

Teaching in a pandemic: using body healing to support your wellbeing

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How have you been feeling during the COVID-19 pandemic? As an educator, reduced opportunities, owing to lockdown, for much needed collaboration and socialisation may have left you feeling lethargic or overwhelmed (Lavie *et al.*, 2021). It is widely recognised that the issues the pandemic has brought will heighten emotional distress as well as increase risk for psychiatric illness (Pfefferbaum and North, 2020). The body and mind are often thought of as different entities; body healing is a holistic mind-body approach – based on the principles of healing and wellbeing of the whole person (Rasweswe *et al.*, 2021) – that involves physical, emotional, energetic and spiritual wellness (Francis, 2020). Though some issues need medical attention and treatment, the co-authors of this opinion piece argue that there is something to be recognised in the role of body healing to help improve our mood, motivation and overall wellbeing while teaching during a pandemic.

The struggles of teaching during a pandemic

Lockdown has seen the closing of many physical classrooms and a shift to online education, but can remote pedagogical approaches replace face-to-face interaction? Our higher education (HE) system has been hit hard (Alvarez, 2020). Numerous courses have been disrupted, thus requiring teaching to be moved, reshaped and reformatted (Oki *et al.*, 2021), meaning heavy workload for educators. More importantly, the ‘personal’ relationship between educator and student has been lost and replaced by a distanced, virtual one (Mishra *et al.*, 2020). Educators are experiencing zoom fatigue, which is described as the “*tiredness, worry or burnout associated with overusing platforms of communication*” (Wolf, 2020). Student engagement diminishes, while absence because of stress or caring responsibilities increases, often leaving lecturers preaching monologues to their webcams and suffering consequent job dissatisfaction – and stress, too. While we cannot control external stressors around us, we can control our reaction to them and learn methods to help restore our inner balance and peace. The human mind-body possesses an innate ability to heal (Kaufman, 2018). It is this ability that we should use to be able to take back control of our own minds, health and general wellbeing. Individuals can take ownership of their own healing (Malchiodi, 2020).

What is body healing?

Body healing uses mind-body therapies – strategies that rely on the influences of thought, emotion and mental imaging in order to make positive impact upon the body (Koithan, 2009). These therapies are among the most widely recommended and used form of complementary and alternative medicine (Koithan, *op.cit.*). There is an extensive range of mind-body therapies that we can partake in to help our bodies heal, with something for everyone: those that use movement – such as yoga, dance, tai chi, mindful walking and therapeutic gardening – and those that focus more on our mental state – such as meditation, imagery, deep breathing and hypnosis. From our personal experience, we have found meditation to be the most useful mind-body therapy during the pandemic. We can meditate almost

anywhere and learning how to meditate is easier than ever, with helpful apps such as 'Headspace'. Even a five-minute meditation can reduce stress as well as increase our focus, productivity, mindfulness and ability to remain present (Headspace, 2021).

Two ways to use body healing within your daily routine:

i) **Fitting body healing around your lectures, seminars and meetings**

If you are feeling lethargic and struggling with the effects of the pandemic on your life, why not consider implementing simple body healing strategies into your weekly routines? Begin your day with the radio on, or with your favourite playlist on a music app, and dance for ten minutes to the songs you enjoy most; dance is proven to help reduce anxiety and stress levels (Saumaa, 2021). If you have been spending hours in front of a screen, make sure you schedule in a lunch break each day and use it to walk outside, around your local area (Richardson *et al.*, 2021). You can track your walks using a simple fitness app if you want to monitor your progress; 'Strava', for example, allows you to share your distances with friends who can celebrate your exercise with you. As many physical social connections with colleagues have been lost in lockdown, find ways like this one for connecting virtually with others. In addition to specific mind-body therapies, it has been proved that something as apparently simple as spending time in nature can benefit health and wellbeing: to enjoy the optimum benefits, spend at least 120 minutes per week out of doors (White *et al.*, 2019).

ii) **Before sleep at the end of a busy day**

Using body healing before sleep is key to feeling rested. You could keep a journal or even use a notes app on your phone to write down three things each evening: something you are grateful for, something you are proud of and something you wish you could change. Reflecting on these aspects of our life helps us to remember the positives as well as to acknowledge things we are not happy with. We need to admit to uncomfortable emotions in order to be mindful of them. Either use lavender spray on your pillow or rub a deep-sleep cream containing essential oils on your hands and inhale well (Karadag *et al.*, 2017). You could also try a mindfulness app to listen to before you sleep or one of the many free sleep meditations on YouTube (Huberty *et al.*, 2021).

In conclusion, the use of mind-body therapies, though just simple adjustments to our behaviours, can have a profound effect on both our physical and our mental health, thus equipping us better for teaching our students. Following these recommended practices can also have a positive impact on our students. In addition to revitalising our own energy and ability to teach, it enables us to be better role models and teach our students the importance of prioritising their emotional wellbeing.

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