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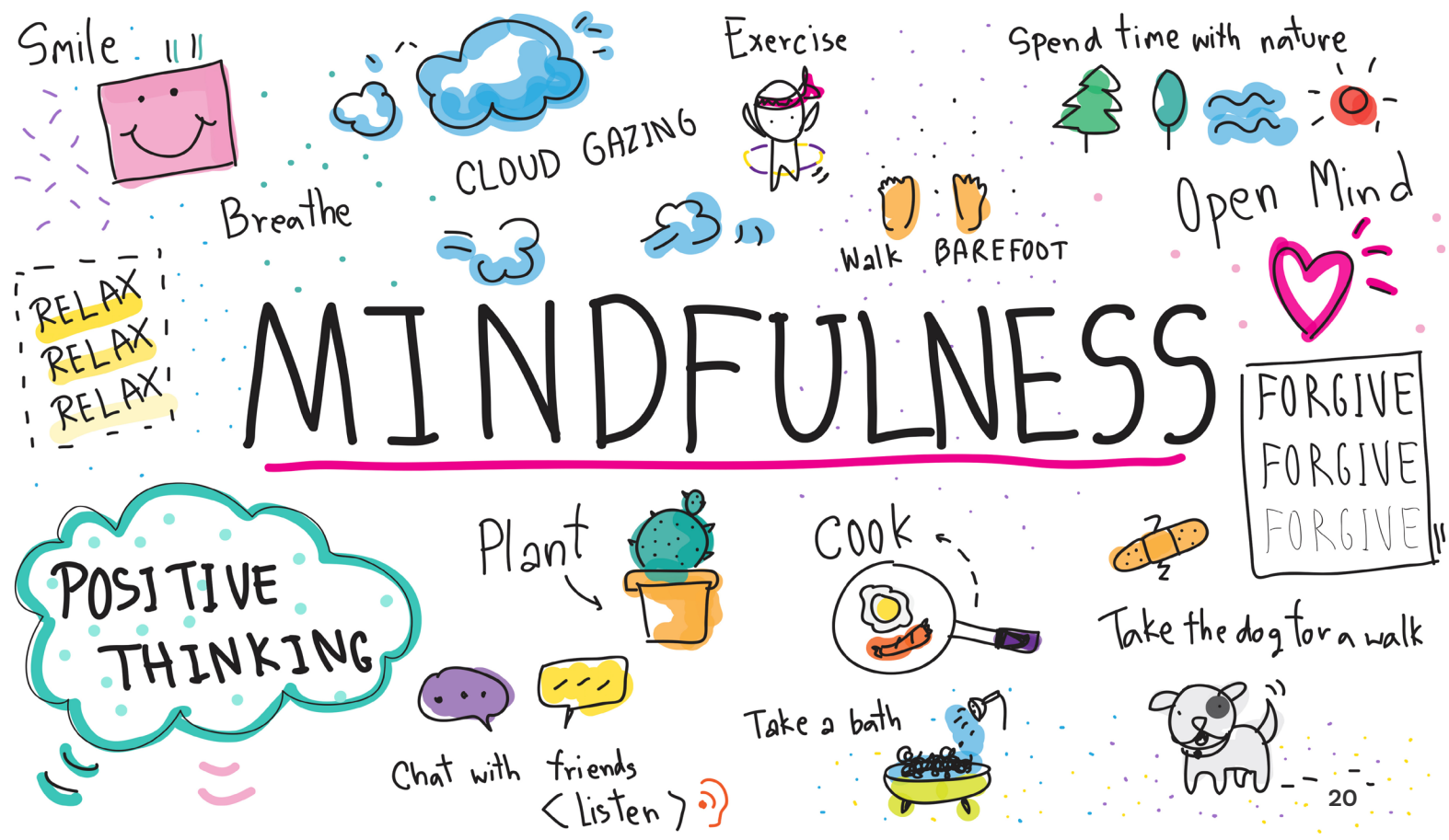
MINDFUL MOVEMENT: CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES WITH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

By Paul T. Stuhr, Erica Rammell, & Mckayla Magadan

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Abstract

One way to view mindfulness is the ability to become fully immersed in the present moment. Mindful awareness is being able to recognize thoughts, sounds, sensations, and emotions as they occur in the here and now. Mindfulness as a movement practice originated in the Far East and has become mainstream in today's Western culture through popular meditative exercises such as yoga, tai chi, and walking. Mindful movements are an amalgam of contemplative practices (i.e., mindfulness) coupled with low impact physical activity (i.e., movement) with the purpose of nourishing the mind and body by bringing heightened awareness to the present moment. The purpose of this article is twofold: to introduce teachers to the conceptualization of mindful movement and cover the potential benefits that stem from using these techniques in and outside of the classroom. Learning strategies to help lower stress and anxiety is a pathway toward promoting social and emotional health. Thus, teachers may find these mindful movement practices to be useful for personal or teaching purposes.



Introduction

During times of crisis and trauma it is critical to practice self-care. Since the onset of COVID-19, teachers and students have dealt with a tremendous amount of social and emotional trauma in their lives. As a result, the balance of juggling all of life's "slings and arrows" has created considerable hardship making the prioritization of self-care more important now than ever. As students reenter the classroom, there becomes an urgent need to provide opportunities for students to experience self-care activities to help them become more connected to themselves and to others in the learning environment. This practitioner article is intended to explain a variety of movement-based contemplative practices (i.e., mindful movement) that can be quite advantageous for teachers and students to use in and outside the classroom to reduce anxiety, stress, and feelings of emotional isolation.

Mindfulness in the Classroom

Mindfulness should be thought of as a simple yet challenging practice to master. To be mindful and fully aware of the present moment is easier said than done. Naturally, the mind likes to wander and, because of this, a great deal of time in life is spent dwelling on the past or anticipating the future. However, if we can dedicate ourselves to practicing and learning how to be more effective in paying attention, then we can unlock a variety of potentially transformative benefits for our overall health and well-being. Mindfulness practices have been shown to have a positive influence on the brain, the autonomic nervous system, stress hormones, the immune system, and health behaviors such as eating, sleeping and social interaction (Greeson, 2016).

At a fundamental level, practicing mindfulness can help with cultivating attention, equanimity, and compassion (Stuhr, Thomas., 2017). These three essential cornerstones represent some of the more salient outcomes in practicing mindfulness. Attention is the gentle focus and awareness of the present moment. Being able to stay focused in the present moment without the mind wandering can be challenging, but life is only experienced living in the now. Being atten-

tive in class positions students toward a higher probability of retaining the information that is presented to them. Equanimity is emotional balance or a feeling of complete composure and mental calmness. Individuals who experience equanimity are those who can maintain a non-judgmental mindset when faced with adversity, stress, or anxiety provoking situations. One could argue, students who can maintain equanimity during school may be in a better position to follow rules, routines, and expectations of the classroom. Benefits can also be seen when using mindfulness to improve intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship skills such as empathy, social awareness, and self-compassion. Students who demonstrate prosocial human relationship skills are those who can appropriately interact with their peers through active listening and being supportive with one another.

With regard to the importance of human connection and relationships, there has been growing interest in social and emotional learning (SEL) in physical education (Wright & Richards, 2021). Additionally, the field has produced SEL literature specific to mindfulness (Knothe & Marti, 2018; Mulhearn et al., 2017; Stuhr et al., 2018; Stuhr & Thomas, 2017; Vicente & Stuhr, 2022). There is also ample evidence that mindfulness can lead to a number of benefits for students (Waters et al., 2015). Mindfulness in the classroom has been shown to help produce a variety of encouraging outcomes for students, such as reducing stress and improving class climate (Wisner, 2014), reduction in depression (Joyce et al., 2010), increased optimism and positive emotions (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010), less reactivity and greater sense of calmness (Wall, 2005), improved social skills (Napoli et al., 2005), improved academic performance (Rosaen & Benn, 2006), and improved behavior (Campion & Rocco, 2009). Techniques that focus on mindfulness in the classroom should be considered a complementary part of an instructor's professional development and pedagogical repertoire.

The growing body of literature has framed mindfulness as an extra tool in helping shape a desired learning community in schools. Creating opportunities for students to practice mindfulness could be quite advantageous toward better equipping them to stay focused and thus engaged in learning tasks for longer periods of

time. Mindfulness practices in physical education create a wonderful opportunity for students to learn how to develop a mindful attitude with non-judgmental acceptance towards themselves and others. There are a variety of specific mindfulness resources available to teachers that can assist students with enhancing their ability to be more caring and kinder to others as well as themselves (Stuhr et al., 2018).

Conceptualizing Mindful Movement

Physical movement in tandem with mindfulness can create a beneficial union. Physical activity is complementary to mindfulness as it improves physiological and psychological well-being (Weir, 2011). Mindful movements are physical activities that encourage an individual to focus their attention on the mind as well as the body (Jewell, 2017). Mindful movements have been shown to help reduce depression and anxiety (Payne & Crane-Godreau, 2013; Saeed et al., 2019). Still further, other empirical sources have shed light on the vast array of health-enhancing benefits from movement-based mindfulness practices (Schmalzl et al., 2014). Although a paucity of literature exists on mindful movement specific to the K-12 setting, there is research that suggests combining mindfulness with physical activity can be advantageous in enhancing mental health outcomes such as reduction of anxiety and stress (Henning et al., 2018; West et al., 2004).

Examples of mindful movement are activities like yoga, tai chi, and walking. A mindful movement like yoga uses specific exercises and body postures coupled with meditative practices to enhance attention and awareness (Khalsa & Butzer, 2016). Mindful movement does not always need to follow formalized patterns of exercise, as one can practice being mindful in motion while performing daily routine activities such as brushing teeth, washing the dishes, or doing laundry. The intention for any mindful movement is to be able to embrace each part of the day with better awareness of the present moment. The use of these types of practices in the school environment holds promise in helping students and teachers further develop social and emotional skills such as attention, emotional balance, and compassion.

Throughout this manuscript we will introduce the reader to eight mindful movements. The contemplative movement activities presented in this paper are intended to be used by students and teachers alike. We believe that a wide variety of individuals can find tremendous social and emotional health benefits from these practices and encourage teachers to think creatively on how best to include them in the classroom. The eight mindful movements in this manuscript are shifting weight while standing, slow walking, affirmation walk, inner smile walking, circles of compassion, yoga for beginners, labyrinth walking, and entry level tai chi.

Mindful Movement 1 - Shifting Weight While Standing

This mindful movement utilizes the skill-related fitness components of balance and stability with the contemplative practice of awareness. This practice provides an opportunity to stop, check in, and re-align body and mind. The goal of this practice is to slowly shift weight from one side of the body to the other while bringing full focus and awareness to the sensation of the movement as you stand. Ideally, start in a location that has reduced distractions or loud noises. Prior to beginning this practice, close your eyes and focus on the sensations of breathing. Is the breath calm and steady, is it labored, or perhaps shallow? Take a few deep breaths and settle your body position. If you become distracted, try to recognize that the mind has wandered and gently, nonjudgmentally bring the focus back to the breath. Table 1 contains a set of instructions on how to perform this mindful movement. When practicing this technique remember to recognize the changing sensations as each foot lifts off the ground, moves, and is placed back down. Motion should occur primarily with your legs/feet, with a slight bend at the knees. However, there should be no bending at the trunk.

After completing this mindful movement in class, the teacher can ask students to check-in with themselves to see how they feel. Teachers can ask students whether they feel relaxed or whether this practice has changed their mood or current disposition. Teachers can also encourage students to conduct a think/pair/share to discuss how they are feeling. If they do not feel comfort-

able sharing, teachers can have students write how they feel in a reflection journal or notebook. With any mindful movement, the key is to open oneself to explore the practice (i.e., what works or is perceived as beneficial) as it relates to helping one draw attention to the present moment.

Mindful Movement 2 – Slow Walking

Slow walking is a simple yet effective mindful movement exercise. In this activity the practitioner brings their attention to two items: the breath and one slow step after another. In performing slow walking one can choose to have a formal walking route with a definitive start and final destination (e.g., walking back and forth on a blacktop, a circular path around a park, or even a walking labyrinth). Or the slow walk can be done simply walking in an open area, in the hallway of one’s house, or in the backyard with no predetermined start or stop point. If possible, try to find a location that limits the number of stimuli present in the environment.

To begin, stand still, take a few deep diaphragmatic breaths, and pause a moment to become aware of how you feel. Take notice of your surroundings, sounds you may hear, any sights or smells. Standing, consider your posture. Draw attention to the weight of your body and bring attention to your feet in your shoes. Next, start walking slower than normal, lifting, and mov-

ing one foot down in front of you as you begin. Notice the subtle strike from heel all the way to your toes. Be aware of the different sensations that you feel with the terrain you are walking on. Walk 10-15 steps, stop and check-in with yourself while taking notice about how you feel. Continue walking for another 5 to 10 minutes with focus on the breath and bringing attention to the actual act of walking (e.g., notice the difference in the terrain, the weight shifting in different parts of your foot and how you move other parts of your body when you walk).

If performing slow walking with young students, remind them that this mindful exercise is not a race. Nor should students focus on reaching a destination in a certain set time. Primary attention should be placed on the breath and sensations of the foot with each slow step. Explain to students, that should their mind wander, that’s ok. Simply and nonjudgmentally refocus attention back to the breath and the movement of each slow step. A wandering mind is human nature, the key is to acknowledge the distraction and gently draw attention back to the act of the slow walking.

Mindful Movement 3 - Affirmation Walk

An affirmation is a conscious thought that is positive, powerful, and aims to challenge negative or unhelpful thoughts (Moore, 2021).

Table 1. Mindful Movement

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|--|
| 1. Shifting Weight While Standing Mindful Stand up and place your feet shoulder width apart. |
| 2. Close your eyes and take a moment to check-in with how you are feeling. |
| 3. Bring your awareness to the bottom of your feet. Take a deep breath in through your nose, allow your chest to fill up, and then slowly breathe out. |
| 4. Next, open your eyes, look forward, and focus on an object ahead that isn’t moving. This will help you keep your balance. |
| 5. Pick up your right foot and bring it up to a comfortable height without wobbling. Slowly, shift your weight so that most, but not all, of your weight is on your left foot. In this moment bring awareness to the changing sensations of your left foot. |
| 7. As you finish shifting weight to your left foot, allow your attention to shift to the right foot that is carrying less weight. Next, slowly bring your right foot down and begin to shift your weight back so that more weight is now on the right foot. Notice the sensation on the bottom of your right foot as you begin to return weight to it. |
| 8. Continue moving slowly, back, and forth for another couple of minutes. Experience the changing sensations in each foot as you shift your weight. |
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The use of affirmations can be beneficial for students in promoting loving-kindness toward self (Wilkins, 2021). Affirmations are a great strategy in mitigating self-criticism and negative thought, especially in social situations or the school environment where bullying may arise. An affirmation walk allows students to walk freely in a comfortable setting while silently repeating positive phrases. This mindful movement is a great tool in helping students to reduce any anxiety and or negative thinking.

Affirmation walking can be performed indoors or outside and preferably in a space with little distraction or noise. This practice can be conducted in as little as 30 seconds to a minute, or over a longer period such as a 10-minute session. Take a moment before you start to walk to take a deep breath and notice the different types of objects or nature around you. Allow yourself to feel the air going into your lungs and then exhaling the air out of your body. After taking a deep diaphragmatic breath, begin to walk forward. As you walk, begin silently stating your positive affirmation(s). The affirmation(s) that you use should be easy enough to remember without difficulty. For example, one might use the affirmation: may I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be at peace. Focus on expressing the affirmation with intent and as meaningful as possible. Table 2 is a list of sample affirmations that students might like to use during this mindful movement practice.

Speaking these affirmations will become easier and more natural as students continue to use this practice. Incorporating affirmations on a classroom bulletin board is another useful technique, as it makes these statements visible for students throughout the day. Ideally, this mindful movement can become a practice for students to perform outside the classroom as well. For example, middle and high school students might benefit in

performing this practice in between classes (i.e., passing period) to help maintain focus on the present moment or to help reduce stress and anxiety.

Mindful Movement 4 - Inner Smile Walk

When we smile, we open ourselves up to the possibility of inviting joy and happiness into our lives. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that smiling lowers heart rate and stress in individuals and is linked to other physiological and psychological benefits (Kraft & Pressman, 2012). This mindful movement incorporates the concept of an inner smile and was adapted from Berkenkamp (2020).

The construct of the inner smile originated as a Taoist practice, one where we visualize and project loving-kindness toward different parts of our body (e.g., neck, shoulders, arms, legs, etc.). To begin, close your eyes and visualize something or someone that makes you feel happy. Something or someone that brings a smile to your face. Focus on the feeling that comes from this image. This feeling represents your inner smile, and we can use this feeling to project love and kindness toward ourselves. Open your eyes but continue to focus on the uplifting feeling (i.e., your inner smile). Now start your walk. As you walk, from time to time, bring focus and attention to the inner smile feeling. If you want, you can target specific parts of your body when you walk and focus this inner smile on these parts of the body. For instance, picture the inner smile as it covers or radiates on your arms or legs, or the inner smile lighting up your inner core, or even imagining breathing in the inner smile with each breath. The smile can be small covering a small body part or it can be large and cover your entire body. For those who need guidance, you can have your in-

Table 2. Sample Affirmations

| Daily Affirmations | Affirmations Helpful for School |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am loved• I am unique and beautiful• I am kind to myself and others• I choose to only think good thoughts• I am an important and valuable person | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am a quick and capable learner• Earning a low score will motivate myself to do better• I appreciate my school and the teachers that help me to learn• I will always look out for my peers• I am making progress towards my goals |

ner smile travel from your feet upwards through your legs, torso, arms, neck, and finally the head (i.e., body scan). You can even imagine this inner smile leaving your body and traveling to others you see or the environment in which you are walking – as though you are sending love and compassion outwards to others who may need the positivity coming from your inner smile.

If you are brave enough, your inner smile can become an outer smile and you can physically smile at the sidewalk, trees, birds, or even smile at other people you may pass along your walk. Smiling at someone can elicit a positive emotion. So why not spread positivity, as positive emotions beget positive emotions. As Mother Teresa once said, “we shall never know all the good that a simple smile can do.”

Mindful Movement 5 – Circles of Compassion

Circles of Compassion is a contemplative practice that can be used for cultivating a stronger sense of community among group participants. Adapted from several sources, this cooperative practice encourages participants to practice loving-kindness to promote self-care and compassion (Ameli, 2014; Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Sutherland et al., 2019).

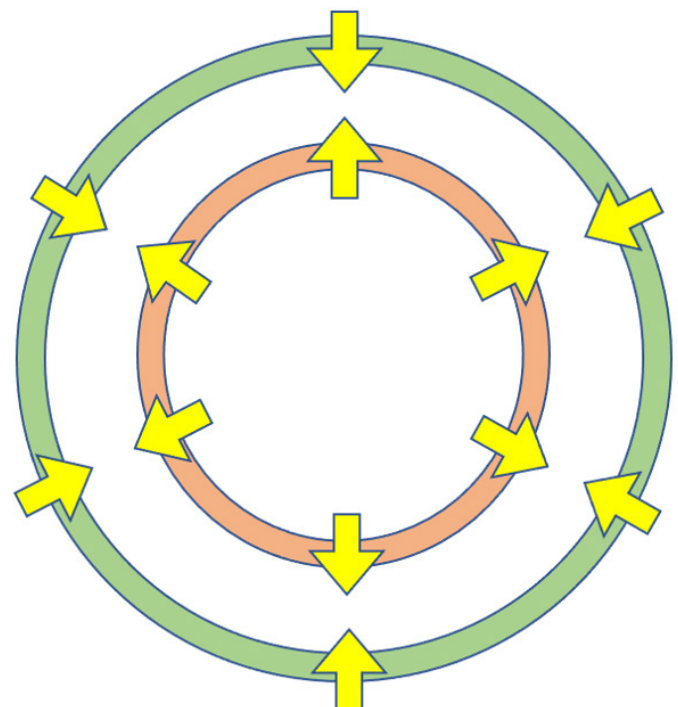
This simple yet impactful experiential activity involves students standing and forming two concentric circles (one inner and one outer circle), with students facing each other. See figure 1 on how to group and position students in the circles. On figure 1, the yellow arrows represent where each student stands. The students standing in the orange inner circle face outward while the students standing in the green circle face inward.

Both inner and outer circles should ideally have 5-6 participants. Each student in the inner circle should choose and face one student from the outer circle. Provide each student with a note card that has a different compassion affirmation written out. Some sample compassion affirmations include, may you be at peace, may you be free from anger, may you be safe, may you be free of pain and suffering, may you be filled with care and kindness, and may you practice calmness and serenity. Tell the students standing in the in-

side circle that they will repeat the affirmation on the note card to the person standing directly in front of them. For example, may you be at peace. Then the students on the outside circle will follow them by presenting the affirmation on their card. For example, may you be filled with care and kindness. Have students pause a moment after stating each phrase to allow students to think about what the affirmation means to them. Explain to the students, once they each have completed their phrase (and momentary pause) that the entire outside circle will rotate (one person) clockwise, in unison and stand in front of a new person and begin again with the affirmation phrases. This process will repeat several rounds until the students reach their first partner. Once this happens, have students shuffle and switch notecards. Have the students from the outer circle form the inner circle and vice versa for the inner circle students. Then repeat the entire process once more. Additionally, for older students, the teacher can ask them to create their own affirmation on a note card to read and personalize the experience further.

Once the activity is completed have the students sit down in a large circle to process and reflect on the experience. First, have students partner up and discuss how the activity made them feel.

Figure 1. Circles of Compassion Student Configuration



Was the activity difficult or was it refreshing? Did the activity seem silly or did students gain insight from it? Once students have had a moment to discuss with a partner, ask for a few volunteers to share with the whole class.

Mindful Movement 6 - Yoga for Beginners

Yoga is a type of exercise that helps the practitioner bring present moment awareness to both mind and body. Although yoga historically derives from spiritual underpinnings, this movement practice can be considered secular, and a great way to help individuals improve flexibility, muscular strength, and blood flow throughout the body. The type of yoga that is typically known in western culture is referred to as hatha yoga. Hatha yoga is typically performed at a slower pace than other types (e.g., vinyasa, ashtanga) and can be practiced by most ages, which makes it great for K-12 students.

A yoga sequence is a series of poses that are performed. Most would agree, there is no “one way” to choose the yoga sequence (i.e., the series of poses). Typically, the poses occur one after the other, from less to more challenging until returning to less challenging at the end of the session. As an example, see table 3 for a mini sequence of five poses that can be incorporated into a beginner yoga lesson.

Yoga creates opportunity for the individual to practice being mindful by bringing awareness to the breath, emotions, and thoughts. A key part of practicing mindfulness is to remind oneself of the importance of being nonjudgmental with each thought, sound, sensation, and or emotion during the yoga session. Mindful meditation is taught in yoga to help calm the mind, reduce rumination, and promote letting go of negative thoughts and feelings. For more details regarding mindful yoga please see Vicente and Stuhr (2022).

The practice of mindfulness in conjunction with the yoga poses is intended to create a profound mind and body connection. Practicing yoga with mindfulness creates space to be fully aware of the present moment and provides opportunity for calmness, resiliency, and a place of tranquility.

Mindful Movement 7 - Labyrinth Walking

Labyrinths are ancient meandering walkways that often have a singular path leading to a center (The Labyrinth Society, 2022). Labyrinths tend to have an outer starting area that allows the participant to enter and travel toward the center. There are curves and turns before the labyrinth pathway reaches the center. The journey through the labyrinth is meant to be simple and easy to figure out, thus allowing opportunity for an individual to meditate. The website Labyrinth Locator shows a selection of labyrinths worldwide (<https://labyrinthlocator.com>). A simple labyrinth can be made by a teacher should there not be one located nearby. See table 4 for website links for a variety of resources, including how to create a labyrinth. Walking in a garden or along a nature trail can be a good substitute if finding or creating a labyrinth is not convenient.

As with any mindfulness practice, the allotted time for a labyrinth walk can vary. For example, some walks might be 15 minutes for a person to walk to the center, turn around, and come back out. Or the allotted time can be much longer to allow someone to stop, observe, and take in the present moment. Walking a labyrinth can be done alone or with others. Before completing a labyrinth walk, begin with taking a deep breath to help center oneself and attempt to quiet the habitual chatter of the mind.

One can consider these three components in walking through a labyrinth: (a) release, (b) pause, and (c) return (Pillsbury, 2015). As one starts to walk, try to release all feelings of anxiety and negative emotions. Specifically, with each step visualize letting go of a specific emotion or feeling. The second component occurs as the individual reaches the center of the labyrinth and pauses. At the center, stop walking and take a few minutes to notice your surroundings, sounds, or even smells. Taking the time to stop at the center can also allow for additional time to focus on any thoughts, feelings, or sensations during this pause. Lastly, as you return to the entrance of the path, use that time to reflect and integrate those thoughts on how that might impact your day. The key in performing this practice is to be fully present in the here and now, to become more self-aware of your thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

Table 3. Five Yoga Poses for Beginners

Child's Pose



- Start by kneeling.
- Spread your knees wide.
- Sit on your heels and bring toes together.
- Lean forward and reach your arms out as far as possible.
- Rest your forehead on your mat.

Cow Pose



- Start on all fours in a neutral tabletop position.
- Inhale and look up towards the sky and bring your chest and chin forward.
- Create a slight “U” shape arch with back.
- Exhale and follow with a cat pose.

Cat Pose



- Following the inhale of the cow pose, exhale going into the cat pose
- Round your back into an inverted “U” shape.
- Look through your arms at your belly.
- Flow from cow to cat pose slowly while inhaling and exhaling.

Cobra Pose



- Lay on your stomach.
- Place your hands flat shoulder length apart.
- Lift up chest while keeping arms straight.
- Slowly and gently look up towards the sky.
- Keep your toes pointed.
- From this position try to move into downward dog pose.

Downward Dog Pose



- Keep hands/arms shoulder width apart.
- Push up and lift your hips up to the sky to make an inverted “V” shape.
- Flatten your feet.
- Lower your head and look between your arms.

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Table 4. Labyrinth Website Resources

| Video Title | Length | Description and Link |
|--|---------------|---|
| Labyrinth and Schools | 2:19 minutes | The use of labyrinths in schools and universities |
| TedTalk: A Beginners Guide to Labyrinths | 8:06 minutes | How to begin a walk The 3 steps on how to walk. The importance of this mindfulness tool |
| Stages of Walking a Labyrinth | 3:38 minutes | Emphasizes three phases: Releasing, Receiving and Return |
| How to make a Quick and Easy Labyrinth in 3 Minutes | 4:46 minutes | Using tape and roller to create a walking labyrinth |
| How to Make a Spiral Labyrinth Outdoors | 4:52 minutes | A visual walkthrough on creating a labyrinth using rocks and flour |
| How to Walk a Labyrinth | 1:56 minutes | POV of feet walking a labyrinth as helpful tips appear on screen |
| Virtual Labyrinth Walk | 9:14 minutes | A virtual walk through a silent labyrinth with tips appearing on screen |
| A Journey to Self-Discovery Lessons of the Labyrinth | 17:33 minutes | Describes a labyrinth, how it works, and what to expect |

The overall experience of walking through a labyrinth is meant to be simple and peaceful. Table 4 lists several website resources to help beginners learn more about labyrinths.

Walking through a labyrinth is a great movement activity to elicit calmness and as part of a student’s journey toward becoming more mindful. Discovering social and emotional benefits from a labyrinth walk may be challenging for some students. Teachers can help students by reminding them to be patient with the activity. Emphasize to students that the walk should be performed slowly and thus allow for opportunity to reflect upon thoughts, feelings, and sensations during the practice. Teachers are also encouraged to take time after the labyrinth walk to sit down and process the experience with students through a question-and-answer session. Potential questions may include: What did you experience? How did the walk make you feel? Was this experience easy or difficult for you? How can quiet reflection be beneficial in your life?

Mindful Movement 8 - Entry Level Tai Chi

Originating thousands of years ago from Chinese tradition, tai chi is known as meditation in motion. Tai chi combines various aspects

of martial arts, meditation, and breath work. Tai chi is a slow and gentle flow of low impact movements that incorporate deep breathing to help relieve stress, increase flexibility, and improve balance. At first you might think this sounds a lot like yoga. While there are many similarities between the two, there is one distinct difference that sets these practices apart. Tai chi movement occurs in a constant flow where you do not stop and hold poses, like one would in yoga. Just like a form of dance, every move in tai chi is fluid, creating a seamless flow as the body moves. With tai chi, a participant can hope to achieve Qi (i.e., an optimal state of awareness). Qi represents or symbolizes the perceived spiritual energy of life that flows through all living things (Hung et al., 2021). There is promising empirical evidence that suggests health-enhancing benefits (physiological as well as psychological) from participating in tai chi exercise (Lan et al, 2015). Specific benefits from tai chi include improved balance, better aerobic capacity, increased muscular strength, and heightened mental outlook (Hutson & McFarlene, 2016).

There are five different styles of tai chi: chen, yang wu, sun, and hao. While each has its own style and level of difficulty, yang is the most practiced style and a great starting point for beginners despite age or fitness level. Yang style in-

corporates large, elegant, slow sweeping movements that are continuous without pause. The purpose of these slow drawn-out movements is to focus deeply on your breath and body control so that you move with purpose and intent. A key point to moving properly is to make sure you shift your weight throughout your body as you flow from movement to movement. As a beginner, start with what feels comfortable to you and work your way up to a full set of movements. As you gently flow from movement to movement, it is important to take long continuous breaths by inhaling deeply through the nose, filling the chest comfortably with air, and exhaling slowly while maintaining a relaxed but alert posture. Table 5 includes four entry level tai chi movements that can be practiced by K-12 students.

The directions listed in table 5 are provided to help further describe how to move the body through each movement. However, for further detail, teachers may want to search the internet for videos of tai chi forms or postures. Remember to move slowly, continuously, and with intent while performing tai chi. During this practice, be sure to pay close attention to the awareness of the breath to help stay grounded in the present moment.

Mindful movements are physical activities coupled with contemplative practices that create space for individuals to enhance intrapersonal awareness of the mind, body, and spirit. Incorporating the power of mindfulness with physical movement is a novel way to work toward establishing uplifting emotional experiences for teachers and students alike. Mindful movements can be taught at the K-12 level, as these types of activities require little to no equipment and are developmentally as well as instructionally appropriate for a wide audience.

Movement-based contemplative practices provide teachers a means to promote emotional and physical wellbeing, while simultaneously building a foundation for creating compassion in the classroom. Educators are encouraged to consider using somatic therapeutic techniques, such as mindful movement, to help promote positive mental health outcomes for students. When consistently practiced, mindful movement may prove advantageous as a pragmatic tool for teachers and students toward stronger mental health and wellbeing. There is no better time than the present for teachers and students to practice mindful movement as a self-care technique.

Table 5. Four Tai Chi Poses for Beginners

Embrace
a Tree



- Start with feet shoulder width apart.
- Close your eyes and put your hands out in front of you like you are embracing a tree.
- Take a deep breath in and reach your arms up high above the head keeping the same rounded embrace with your arms.
- As you exhale, bring your arms back to the starting position.
- Repeat a few times with a slow, fluid motion. Try not to hold or completely stop the pose.
- Focus on taking deep breaths.
- Feel the ground connect with your feet.
- Think of yourself as a tree and you're growing roots into the earth.
- As you ground yourself, feel any tension, stress, or worry melt away into the ground.
- Be fully present and aware at this very moment.

Moving The Clouds



- Reach your arms out in front of you with palms facing each other in a relaxed position.
- Now twist your waist to your left side with your left hand/arm on top.
- As you twist to the left, keep your gaze on your left hand as your right hand follows underneath.
- While doing this, shift your weight onto your left foot.
- Now bring the motion back to the right side, this time right hand/arm on top with gaze on your right hand as your left hand follows underneath.
- In long, slow, fluid motions let your arms move from side to side as you twist from one side to the other.
- Feel as if you are moving clouds from side to side.
- Letting go of any negative thoughts as you sweep them away with the movement of the arms.

Play With a Ball of Energy



- Start with feet shoulder width apart.
- Form your hands as if you're holding a ball of energy.
- With palms facing each other, feel the energy you hold in your hands.
- Close your eyes and feel the connection with the body.
- Take a couple deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. Then, open your eyes.
- Get creative with this movement as you play with your ball of energy.
- Make your ball big. Make your ball small. Bring it over your head, side to side, and all around you.

The Dragon Eats a Pearl



- Stand with feet shoulder width apart.
- Make a dragon mouth with your two hands by placing your right hand on top of your left hand.
- Make sure palms are facing each other.
- Now, imagine your hands and arms have formed a dragon's mouth.
- As you breathe in, open your dragon mouth a little and exhale as you close the dragon's mouth.
- Do this several more times making your dragon mouth bigger and bigger with each breath.
- Once you have made your dragon's mouth as big as it can go, place your hands on your belly.
- Close your eyes and rub your belly.
- Feel the warmth and positivity radiate throughout your body.
- Focus on deep breaths and allow yourself to be fully present

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