

PSYCHOLOGY *for* TEACHERS

PAUL CASTLE
SCOTT BUCKLER

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Assistant editor: Rob Patterson
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CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

- To define relaxation and understand the differences between physical and mental tension.
 - To understand that relaxation requires engagement to produce the required effects.
 - To identify how anxiety, stress, attention and concentration relate to relaxation.
 - To develop and practise some relaxation strategies.
-

TEACHERS' STANDARDS

None of the Teachers' Standards relate to this topic ... but there should be one!

17.1 INTRODUCTION

Teacher wellbeing has never been so central to discussions about the sustainability of the workforce. Perhaps one day, this last sentence will become a main headline: for now it is a mere prediction. We are frequently aware of the inordinate number of hours worked during the week and at weekends. Holidays are a time when teachers can work without going into school. However, when it comes to a time to be able to switch off, it can be extremely difficult. Combined with this, as discussed in Chapter 12, pupils' MWB has increasingly worsened. With the range of academic pressures, along with physical and emotional maturation, the overemphasis on achieving results through continual testing is causing immeasurable longer-term problems.

In teaching, the implications of not being relaxed are potentially severe, culminating in excessive stress loads or potentially leading to an instantaneous poor decision with personal and professional repercussions. So the general advice would be to do just that: 'Relax'. Yet very few people are ever taught how to relax properly. To dispel a common myth, relaxation is not simply about taking a few moments to unwind, listening to some music, taking a walk and so forth; it involves a conscious engagement to relax. Various techniques exist and we will discuss these in this chapter. It is important to note that relaxation training should not be thought of as a simple technique that can be learned quickly. Rather, it may take somewhat longer than teachers anticipate. The key to success is that it should be carried out in a systematic, progressive manner.

Through understanding and embodying principles to help relax, these in turn can be utilised with pupils. As this chapter is being written, a local denominational first school in Worcestershire is engaging with a wellbeing week where some of the principles in this chapter are being shared with children. Arguably, however, such techniques and principles ought to be included daily within the curriculum.

17.2 AVOIDING BURNOUT

'Burnout' is a term that has been defined as a combination of depersonalisation, emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment that has resulted from prolonged work-related stress (Maslach et al., 2001; O'Brennan et al., 2017). Contributory factors include a lack of clarity about roles, aims and the content of work (Schaufelli and Baker, 2004). Furthermore, as Maslach and Leiter (1999) reported in their research, teacher burnout contributes to both teachers' and pupils' behaviour and experience: that teacher behaviour as a result of burnout decreases classroom preparation and classroom involvement, which in turn impacts on pupils and their behaviour. Further research demonstrates the impact of teacher burnout on pupil motivation as reported by Shen et al. (2015). Teacher burnout is evident not just in the UK but in India (Seth, 2016), Sweden (Arvidsson et al., 2016), the United States (O'Brennan et al., 2017), China (Zhang et al., 2016), Lithuania (Bernotaite and Malinauskiene, 2017) and New Zealand (Blanchi et al., 2016), among many other countries.

Can it really be that teaching is a profession that globally affects the MWB of its staff? With such high prevalence, why would anyone enter into teaching? Of course the answer to this is multi-dimensional, although at some level, intrinsic motivation (discussed in Chapter 10) would be fundamental to the answer. Consequently, something appears to happen once an individual is within the teaching profession, such as factors already mentioned of exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment. An additional factor that has received increased attention is compassion fatigue, a term first used by Joinson (1992) – defined as the physical, social, emotional and spiritual exhaustion that overwhelms a person, causing a pervasive decline in their ability, desire and energy to care for others (Merriman, 2015). Compassion fatigue has been discussed predominantly through many caring professions such as nursing, although we would assert that over the coming years, it will increasingly be reported within education.

One way of visualising burnout is putting your car in first gear, then increasing the speed to 30 miles per hour. The needle on the rev counter will enter the red zone as the engine strains. The signs and signals warn you not to maintain this. This is similarly portrayed through the Yerkes–Dodson inversed curve, where some level of stress is required to initially motivate the person (Yerkes and Dodson, 1908). As the level increases to the pinnacle, the individual experiences eustress,

or positive stress. Further increase of pressure will move the individual into the de-stress zone, which can be maintained for a while, yet not excessively. Indeed, given the discussion in Chapter 13, operating in the de-stress zone can help develop resilience; but there is a time to ease off. Bakusic et al. (2016) report that there are no diagnostic criteria for burnout; however, there is a need for further longitudinal research to explore the cause and effect relationship between work stress, burnout and depression. We would argue that searching for a causal link may not be the most prudent approach to take, given the intricate interplay between each of these complex issues.

From this initial discussion about the causes of tension, we can progress to considering what relaxation is: as such, it is the reduction of tension mentally and physically, which directly facilitates emotional relaxation.

17.3 HOW DOES RELAXATION WORK?

When considering relaxation, the core is to identify what the cause of the tension is: whether a person is experiencing somatic anxiety (physical tension) or cognitive anxiety (mental tension). Although they relate to each other, establishing the cause can ensure correct guidance for either somatic relaxation or cognitive relaxation. The differences between somatic and cognitive relaxation are distinct. They can be categorised as muscle-to-mind relaxation and mind-to-muscle relaxation, respectively.

PHYSICAL TENSION: SOMATIC OR 'MUSCLE-TO-MIND' RELAXATION

The premise underlying somatic relaxation is that the mind cannot be anxious in the absence of muscle tension. So, if there is no tension in the muscles, then the messages going back into your brain must be saying that there is no need for anxiety. If you reduce tension in your muscles, the signals returning to the brain will tell you that you are no longer tense. The key here is that you need to know what signs to look for and we will cover these shortly when we outline four basic yet really effective relaxation techniques.

MENTAL TENSION: COGNITIVE OR 'MIND-TO-MUSCLE' RELAXATION

Cognitive relaxation acts in the opposite direction. Rather than the muscles providing the mind with information about tension, it is negative thoughts that are causing

anxiety and these thoughts may then lead to muscle tension. If the teacher trains his or her mind to relax, then the muscles in turn will become relaxed.

An analogy is in flipping a coin: it cannot fall on both sides at the same time. If a person is relaxed mentally, they cannot be anxious.

ACTIVITY

- List as many indicators as you can think of which would indicate physical (somatic) tension.
- List as many indicators as you can think of which would indicate mental (cognitive) tension.

17.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF BREATHING

Breathing is fundamental to our existence, and one of the easiest and most predominant forms of relaxation is that of breathing (Jerath et al., 2015; Klainin-Yobas et al., 2015; Panda, 2014; Smith and Norman, 2017; Van Diest et al., 2014). All of the techniques mentioned below involve mastery of breathing. It is not enough to simply outline these techniques out of context. Rather, it is important to understand that appropriate breathing is a necessary requirement, and to receive guidance in correct breathing techniques. This may sound strange, given that breathing just happens – a newborn baby can breathe without being taught. As such, breathing is a function of the autonomic nervous system and is controlled without thinking. Indeed, if we ask you now to hold your breath for as long as possible, we will not have to tell you when to start breathing again, it will simply happen after a while. Consequently, the type of breathing required for relaxation techniques is rather more formal and structured, yet equally simple with practice.

During daily life, many of us use thoracic or chest breathing. It is superficial and shallow, generally only utilising the upper section of the respiratory system. Chest breathing is fairly rapid and is associated with the rigours of daily life. In contrast, abdominal or deep breathing is rhythmic, slow and, as expected, deep. It utilises the full capacity of the respiratory system. You can feel the difference as you read this section. Does your breathing feel shallow and irregular? Now, if we ask you to take a breath, fill your chest with air, then fill some more and finally take one extra breath to fill your lower abdomen, you will understand the difference in capacity. When you have filled this extra space, hold for the count of three and then slowly and gently release the inspired air to the count of five. Do this properly three times and we guarantee that you will feel more relaxed than you did before starting the task. Having shown that there seems to be an immediate difference, it is now possible to practise deep breathing to feel the benefits.

ACTIVITY

Think of the lungs as having three compartments: shallow, middle, deep. As you breathe in, fill each section in turn *before* you exhale.

17.5 COMMON RELAXATION PROCEDURES

To recap, the distinction between somatic and cognitive relaxation should be remembered as a quick and effective way of establishing preliminary information about tension and anxiety. We will now discuss four common techniques used to elicit relaxation: progressive muscle relaxation, self-suggestion (or autogenic training), meditation and listening to your body (or biofeedback). We will then conclude by introducing the idea of an enhanced relaxation procedure, using psychological principles to provide what can perhaps be described as a ‘supercharged’ method due to its links with mental imagery techniques discussed in Chapter 15.

17.6 PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Progressive muscle relaxation, or PMR, is a muscle-to-mind technique, originally developed by Jacobson (1938). It has been used in a variety of contexts globally, for example with elderly patients in Iran (Hassanpourt-Dehkordi and Jalali, 2016), cancer treatment in Cyprus (Charalambous et al., 2016), footballers in Malaysia (Sharifah Maimunah and Hashim, 2016), among many other contexts. Essentially, this technique involves tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups. If all of the muscle groups are relaxed, then there can be no tension in the body. As a consequence, any tension in the mind should disappear. It is important that the teacher knows the difference between these two opposing states. Awareness of muscular tension will act as the trigger for the teacher to begin the relaxation technique. Table 17.1 provides practical instructions for PMR. Follow each step, by tensing and relaxing each muscle group in turn. You should pay attention to the difference between tense and relaxed muscles. Each step should take approximately 10 seconds. It may help to transfer the instructions into audio format, so that you can play it back and follow the verbal instructions it gives.

When you have mastered PMR, you can dispense with the tension part of the technique. By this, we mean that you can go straight to the relaxation steps, because you have already identified tension. This is where the benefits occur. If you are standing in the classroom, with tense shoulders and one minute to go before the morning bell, there will not be enough time to run through the whole technique. Instead, you

Table 17.1 Instructions for progressive muscle relaxation

Step	Instruction
1	Make yourself comfortable in a quiet environment. Remove or loosen any restrictive clothing. Breathe in deeply, hold and exhale. Do this two more times. You should begin to feel more relaxed.
2	If you hear any noises, do not ignore them, but focus on inhaling and exhaling slowly.
3	Begin by tensing the muscles of your lower left leg and foot by pointing your toes. Hold this tension for five seconds and then relax. You can feel the difference between tension and relaxation in your calf and foot. Repeat this procedure once more. Do this for the left leg and then twice for the right leg and foot.
4	Move on to tensing the left thigh and buttocks. Tense the left thigh muscle and buttocks by pushing down into the floor. Hold this tension for five seconds and then relax. You can feel the difference between tension and relaxation in your left thigh and buttocks. Repeat this procedure once more. Do this for the left leg and then twice for right thigh and buttocks.
5	Next, tense and relax the left forearm. Do this by bending at the elbow. Hold this tension for five seconds and then relax. You can feel the difference between tension and relaxation in your left bicep. Repeat this procedure once more. Do this for the left bicep and then twice for the right bicep.
6	Next, tense and relax the left bicep. Do this by making a fist. Hold this tension for five seconds and then relax. You can feel the difference between tension and relaxation in your left forearm. Repeat this procedure once more. Do this for the left forearm and then twice for the right forearm.
7	Move on to tensing and relaxing the muscles in your back. Do this by arching your back. Hold this tension for five seconds and then relax. You can feel the difference between tension and relaxation in your back muscles. Repeat this procedure once more.
8	Next, tense and relax the muscles in your stomach and chest. Do this by inhaling, holding and releasing. Hold this tension for five seconds and then relax. You can feel the difference between tension and relaxation in your stomach and chest. Repeat this procedure once more.
9	Next, tense and relax the muscles in your neck and shoulders. Do this by shrugging your shoulders. Hold this tension for five seconds and then relax. You can feel the difference between tension and relaxation in your neck and shoulder muscles. Repeat this procedure once more.
10	Move on to tensing and relaxing the muscles in your face and forehead. Do this by clenching your jaw and frowning. Hold this tension for five seconds and then relax. You can feel the difference between tension and relaxation in your facial muscles. Repeat this procedure once more.
11	Mentally scan your whole body for any tension. If there is any, release it by tensing and relaxing.
12	Finally, focus on the relaxed feelings your muscles are now giving you. You are calm and relaxed.
13	Before getting up, it is important to return to a greater degree of conscious awareness. Count slowly, from 1 to 7, exhaling on every count. As you get closer to 7, you will feel more and more alert.
14	You should now feel completely relaxed and rejuvenated.

should simply feel the tension in your shoulders and run through the relaxation step for these muscles. Within a matter of seconds, you should find that the tension dissipates and is replaced with relaxed shoulder and neck muscles.

17.7 AUTOGENIC TRAINING (OR SELF-SUGGESTION)

Autogenic training is a mind-to-muscle technique, originally developed in the 1930s by Schultz (Luthe and Schultz, 1969). The underlying concepts of autogenic training

are the physical sensations of 'heaviness' and 'warmth'. Mental effort is directed towards a particular body part and a sensation of heaviness is produced in that body part. For example, we might instruct you to imagine your right calf becoming extremely heavy. We would then ask you to imagine the right calf losing its heaviness and becoming warm and sun-kissed. After successful practice, we would progress by directing your attention towards 'coolness' in your forehead. The remaining element of this technique is to direct attention towards having a rhythmic breathing pattern and strong, stable heart rate. This technique is akin to self-hypnosis and rests on verbal instruction or internal thought processes, for example: 'My right calf is heavy; my right calf is relaxed and warm; my heart rate is slow and calm; my breathing is strong and rhythmic; and my forehead is cool.' This technique takes a long time to develop to a high standard and, given that teachers' schedules are usually rather hectic, is not ideal. However, it is available and may prove useful, so the message is to give it a try.

Autogenic training continues to be used in a variety of settings. For example, Kiba et al. (2017) have successfully used the process for patients with functional somatic syndrome, while others have demonstrated the effectiveness on sufferers with chronic migraine (Peper et al., 2016), or improved performance with athletes (Mikicic and Kowalczyk, 2015). Specifically, Kuhlmann et al. (2015) have used such a programme with students experiencing excessive stress.

17.8 MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS

In the first edition of this book, we discussed whether mindfulness should be included given that it was being treated as a fad, despite our extensive research into the area. Mindfulness has now become commonplace – appearing on the front cover of *Time* magazine, and featuring on various popular television and radio programmes. The school discussed in Section 17.1 is utilising mindfulness techniques for its well-being week. Consequently, mindfulness appears to have become the Western world's acceptable face of meditation, which is still perceived as somewhat esoteric in nature. Arguably both meditation and mindfulness are the same: they both involve focused concentration on one element at a time, for example, breathing, chanting, physical activity and so forth.

According to Germer (2013), the definition of mindfulness originates from the Buddhist philosophical language of 'Pali', specifically the word 'Sati' which translates as 'awareness', 'clear headedness', or 'joy'. Germer et al. (2013: xi) provide a new interpretation, that mindfulness is 'being aware of where your mind is from one moment to the next, with gentle acceptance'. Conversely, Gunaratana (2002) argues that mindfulness cannot be fully captured with words because it is a subtle, non-verbal experience.

The Chinese character for mindfulness encompasses the notion that it concerns undivided attention and is an interplay of the senses, specifically the eyes and ears, combined with the heart through feeling, and the mind through thinking. This is demonstrated in Figure 17.1.

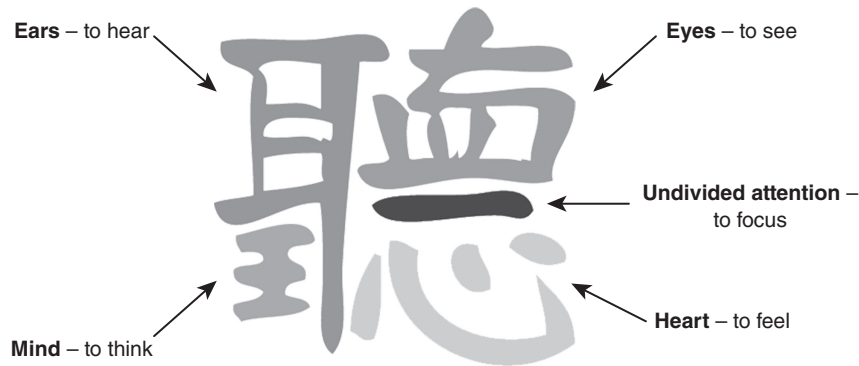


Figure 17.1 Chinese character for mindfulness

Within mindfulness, there are three levels: focused attention, open monitoring and compassion (Salzberg, 2011). Focused attention is the area that most people consider mindfulness: it is the aspect of concentrating on one thing, fully, at that moment, whether this is through movement, postures, breathing, chanting, mandalas, eating or any practice that involves heightening one's senses. As such, the focus is on concentration. However, true mindfulness is at the second level of practice, that of open monitoring. This is where there is an awareness of thinking, specifically being aware of thoughts and feelings without attachment or a judgement of them. The third level of mindfulness is that of compassion, or loving kindness.

Taking these further, activities that help focus attention are global in nature, for example, the use of prayer beads, or mala, is common within many faith traditions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, or Judaism, and consist of using beads to activate the memory and count recitations of prayers, or a mantra. Many such prayer beads consist of 108 beads (or 27 for a wrist mala). One mantra is 'Om Mani Padme Hum' (Sanskrit: ॐ मणिपद्मे हुम्). The six-syllable invocation translates as 'O jewel in the lotus blossom', or 'O, thou jewel in the lotus, hail.' The meaning of a mantra is often irrelevant, as the sound is more important: indeed, the sounds of the mantra can lie beyond meaning. The mantra is the most widely used in Mahayana Buddhism but also widely in East Asia (Tibet, Mongolia, China, Korea, Japan, Burma, Vietnam, Thailand).

Open monitoring meditation involves a non-reactive monitoring of the moment-to-moment content of experience. This helps the individual to become reflectively aware of the nature of emotional and cognitive patterns. The aim of the practice is to develop a non-judgemental awareness of sensory, cognitive and affective fields of experience in the present moment. One such practice adapted from Siegel (2011) is listed below.

- Start by sitting comfortably in a dignified posture. Notice the sensations of sitting in the chair. Eyes can be closed or softly open.
- Take a few breaths, letting go of any burdens you might be carrying. Stay with your breath, the sounds around you, or the sensations in your hands for a few minutes until you can focus and gather your attention.

- Picture an image of a wheel and bring your attention to the hub. Then expand the image to include the spokes going out to the rim of the wheel.
- Now place yourself in the hub of the wheel. Give yourself a few moments to feel anchored and steadied.
- Place the things in your life that may be upsetting or distracting you on the rim of the wheel. The distance between the hub and the rim is up to you. Allow as much space as you need – a few feet or yards, or even a football field. Give yourself a few moments to find the space you need. Allow yourself this respite.
- When you're reading, see if you can venture out on a spoke and begin to investigate one of the items on the rim. Start with something that is manageable, not the most difficult problem that you face.
- See what arises as you begin to bring your attention to this issue. What do you notice in your body? What emotions arise? If you start to feel overwhelmed, return to the hub and allow yourself to steady and ground. Experiment with going back and forth between the hub and the rim. Go slowly. (Pollack, 2013: 144)

One of the most powerful open monitoring meditations we have used with clients is outlined below.

THE PEBBLE MEDITATION

Close your eyes gently ... Settle yourself in your chair ... Focus on your breathing ... As you breathe in, say in your mind the word 'calm' ... As you breathe out, say in your mind the word 'relax' ... Continue to breathe naturally, as you breathe in, 'calm' ... as you breathe out, 'relax'.

(Allow about a minute for the person to focus on their breathing.)

Imagine being at the edge of a beautiful pond ... The sun is shining and you can see some of its rays reflected in the water ... There are water lilies, and blue and green dragonflies circling ... Maybe you hear a frog croaking ... Perhaps you can hear the rustling of leaves gently blowing in the wind ... Can you feel the gentle breeze on your skin? ... Allow yourself to visualise this pond in all its glory and add any image or sound to the picture that you create in your imagination.

Now see yourself picking up a small, flat pebble ... Take the pebble in your hand. Feel the texture ... is it smooth or rough ... is it cold, or is it warming up within your hands? How did the pebble get to be where it is?

Imagine throwing the pebble gently into the water ... See the concentric ripples dancing on the surface from where the pebble entered the water ...

(Continued)

Watch the pebble sink a little ... Notice what thoughts, feelings and sensations you are experiencing right now ... Allow the pebble to sink deeper and see whether any sensations, images or feelings change.

Let the pebble settle at the bottom of the pond. You may even be able to see where it has settled ... What do you feel, sense, or think now? ... Are there any messages arising from your consciousness that you need to hear or bring to your awareness?

Stay a little longer and just breathe, from moment to moment ... taking care of the here and now.

Source: adapted from Collard, 2014: 38–9.

In relation to compassion, a loving-kindness meditation (or ‘metta bhavana’) is provided below.

A LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION

- **Mindful breathing with gratitude**
 - Begin by feeling your natural breathing with a sense of affection. Feel thankful that you’re breathing, nourishing your body with lovely oxygen.
- **Well-wishing towards someone you find it easy to show affection to**
 - Choose someone with whom you have a simple, unconditionally loving relationship. Visualise the person, and in your mind, say to yourself several times, slowly and thoughtfully: *‘May you be well, may you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be free from suffering.’*
 - Say it with kindness and affection.
- **Well-wishing towards yourself**
 - Now transfer the same sense of well-wishing to yourself. Visualise yourself and wish yourself a sense of wellbeing. Say to yourself, several times: *‘May I be well, may I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be free from suffering.’*
 - Feel the words coming out of your heart area. Feel as if you’re absorbing any pleasant feelings that arise.

- **Well-wishing towards someone neutral**
 - Now think of someone to whom you have neither particularly positive nor negative feelings – perhaps a ticket seller at the railway station or the assistant at your local shop. As before say: *‘May they be well, may they be happy, may they be healthy, may they be free from suffering.’*
 - Visualise the person and wish them well, as best you can.
- **Well-wishing towards someone difficult**
 - Think of someone who you don’t particularly like; perhaps someone who irritates or annoys you – essentially someone with whom you have a difficult relationship but whom you’re willing to work with today. Say: *‘May they be well, may they be happy, may they be healthy, may they be free from suffering.’*
 - Notice what emotions arise for you as you do this.
 - Remember, you’re not condoning any inconsiderate behaviour: you’re just wishing them a sense of wellbeing rather than holding a grudge against them.
 - The meditation makes no difference to the difficult person, but you may feel a weight coming off your shoulders as you let go of a sense of frustration with them.
- **Well-wishing for all four or you together**
 - Imagine yourself, your loved one, your neutral person and your difficult person all together. See if you can wish everyone a sense of wellbeing together, in equal measure.
- **Well-wishing to everyone on the planet**
 - In this final stage, zoom out to the planet as a whole. Think about all the human beings in all of the different countries around the world, all the families and friends, all the children and elderly people. Think of all the animals, all the creatures in the oceans, lakes and rivers. Wish them all wellness. Use the words, *‘May we all be well, may we all be happy, may we all be healthy, may we all be free from suffering.’*
- Note that you can change the wording of the sentences to whatever resonates with you.

There are potential concerns with any such practice, specifically in relation to whether it is being conducted correctly, although negative effects, or contraindications, are limited (Pollack, 2013). The core guidance is that the person leading the mindfulness session should have experience before leading such a session (Davis and Hayes, 2011). However, mindfulness is not just a meditation technique: instead, 'It is a lifelong endeavour to embody awareness, compassion, and ethical behaviour in one's life' (Pollack, 2013: 135).

17.9 BIOFEEDBACK

Biofeedback is a mind–body, self-regulation process for improving performance and health (Ratanasiripong et al., 2015), which has been used successfully within the school setting (e.g., Edwards, 2016; Kassel, 2015). It is a way of using signs and signals from your body to check whether your strategies are working in your favour or against you. In order to do this, you need to be made aware of what to look for, to recognise the correct signs. In a laboratory setting, this would be achieved, for example, by recording an electromyogram (EMG), skin conductance response (SCR) and heart rate (HR). Yet, such measurement techniques are largely inaccessible to teachers. However, biofeedback devices are readily accessible to us all – cheap (and expensive) heart rate monitors are available in many sports shops, or through internet retailers. Indeed, we have delivered lectures and classes using these devices, out of curiosity about what our heart rate does during such sessions. Nowadays, we can attune to our breathing and to our heart rate. If we feel tension in our chest as we breathe or if we are not breathing slow deep breaths, then we are probably tense. If we feel our hearts pounding rapidly, then equally we are not that relaxed.

REFLECTION

Try each of the methods above. Does one stand out as being more suitable for you than the others? In your journal note down the following:

- What method is it?
- Why do you think this method is more suitable for you than the others?
- How can you incorporate this into your everyday schedule?
- When will you set aside time to practise this method?
- Where will you be able to practise this method?
- Who could you get in contact with to learn more about this technique?

17.10 WHEN SHOULD RELAXATION TECHNIQUES BE USED?

As highlighted earlier, relaxation techniques should be used to combat muscular anxiety (somatic) or mental anxiety (cognitive). It is vital that you explore your optimal levels of arousal for peak performance. Imagine sitting in the staffroom, prior to the start of the day. You are running through a deep relaxation exercise and are now in such a state of relaxation that you are no longer ready to carry out the task in hand. As such, we would suggest finding out what level of arousal you need to perform successfully. This can be explored through discussion and concentrating on how you feel during the course of the day. If, after a day of teaching you felt you were unable to retain focus or were 'having an off day', we may infer that the relaxation technique was employed at an inappropriate time. We would have to adopt a calculated, although somewhat trial-and-error method of finding the most opportune time to employ the technique. For this very reason, you should be practised in using relaxation techniques before you need to use them for that all-important visit by the inspectors/tutor/mentor!

It is, however, possible to keep an eye on proceedings during teaching in order to identify when problems begin to emerge. Psychologists are often experts in using observational techniques, which will enable them to pinpoint various occasions where tension and anxiety manifest themselves through a teacher's behaviour. We observed a teacher gently tapping their hand on the desk waiting for their pupils to quickly tidy up after an art lesson. This sign of tension led to an increasing sense of frustration as the teacher obviously wanted the lesson to end so that the pupils could finish on time. The teacher was running behind schedule and this was making the pupils late finishing the lesson. If this teacher had been successfully practised in relaxation techniques, they would have refocused on what actually needed doing, restoring an organised and methodical clear-up, in turn reducing any tension and ending the day in a calm, relaxed way. This is the essence of relaxation techniques. If you only have a matter of seconds to prepare, then you need to be able to use a technique that can be adapted to suit the situation. It is common, among trainee teachers we have worked with, for them to practise relaxation techniques during the days leading up to a teaching practice and during teaching practice so that they are mentally and physically prepared for a successful and stimulating experience. The message is quite simple: identify when it is necessary to relax and find the time and place to carry it out. Relaxation is an important part of a teacher's preparation. If it is left out or a half-hearted attempt is made, there can be no guarantees that performance will be successful. If, however, time and effort are allocated, the possibilities are limited only by the teacher's confidence and ability. Next, we would expect you to feel the change to relaxation as you run through the PMR or autogenic technique. We would expect your heart rate to be reduced through your awareness of biofeedback, but we certainly would not expect you to enter a 20-minute meditative state just before the pupils come into the classroom.

CASE STUDY Enhanced relaxation training (ERT)

This section acts as a link between relaxation and mental imagery techniques, outlined in Chapter 15. John King, a psychiatrist from Worcestershire, developed a technique for use with patients who were referred to him suffering from depression. The technique, which he called enhanced relaxation training (ERT), aimed to reduce the symptoms of depression, by providing patients with a mental simulation of a sea-side environment. Essentially, this clever technique involved sounds and smells of the coast, combined with the feel of sunshine, provided by heat lamps. King used mental imagery to underpin these stimuli, by talking his patients through a mental sequence of visual events at the sea-side. The result was a mental imagery sequence that was life-like for his patients. The technique rested on simple, yet effective theory. In the main, people go on holiday to relax, unwind, recover from the stresses of daily life and return feeling refreshed.

King assembled all of the relevant props to provide the context for a holiday in the privacy and safety of his consulting room and was able to manipulate the environment such that he could introduce feelings of calmness and relaxation in his patients. He was then able to make suggestions about how the sea-side seemed to be improving their mood and emotional feelings, thus providing these patients with a dilemma: if my mood has improved, how can I be depressed? You will recall a similar argument earlier in the chapter regarding anxiety and relaxation. Of course, we have simplified the situation considerably. However, it is only necessary to highlight the concept of what King was attempting to do.

The message is simply that if you wish to get into the mindset of relaxation, you should put as many props in place as possible. Of course, we do not want you to think that combining mental imagery and relaxation training is only useful for combating depression. Rather, the use of mental imagery may be used to induce relaxation quickly and easily, with the power of verbal persuasion.

ACTIVITY

From the case study outlined above, what would your ideal escape consist of? What memories are evoked from a time or place where you felt relaxed? Make a note of these in your journal.

- Consider a series of multisensory props you could collect.
- Consider how you could collect these props (whether you need to download a sound file of waves crashing, or use an audio recorder to record such sounds, etc.).

17.11 CONCLUSION

While relaxation may appear to be a luxury for many teachers, worldwide research indicates that the profession is reaching crisis-point leading to burnout. With reduced efficiency and effectiveness, smaller issues within schools gain momentum, in turn adding to the overall pressure. This cyclic process needs to be broken: how this is achieved requires an interplay of factors such as ensuring effective leadership is in place, that resilience is more openly discussed (Chapter 13), that teachers' MWB is addressed (Chapter 12), while educating teachers about strategies for relaxation and engaging the workforce at all levels in the debate.

17.12 FURTHER READING

Fontana, D. (1999) *Learn to Meditate: Find Deep Relaxation, Relieve Stress and Anxiety, Enhance Creativity*. London: Duncan Baird Publishers.

This book was written by Professor David Fontana who had an extensive career in academically researching a range of therapeutic techniques. He was one of the founders of the Transpersonal Psychology Section in the British Psychological Society.

Lovewell, K. (2012) *Every Teacher Matters: Inspiring Well-Being through Mindfulness*. St Albans: Ecademy Press.

This is a clearly accessible book aimed directly at teachers.