachers,

We hope you are well and had an enjoyable Thanksgiving. Holidays are often synonymous with sharing, eating and giving. In this month's Beyond The Program, we'd like to propose that you bring mindful movement into your life as a way to give to yourself and to others. Simple mindful movement practices can help your students learn to move more mindfully. Interacting with people by moving mindfully is a very kind thing to do! And giving to yourself is something most of us don't do enough.

In our lives we move constantly. If we teach, we get out of bed early and move around our living spaces in a certain fashion. Perhaps you need time in the morning to wake up slowly and you give yourself lots of time so you can move around slowly and methodically as you get prepared to leave for school. Or, perhaps you need every last minute of sleep and your movement involves rushing around and multi-tasking to get done all that needs to happen before walking out the door. No judgment here, just mindful awareness.

As for your students, some may move methodically and slowly and others rush around knocking things off desks and bumping into other kids. Might there be a mad dash to the door involving pushing and shoving when you announce "line-up" before recess and lunch?

One way to step into the present is to move mindfully. Doing so has many benefits including taking good care of the body, avoiding injury, creating calm, and being kind to others. If you drive, are you aware of how your driving affects others or of how your movement in the grocery store impacts shoppers around you?

This month we'd like to propose that you and your students pay attention to mindful movement both inside and outside the classroom as a way to give to others. You can encourage your students to move mindfully inside the classroom, out on the yard, in the library and where they live. And you can do the same! How does one move mindfully? Check out our activities section below.

Activities for Inside the Classroom and Outside the Classroom

1. Mindfully walking to the door. Read the following instructions to your students. Encourage students to do this in silence.

- Slowly rise and begin standing by taking a moment to feel into the body. Feel the connection of the body to the floor.
- Become aware of your surroundings and any feelings or emotions and let them all be just as they are.
- Staying in place without moving forward, lift one foot and place it back down on the ground. Then lift the other foot. Ask them to do this three or four times.
- Now let's walk to the door and line up. Lift one foot, move it forward, and place it back down. Now lift the other foot, move it forward, and place it back down. Repeat these steps moving mindfully and slowly. Notice if you want to move quickly to get ahead of others. Try to not do that, and invite someone using hand motions and not your voice, to go in front of you.
- Ask your students how the exercise felt.

One goal might be to get your kids to move mindfully to the door every time they line up!

2. Walking mindfully down the hallway or outside. You might try the same exercise as above but where you all have more space, walking for example down a long hallway or across a play yard or quad. Once students get to the end. Have them pause take a few breaths to check in with their body before transitioning to lunch or next class, turn around and repeat.

3. Have a slow race. Ask students to rise from their chairs as slowly as they can. Ask them what muscles they noticed as they did this. Ask them to sit down slowly as well. Again ask them what muscles they notice. Most of the time we move and pay no attention to the mechanics of how we are moving.

4. Brainstorm with your students about why moving mindfully is important. You can get into safety, sports, health and well-being. Give them a piece of paper and ask them to write down a path at school for which they will choose to walk mindfully for a week. It could be from their seat to the garbage can, or from the classroom to lunch, or from the hall back to the classroom. Give periodic reminders throughout the day and week so they remember to do this. You can collect the papers and hand them back at the end of the week, asking kids how they did. You can do this as well. For example, every time you walk from your classroom to the rest room or to the office you can do so mindfully.

5. Hand out an assignment for students to practice this same exercise at home as well. Have them write down on what pathway at home they will walk mindfully for a week. It's fun to change the pathway every week. Doing so helps us be a lot more present.

6. Do a drawing project mindfully. Hand out paper and any drawing implement of your choice. Ask them to notice what it feels like to hold the pencil, pen or crayon. Ask them to write their names and notice what it feels like when they write; are they holding the implement more tightly then when not writing? Is it possible to write without holding the implement so tightly? Now ask them to draw anything they want for five minutes and pay attention to each mark or line they make on the paper. After five minutes ask them how that exercise felt compared to when they do something similar without being mindful.

7. Play music and ask the students to dance or move mindfully to their music at their desks. Ask them to stop when the music stops. You can turn the music on and off many times. You might try using classical music. You also might want to invite kids to close their eyes as they move. Ask them about the experience.

8. Ask students to raise their hands as if they wanted to answer a question. Now ask them to raise their hands very slowly and notice what muscles they are using to do so. In class, some kids will raise their hands before they even hear the question. Ask them to be mindful when raising their hands.

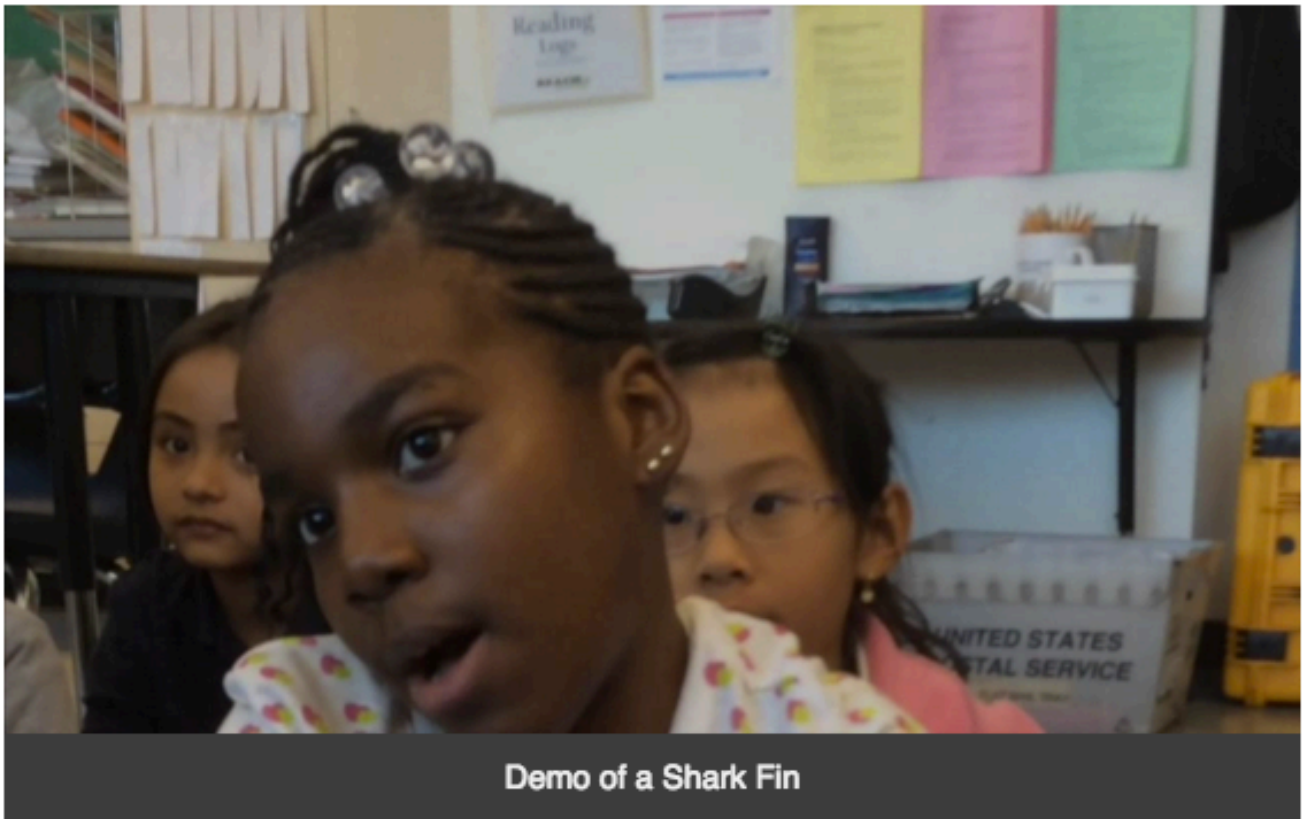
Neuroscience of Movement

All movement requires communication between the brain and the muscles. The cerebellum, approximately the size of a fist, is the area of the brain most connected with movement and motor control. It only takes up about a tenth of the brain in space but holds about half of the brain's neurons. The more we practice a movement, the less time it takes for the brain to respond and movements become more fluid. (think sports, playing music or dance) In the last few decades neuroscientists have discovered that the part of the brain that processes movement is the same part of the brain that processes learning. At the 1995 Annual Society of Neuroscience Conference, 80 studies were mentioned suggesting strong links between the cerebellum and memory, special perception, language, attention, emotion, nonverbal cues, and even decision making. Scientists are making an important connection between physical education and movement and improving cognition.

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/104013/chapters/Movement-and-Learning.aspx>

Mindful Movement - Shark Fin

Edgar, an elementary teacher from Oakland, CA, shares a brief video of his class practicing the Shark Fin mindful movement. This is an easy signal to settle and a great way to begin the Inner Explorer practice.



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