

Using the Mindfulness Bell to Help Students Focus

Our students are distracted.

Rather than calling the class to attention, dedicate a few minutes to mindfully eliminate these distractions and focus on the present. Unlike a standard bell, a mindfulness bell sounds out a longer resonance that slowly fades. This gives the listener time to focus on the sound and notice its change in tone.

Do you have problems focusing your students? Perhaps they are still chatting happily or playing on their electronic devices as you call the class to order or in your attempt to reign them in from a group discussion. If you are like me, you do not like raising your voice to ask students to quiet down and put away their devices! One way you can call class to order or remind your students that it is time to focus is through the use of the mindfulness bell.

First of all, what is mindfulness and why is it associated with a bell? Andrews, Kacmar, and Kacmar (2014) define mindfulness as “a state of conscious awareness and attentiveness to what is occurring at the moment” (p. 495). It is an eastern Buddhist concept encouraging individuals to be present, which is often problematic for Western cultures (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Its benefits, however, influence “mental health and well-being, physical health, self-regulation, and interpersonal behavior” (Brown et al., 2007, p. 211). Moreover, the “state of conscious awareness and attentiveness” to the present moment implies intentional focus. And perhaps the best way to ensure this intentional focus—to “condition” our students to recognize when it is time to pay attention—is through the use of a “Pavlovian” bell. Buddhists use Tibetan singing bowls, due to the beautiful reverberations, which produce lasting relaxation and focus during meditative practices (Harrison, 2011). The mindfulness bell exercise is portrayed in the documentary film *Room to Breathe* (2013), when mindfulness teacher, Megan Cowan, visits an at-risk San Francisco middle school to bring meditative practices to students struggling with emotion regulation. Through this practice, students will be able to...

1. Identify when it is time to focus and/or refocus on class and the instructor by the sounding of the bell
2. Reflect on and apply this meditative practice to everyday living and mental health

The instructor needs the following to complete this exercise:

- A singing bowl, which can be purchased easily online, but faculty may also use a webpage like “Mindfulness Bell” from Washington Mindfulness Community.
- Five to ten minutes of class time

Directions:

1. Engage the class in a short discussion of what they do to focus and/or refocus attention
2. Mention you would like to try a method that might feel a little strange at first
3. Understand you may meet with some initial skepticism, which is why providing some research supporting the benefits of mindfulness and meditative practices is advisable
4. Tell the class you will play the sound of a bell, and you would like them to listen to its reverberations until they can no longer hear them
5. Once they are certain the sound is “gone,” instruct them to raise their hands
6. You may want to turn down the lights or encourage students to close their eyes
7. Play the bell once; repeat a second or third time if desired
8. Reflect with the class on what they thought of the activity (Did they like or dislike the exercise and why? What challenges did they face? How did they overcome these challenges? Do they see the exercise’s utility?)
9. If you wish to begin class this way each day, or if you wish to use the mindfulness bell as a way to reign students in from group discussions, make sure you clarify this with your class. (“I don’t like raising my voice to get students’ attention; so, if it’s okay with you, I’m going to play this bell each time I want you to quiet down and listen.”)

References:

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