



Mindful EFL

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Editorial Team: Anna Pires, José Moura
Carvalho

 mindfulefl.appi@gmail.com



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Teaching the rainbow

Xana de Nagy

How do you feel about colour? Do you notice the colours around you? Do they impact your feelings?

How do you feel about your learners? Do you notice your learners and how they are feeling? Do you consider this in your teaching?

These are some of the questions that occur to me when I think about colour and teaching. I think I know my learners, I take an interest in them as people and not only as students in my class but am I aware of how they are feeling on any given day and do I cater for that in my teaching? Am I 'teaching the rainbow'?

Why the rainbow?

I am a fan of the concept of 'eating the rainbow' – the idea behind this is that by eating a variety of foods of different colours we get a variety of nutrients and so, as a result, should be healthier. At least that's the idea. This made me think about our learners and teaching. Are we catering for all the different 'colours' (emotions) in our classrooms, can we be more inclusive in our teaching by considering how our learners are feeling and how can we find out about this?

In the same way that eating a variety of colours gives us a balanced diet, acknowledging a variety of emotions or 'colours' can provide a more balanced learning and teaching environment.

Children and our relationship with colour

Children learn about colours very early on, they start by distinguishing between light and dark, black and white but from a very early age we engage them with bright primary colours and they respond. This continues all the way up the age ladder. How many times have you asked, 'What's your favourite colour?'

Children find colours stimulating, they influence their emotions, they can boost their creativity and are good for cognitive and language development.

Colours help with memory, we are more likely to remember something that is colourful than something that is in black and white. Using colour in the classroom can help children remember language, activities and experiences they have had.

Colours in general can have an effect on our moods, mental health, productivity, and behaviour. There must be a good reason why hospital walls are not painted black and why even a brown hotel room has some brightly painted artwork on the wall.

Colour in our classrooms

What is the importance of colour in a Young Learner classroom and in classrooms in general? I'm sure you have all been in classrooms that are full of colourful posters and students' work on the walls. But we have also been in classrooms where there is no colour. Sometimes this is not down to the teacher. Maybe the school doesn't allow for work to be put up or as teachers, we have to move around from classroom to classroom and so it doesn't make any sense to put things on the walls.

Adding colour can change our perspective. A bright, colourful classroom raises our spirits and can make for a more complete teaching experience. It inserts emotion into the classroom and teaching and makes it more personal.

Teaching the rainbow – some practical activities

1. What colour do you feel/ want/ see today?

How? Ask your learners to identify or select a colour to represent how they are feeling. Start with a selection of colours and maybe encourage the learners to associate a feeling with each of the colours. E.g. they say that yellow = instant cheer

Why? By getting the learners to share this information, you can find out how they are feeling and (hopefully) cater for this in your teaching. Could you group the learners that are maybe feeling more bubbly and energetic, let the ones that are feeling less so, work on quieter tasks, etc?

Reflection How do you feel when asked to do activities in class? Would you feel happy sharing your preferences?

2. The Colour Walk

How? Inspired by a TikTok video by Bridget Campbell on Instagram Review the colours and then let the learners choose a colour and find items in the classroom and/or on their way to or from school with that colour. Ask them to share why they chose that colour and what it means to them. This can be done in pairs or groups that have selected similar colours. Depending on the age or level – you can also use this for some language work, identifying colours and objects.

Why?

This is personalised and open -ended. It could be done in pairs from the start but is better if the learners can choose a colour that means something to them, either in general or at that moment. Sometimes we choose based on the colours we know but sometimes it is based on how we feel or what a colour means to us. E.g. I love blues and browns, I don't like yellow, but I know that yellow is a cheerful colour. Maybe I would choose yellow on my walk.

This can also be used for:

- Language practice – reviewing vocabulary
- Classroom management – allowing children to get rid of some excess energy while they walk around the classroom
- Including 'physical, visual, fun' elements in the lesson

Reflection

What about you? Do you feel strongly about any colours?

3. A Story

There are so many different stories you can use that focus on colour, The one I chose is 'Grey' by Laura Dockrill and Lauren Child

How?

- a. What colour do you have inside you today? Right now? Tell each other if you want to.
- b. Read the story and ask the children to think about the things they mention for each colour to help you.
- c. Shout out the colours and the learners say what was mentioned in the story associated to that colour

A story



- d. Look and compare to emotions e.g. red – big hug

A story

sunshine	treetops	big hug
night sky	icing sugar	scribble on a page storm in the sky puddle in the road cold tea
lullaby	new idea	balloon



- e. Get the learners to compare to different things they associate with each colour. Did they have something similar? How do these colours make them feel?
- f. Other ideas
 - Asking the children to identify how they feel at the start of the lesson/activity/day- You could give them cards or colours on a stick which they choose and put on their table. This would give you a clue to how they were feeling and give them some agency over what and how they interact.
 - Learners could work in colour-groups e.g. the more energetic ones doing activities that cater for that, etc. Do they want to do a speaking/physical activity, etc?
 - Having colour-coded areas in the classroom, children could choose where they wanted to be as they come in – no questions asked

A story



What colour do you feel today?	Identify how they feel at the start of the lesson/activity/day	Give colour cards to choose and put on their table
Working in colour-groups – similar moods	Having colour-coded sections of the classroom – no questions asked	Tell the story and talk about how they feel
Language practice – identify the colours, the objects, matching, swap the colours	Write/tell your own version of the story	Draw how you feel, choose a colour and display

Why?

Stories allow us to transfer our feelings. Using the story as a way of showing the children how we can feel in any given situation.

Reflection

Do you have a favourite story that would work in a similar way?

4. A Poem

A few years back at a YL conference I went to a wonderful session by Roderick Fraser. In it he showed us a poem called, *The Sound Collector* and, like all teachers, I did what we all do, we borrow ideas and build on them. When I was thinking about ‘Teaching the rainbow’, I remembered Roderick’s session and in particular this poem by Roger McGough that he did with us. However, I misremembered it as ‘The colour thief’ because what stuck with me, were the first couple of lines: “A stranger called this morning, dressed all in black and grey”. I thought he went about ‘stealing colours’ – in fact the poem was called the ‘Sound collector’ and he stole sounds. This made me think of what a world without colour would be like.

How?

- a. Create your own poem.
 - b. With your partner think of a place, make a list of 5 things you can see and the colours for each e.g. the yellow of the sun, the pink of the T-shirts, etc Normally we would say ‘a yellow sun’ but as we are focussing on the colour (and the poem), say ‘the yellow of the sun’.
 - c. Then share with another pair, read your poem.
- A stranger called this morning dressed all in black and grey. Put every colour into a bag

and carried them away.
The yellow of the sun,
The blue of the sky
etc...

 **A poem**

The **'Colour'**Collector
(with apologies to Roger McGough ☺)

A stranger called this morning
Dressed all in black and grey
Put every **colour** into a bag
And carried them away
The _____ of the _____...

How would you feel in a world without **colour**?



Why? Getting learners to reflect on a world without colour gets them to think about the importance of colour for them
Encouraging the learners to think about poetry and be creative.

Reflection Getting learners to reflect on a world without colour gets them to think about the importance of colour for them
Encouraging the learners to think about poetry and be creative.

5. Other ways to focus on colour in the classroom

VYs and YLs Getting learners to reflect on a world without colour gets them to think about the importance of colour for them
Encouraging the learners to think about poetry and be creative.

All ages Colouring in
- Picasso dictation with incorrect colours e.g. colour the sun pink- learners correct and tell you the colour.
- They choose the colour and say why – How does it make them feel? Can the sun be red?

Teens Projects relating to verbs we use with the rainbow
e.g. eat /wear/look at/ see/interpret the rainbow, etc.
Wearing the rainbow – a project on sustainability, for example

Stories The Colour Monster, The Colour Thief & lots more (see bibliography for references)

So...

How do colours make you feel? Do they reflect your moods? Are you considering your learners in your classroom and making sure you cater for all colours and feelings? Are you teaching the rainbow?

Adding colour can change our perspective. A bright, colourful classroom raises our spirits and can make for a more complete teaching experience. It inserts emotion into the classroom and teaching and makes it more personal.

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Xana de Nagy has been a teacher and teacher trainer for many years. She has always had a keen interest in teaching YLs and training on YL courses.



Stress in the Workplace

Maria Teresa Victoria

Little did Hans Selye know that a negligible language mistake was going to make quite an impact in the world.

The word stress seems to have been with us forever but it was only in 1951 when it was seen for the first time in the prestigious magazine Science.

Hungarian-Canadian endocrinologist, Hans Selye (1907-1982) would hear his engineer friends from the students' accommodation discuss strain and how by the end of the week, machines proved faulty and seemed in good

need of a proper rest to start functioning again.

He thought that was a great example to illustrate how our body functions and how much rest is needed for recovery and recuperation. Especially after experiencing a stressful situation or when stress sustains in time.

When Hans Selye wrote this remarkable article about General Adaptation Syndrome for Science magazine he mistook this word he thought he had heard from his friends and wrote about Stress and Disease. So, off the text went to the printers!

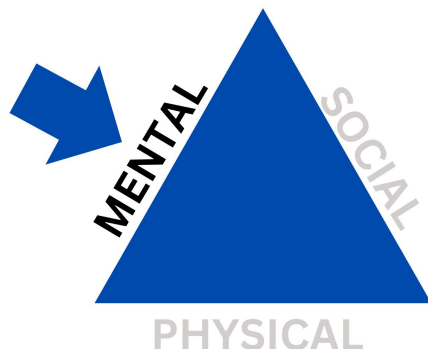
When the article was published, a shy Hans Syley apologized for his spelling errors (English was not his mother tongue) and the matter of the fact actually was that he was praised by his research directors for his innovation and creativity in coming up with a new word.

But let us focus now on the experience itself of stress.

The modern concept of well balanced health can be represented as an equilateral triangle composed of a physical side, a mental side, and a social side. Each of equal importance. This is a well founded concept, and those who live according to it maintaining the balance of all three sides enjoy good health.



Unfortunately anything that affects the mental side of health can affect the other sides and eventually the whole triangle. To better understand how this can happen let us first look at the problems of animals (a human being after all is also an animal).



All animals encounter tensions of various kinds as a normal part of their lives. They may begin with the possibility of having to cede their living space to another species, the need to defend their shelter, to protect their young, even to compete for a mate. Naturally the greatest tension is the fear of losing their lives. And for this, Nature has provided every animal with certain protective reactions, one of the most important of which is the fear instinct. Here is how it works.

THE FEAR INSTINCT

Sympathetic branch **Stress**

- Fight
- Flight
- Inhale
- Gas pedal



Parasympathetic branch **Pause**

- Rest
- Digest
- Exhale
- Brake

The moment an animal realises that there is danger, immediately the fear instinct awakens every reserve in its body, preparing it to take one of two attitudes to ensure its survival: fight or flight. In either case it must spring into action and use its energy reserves. When the danger has passed the animal calms down and returns to normal as if nothing has happened. The fear instinct has kicked in and there are no harmful after effects.

Scientists believe that the same protective responses exist in the human animal, located in an area of the brain, as if the fear instinct of our ancestors still lives there ready to press the panic button. But unlike other animals, human beings have more than instinct. They have a superior intellect and a brilliant and creative imagination that unfortunately, can create real dangers and trigger unnecessary tensions and fear.

And so, they begin ruminating in the face of a “threat” when neither fighting nor running makes sense, and must swallow their pride along with all the unused biochemical preparations that their body manufactured. So they are literally cooking in their own juices.

Here is how we can disarm unhealthy patterns through mindful awareness of stress.

AWARENESS OF UNPLEASANT EVENTS



This week, be aware of one **unpleasant event** or occurrence each day.

Record in detail what it was and **your experience** of it.

It is not necessary to choose the most challenging event of your day (in fact, **avoid** this if possible).

- ◆ **What was the experience?**
- ◆ **Were you aware of the unpleasant feelings while the event was happening?**
- ◆ **How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience? Describe the sensations you felt.**
- ◆ **What moods, feelings and thoughts accompanied this event at the time?**
- ◆ **What sensations, thoughts or mood, are in your mind now as you write this down?**

There are different types of stress: time stress, role stress, food stress, people stress, work stress or sleep stress. Recall something that usually makes you stressed or has recently made you feel some discomfort like things at work that make you overreact, and see what you notice. Remember to choose an event that is not too challenging (within your comfort / learning zone) and take a note of how you have experienced that event during the past week:

- What was your direct experience?
- Any physical sensations?
- Where were these occurring -a specific location or through the whole body?
- Did the sensations change or were they constant?
- What were the emotions and feelings connected to them?
- What thoughts arose?

TIPS FOR REDUCING STRESS AT WORK

Retrieved from Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat-Zinn

- 1 When you **wake up**, take a few quiet moments to affirm that you are **choosing to go to work today**. If you can, briefly review what you think you will be doing and remind yourself that it may or may not happen that way.
- 2 Bring **awareness to the whole process** of preparing to go to work. This might include showering, dressing, eating, and relating to the people you live with. Tune in to your breathing and your body from time to time.
- 3 When leaving the house, **don't say good-bye mechanically** to people. Make eye contact with them, touch them; really be "in" those moments, slowing them down just a bit. If you leave before other people wake up, you might try writing them a brief note to say good morning and **express your feelings toward them**.
- 4 If you walk to public transportation, be aware of your body breathing, walking, standing and waiting, riding, and getting off. Walk into work **mindfully**. As best you can, **leave your cell phone alone**. Try smiling inwardly. If driving, take a moment or two to come to your breathing before you start the car. Remind yourself that you are about to drive off to work now. Some days, at least, try driving without the radio on. Just **drive and be with yourself, moment by moment**. Leave your cell phone alone. When you park, take a moment or two to just sit and breathe before you leave the car. Walk into work **mindfully**. Breathe. If your face is already tense and grim, try smiling, or try a half smile if that is too much.
- 5 At work, take a moment from time to time to **monitor your bodily sensations**. Is there tension in your shoulders, face, hands, or back? How are you sitting or standing in this moment? What is your body language saying? Consciously let go of any tension as best you can as you exhale and **shift your posture** to one that expresses balance, dignity, and alertness.
- 6 When you find yourself walking at work, take the edge off it. Walk **mindfully**. Don't rush unless you have to. If you have to, know that you are rushing. Rush **mindfully**.
- 7 Try doing one thing at a time and giving it the full attention that it deserves for as long as it deserves, without distracting yourself or allowing yourself to be distracted, such as by incoming emails and texts. Overall, the evidence from studies shows that **not only does multitasking not work, it degrades performance** on every task you are trying to juggle.
- 8 Take frequent breaks if you can and use them to **truly relax and renew**. Instead of drinking coffee or smoking a cigarette, try going outside the building for three minutes and walking or standing and breathing. Or do neck and shoulder rolls at your desk. Or shut your office door if you can and sit quietly for five minutes or so, following your breathing.
- 9 Spend your breaks and lunchtime with people you feel comfortable with. Otherwise, maybe it would be better for you to be alone. Changing your environment at lunch can be helpful. Choose to **eat one or two lunches a week in silence**, mindfully.
- 10 Alternatively, don't eat lunch. Go out and exercise, every day if you can, or a few days a week. **Exercise is a great way of reducing stress**. Your ability to do this will depend on how much flexibility you have in your job. If you can do it, it is a wonderful way of **clearing the mind**, reducing your tension, and starting the afternoon **refreshed and with a lot of energy**. Many workplaces now have wellness centers that provide organized employee exercise programs both at lunchtime and before and after work. If you have the opportunity to exercise at work, take it! But remember, an exercise program takes the same kind of commitment that the formal meditation takes. And when you do it, do it **mindfully**. That changes everything.

Paying mindful attention to the experience may help you become aware of patterns that sustain in time and generate chronic stress reactions that you could actually redirect into a more healthy response. Mindfulness is a super power we have which provides that gap between stimulus and response where we can choose how to better respond to situations that are constantly making us feel discomfort or stress. You can choose to break the cycle.

Jon Kabat Zinn talks about the daily practice of Mindfulness as a bank account where you are putting money aside for when needed (in this case not money but calmness). And remember that being mindful does not necessarily mean sitting on a cushion for your meditation practice! You can Be Mindful by simply paying full attention to what is unfolding at this precise moment.

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After teaching English and holding various management positions at EEOOII Andalucía (Spain) since 1993, **Maria Teresa Victoria** became a Qualified MBSR Teacher by Brown University School of Professional Studies to endeavour to alleviate stress in the Education community.

Currently teaching at schools and universities “Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction courses” following the MBSR Curriculum originally designed by the founder of Mindfulness, PhD Jon Kabat-Zinn.

She has two publications on Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence in ESL Classrooms.



Mindful Music: using songs to connect language, emotions, and learning

Anna Pires – APPI Mindful EFL SIG

Why bring music into the ELF classroom? Music offers more than just a listening activity—it is emotion, memory, movement, and meaning. It invites learners into a deeply human experience where sound and story, language and feeling, come together. In the Mindful Music talk I presented at the 6th edition of the Mindful EFL Day, on February 1st., 2025, we explored how music-based practices—grounded in mindfulness, multimodality, and social-emotional learning—enrich language learning while nurturing presence, empathy, and creativity.

Daniel Powter, Bad Day

One activity that often resonates with learners is Music Graffiti. As Daniel Powter’s “Bad Day” plays, learners draw freely in response to what they hear in real time. They might focus on key lyrics, the emotional tone of the song, or the textures of sound that emerge. Some sketch draw shapes or symbols; others highlight lyrics in expressive, graffiti-style lettering. Learners choose colours instinctively to match the shifts in mood they perceive while listening. This process of simultaneous auditory and visual engagement supports meaning-making in ways aligned with multimodal learning theory (Jewitt, 2008) and Vygotsky’s notion of symbolic mediation. For more visual or creative learners, this act of drawing while listening can offer a pathway into language and emotion that feels both

immediate and personal.

Ed Sheeran, Castle on the Hill

A quieter but equally reflective activity is Ed Sheeran’s “Castle on the Hill”. As the song plays, learners are asked to listen with full attention and, at the same time, select two or three colours they feel capture the essence of the music. The selection happens intuitively, guided by the rhythm, lyrics, and atmosphere of the track. What begins as a simple sensory task often reveals deeper emotional connections: some learners might choose blue and white to represent nostalgia and warmth, while others select grey and green for a feeling of longing and distance. After the song, learners are invited to share and explain their choices, and this often leads to thoughtful discussion about personal associations, memories, and emotional interpretation. The activity aims to lower anxiety and invite vulnerability, while reinforcing the idea that emotional responses to art—and to language—are subjective and valid.

Khalid, Skyline

The use of the five senses comes into focus with “Skyline” by Khalid. Learners watch the music video while being invited to engage with it through a multisensory lens. As they view, they are prompted to imagine what they might see, hear, smell, touch, and taste if they were inside the scene. Afterwards, they describe these imagined experiences—some might mention the scent of desert air or the warmth of sun on their skin, while others refer to the hum of car engines or the fizz of a cold drink under glowing skies. This reflective phase helps consolidate their impressions and translate sensory perception into language. The task helps learners connect vocabulary to embodied experience, in line with principles of embodied cognition (Gallese & Lakoff, 2005). It also encourages vivid, descriptive expression that may feel more meaningful and personally resonant than traditional descriptive writing tasks.

U2, Where the Streets Have No Name

Another reflective moment is built around U2’s “Where the Streets Have No Name”. Through a guided visualisation, learners are invited to picture themselves in a boundless landscape, free of signs, divisions, or judgement. As the music builds, they consider what it might feel like to be in a world where categories dissolve. This activity aims to open up gentle but powerful conversations about identity, borders, and freedom. Learners can connect it to their own cultural or social contexts or interpret it metaphorically as a longing for peace and understanding. While not all students share openly, the atmosphere usually becomes more thoughtful and grounded. The activity draws on contemplative pedagogy (Zajonc, 2013), offering a space for quiet reflection that some students may not often encounter in formal language learning.

Coldplay, Viva La Vida

With “Viva La Vida” by Coldplay, there’s a shift into layered reflection and meaning-making. As learners listen, they are guided by three reflective questions: What emotions do you feel as you listen? How do the instruments enhance those emotions? Are there any words or lyrics that stand out? This phase encourages emotional awareness and deeper engagement with both the musical and linguistic elements of the song. After listening, learners begin to interpret the song’s meaning collaboratively. Their interpretations tend to range widely—some focus on themes of regret or the collapse of power; others sense a confessional tone or a plea for forgiveness. The open-ended nature of this discussion allows learners to develop critical thinking and explore how meaning is shaped by perspective.

Only after this shared interpretation do we introduce the song’s background. We explore the idea that “Viva La Vida” is thought to have been inspired by the final reflections of King Louis XVI before his execution during the French Revolution. According to one reading, the song gives voice to a dethroned monarch reflecting on his former glory and the consequences of his reign. This historical framing often elicits renewed interest in the lyrics and prompts learners to revisit their earlier ideas in light of the new context. Many seem surprised to realise how their emotional reading aligns with the mood of the revolution—loss, upheaval, and a shifting world order. This layered

process—from personal response, to collaborative interpretation, to historical grounding—transforms the song into a rich interdisciplinary experience. It also echoes Bruner's (1990) notion that narrative is not only a tool for organising experience but a pathway to empathy and deeper understanding.

Eurythmics, Sweet Dreams

Learners engage in a mindful listening activity with “Sweet Dreams” by Eurythmics. They are invited to notice any sensations or emotions that arise in the body as they listen. Some may feel the rhythm in their chest or hands; others describe a shift in mood, tension, or calm. Reactions vary, but many learners report feeling more aware of how music affects them physically and emotionally. This activity supports the development of interoceptive awareness (Siegel, 2010), contributing to better emotional regulation and a stronger mind–body connection. It also fosters presence and attention—skills increasingly recognised as essential for learning and wellbeing.

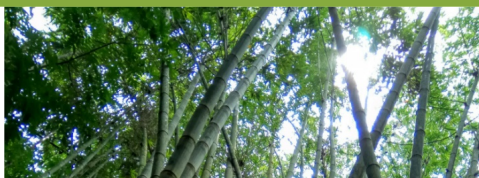
Across all these activities, music acts not simply as a resource, but as a relational space—one in which learners access not only language, but also emotion, memory, values, and self-expression. Each activity engages the head (cognition), the heart (emotion), and the hands (creativity), offering multiple points of entry for learners with diverse strengths. While responses vary from class to class, the Mindful Music approach consistently creates opportunities for inclusive, reflective, and emotionally resonant learning.

This is not a method in the prescriptive sense, but a practice of presence. It doesn't aim to reach every learner in the same way, but rather to offer meaningful alternatives to more transactional approaches to language teaching. Whether learners are journaling from a king's perspective, sketching their emotional response to a lyric, or sitting quietly with the rise and fall of a melody, they are not only learning English—they are learning to listen deeply and compassionately to themselves, to others, and to the world around them.

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Anna Pires is from the beautiful city of Toronto and has been an EFL teacher in Portugal for over 25 years. She is also a coursebook author for Porto Editora. Anna loves the challenges of working with children and teens. She's been practising Mindfulness since attending the course MindKindful, and has been implementing what she's learned in her classes.



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Articles should preferentially be about 1000 words long. If you send a longer article, we may ask you to shorten it before we can publish it.

Please send your article in .docx, .doc format ... Unfortunately, we won't be able to publish articles sent in .pdf format.

No special formatting should be used. Only paragraphs and paragraph headings. (No columns, no special formatting, not special fonts, no WordArt, etc.)

Any images — photos, graphs, drawings and

other artwork — must be high quality resolution and sent as a separate file (jpg, png) — pictures pasted into Word lose all resolution and are unusable. Please make sure that either you hold the necessary rights over the images you send or that they have been licensed under a Creative Commons license.

In your article write the name of the image in the place it should be inserted (use the name of the separate image file you sent).

Please include a proposed heading (title) and a subheading, if you wish.

Authors should include a brief bio of 2–4 lines (50–60 words).

“We can talk about mindfulness or write at length about it, but to truly understand mindfulness, we have to experience it directly.”

Dan Siegel et al.
