

How schoolchildren (and their teachers) might get into the practice of stopping

Time: 3-6 minutes, ideally at the beginning of the first class of the day, or else following a longer break between classes

Age range: 5-12 years

1. Noticing Activities

What are you doing at this very moment? Let's check in, each of us, and find out.

Help students catch things that might not seem so obvious: breathing, sitting, thinking, feeling bored, waiting (for something? or for nothing in particular?) Write the answers up for everyone to see. Try to approach each answer with genuine interest, appreciating it without evaluating it (even positively), maybe simply thanking for any which seem especially penetrating or timely.

2. Stopping

So now: what would it be like, if just for a moment – a few seconds, maybe – you stopped doing one or another of those things we've just noticed?

3. Noticing Effects of Stopping

Did anyone notice feeling any different during that moment of "stopping"?

Or now, that we've finished stopping?

Potential prompts:

- Are you feeling more calm or less?
- Are you feeling more tired or less than you did a few moments ago?
- Do you think you would be feeling much different if you'd been doing the stopping with your eyes closed (or open, if they were in fact closed)?

Where this cultivates a safe and open space for student participation, express special appreciation for the making of comments that may be less positive or socially acceptable (e.g. rising impatience, irritation, feeling consumed by worrying).

4. Ending

Thank you all. If you have something more you wanted to say about what we were just doing, you could catch me at the end of the lesson. Or else make a note of it – it might be worth coming back to when we try out some more stopping, next time I see you / next week / sometime.

Consider allowing the answers you wrote up to remain on display, at least for the duration of the lesson, as "bells of mindful stopping".

Rerunning the exercise

- Write up only answers that are new (or somewhat new).
- Over time, progressively shift the time allocation away from Part 1 (Noticing Activities), initially to Part 3 (Noticing Effects of Stopping), and eventually to Part 2 (Stopping).
- Towards the end of Part 3, ask whether pupils notice any particular differences between today's stopping and the last time they stopped (was that during the class stopping or at another time?).
- If someone new joins the class (or returns after a longer absence) consider treating the exercise as a "beginner's mind" refresher, once more running it as if it were the first time around.