

Meditating on happiness

Sometimes it's tough being a kid; there's pressure from friends, pressure at school, in many cases the stress of a dysfunctional family life, pressure to achieve on the sports field...

So, helping children to achieve a bit of inner calm is a good thing and it's looking more and more like meditation is an effective way of attaining it.

Facilities like the Toogoolawa schools for troubled boys place meditation front and centre of their approach and it seems to work; calmer students with a burgeoning self awareness do better at school and tend to be nicer to be around.

In Victoria, Janet ETTY-LEAL has been seeing similarly positive results through the introduction of meditation into schools. A former teacher, Ms ETTY-LEAL has been involved in teaching meditation for 10 years, first to corporate clients and teachers as part of their professional development.

"Initially, we had to fight against the notion that meditation was a fringe activity. My first contact with schools was in stress management for Year 12s, we hesitated to call it meditation. Unfortunately, most of the students at that level were time poor and couldn't give the program their full attention," she says.

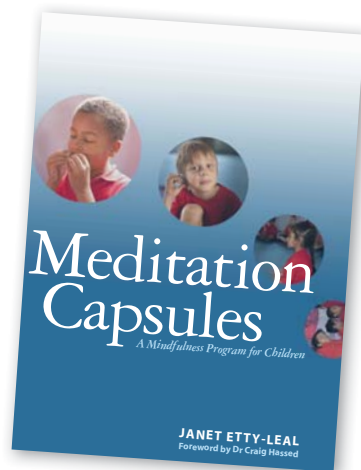
It made more sense to start teaching meditation and mindfulness techniques at the primary level, introducing it as a skill that could be used right through education and into later life.

In a pivotal 2005, Bill Liston the principal of Yarraman Oaks Primary School invited Ms ETTY-LEAL to run a program at the school.

"The teachers have really embraced meditation as part of the way they teach and every time I visit I'm impressed with how focussed and mature the children are. You can pursue meditation for any of a number of reasons, in schools it is a great way of encouraging performance: teaching children to concentrate is important if they want to study effectively."

Behaviourally, having introduced meditation has taken some of the nastiness out of Yarraman. Often bullying is addressed with a negative focus, but through meditation and the introduction of the concepts of kindness and adjusting responses, bullying at the school is now minimal.

The courses Ms ETTY-LEAL has designed are also meant to be fun: a quarter to a third of each session is dedicated to meditation practice while



the rest is spent on understanding the concepts of mindfulness and regard for others.

The program was recently evaluated in a 10-week study by Monash University and Southern Health, which found great improvements in students' mental health. Results of the study were published in the April 2010 issue of the journal *Advances in Mental Health Promotion*.

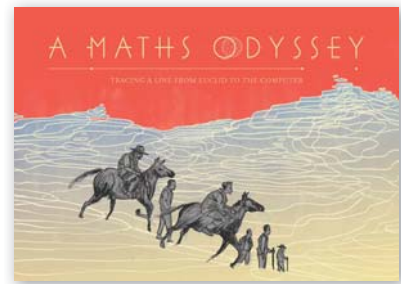
Her book *Meditation Capsules: a Mindfulness Program for Children* was released in August 2010, drawn from the course notes ETTY-LEAL had developed over years of experimentation and learning.

In the forward Dr Craig Hassed Deputy Head of the Monash University Department of General Practice writes, "...teaching mindfulness to children is not so much a matter of teaching them a new and foreign skill; it is more a matter of helping them to maintain and develop what is natural to them. Some say that it is difficult making a convincing case for teaching mindfulness to children. I think the opposite. I challenge anyone to make a convincing case for neglecting to teach mindfulness."

The book provides an easily-followed pathway for the introduction of meditation into schools.

The program is based on simple strategies divided into capsules that help children calm down, manage stress and develop mindfulness. The program encourages children to gain an appreciation of their own inner resources as they learn about posture and breathing, gain the ability to understand stress and observe their own thoughts.

The 112 page *Meditation Capsules* manual comes with a CD of guided meditations and is designed for classroom use with students at upper primary school level but can be adapted to suit.



A Maths Odyssey

Matthew Connell and Helen Whitty,
illustrations by Matt Huynh
Powerhouse Publishing
ISBN 9 781863 17131 1
RR \$15.95

Straight lines are easy to identify but describing what is straight is not simple. Two centuries ago mathematicians and philosophers debated and discussed, became passionate, confounded and even obsessed with straightness.

A *maths odyssey* from Powerhouse Publishing presents mathematics in an innovative and engaging way, tracing a line from Greek mathematician Euclid to the development of the computer.

The illustrations of Sydney graphic artist Matt Huynh are accompanied by easy-to-read text developed by Powerhouse Museum curator Matthew Connell and education expert Helen Whitty.

The publication's aim is to make maths more accessible and appealing to secondary students (Years 7–10) and young adults by using a 'graphic novel' concept to tell the story.

Mathematics is a human endeavour of long standing, and is deeply ingrained in Western philosophy and thinking. By weaving an engaging story around the properties of straightness, the book shows that The book is also designed to meet the needs of secondary school teachers. It contains a set of related maths problems and answers that align with the new national maths curriculum and a list of resources for further study.

