

A Systems- Level Approach for Mindfulness Training in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Sydney M. Murphy

Abstract

Research supports that mindfulness strategies are associated with enhanced well-being, decreased anxiety and improved relationship qualities. For the purpose of this assignment, mindfulness will be discussed for several considerations and an example of an evidence-based mindfulness model will be explored for feasibility and effectiveness. The role of a school psychologist in the implementation of an intervention such as this and how mindfulness may be beneficial for educators in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study exhibit positive impacts on problematic responses to stress including: emotional arousal, intrusive thoughts, and rumination. Additionally, teachers and administrators generally found positive outcomes in student behaviors in the classroom. Research such as this actively demonstrates the usefulness of mindfulness in schools at a systems-level and could be a valuable tool to battle student stress induced from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout this discussion several concepts will be considered such as: exploring what mindfulness is, where it comes from, and what it represents. A 12-week yoga intervention program will be explored, where students attended 45-minute mindfulness sessions four days a week. Further, the role of a school psychologist in problem solving and systems level delivery will be discussed as well as the collaborative approach with other school professionals necessary for effective implementation. The role of a school psychologist in the implementation of an intervention such as this and how mindfulness may be beneficial for educators in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mindfulness

Chhabra & Parveen (2017), described mindfulness as a psychological state of awareness. It is focused on an individual bringing attention to their center. Reported benefits include enhanced well-being and decreased anxiety. This specific study found that mindfulness can improve cognitive and emotional control. Mindfulness comes from Buddhist Psychology, specifically, Buddhist meditation practices. There are also roots in Hinduism, as the culture has a deep history of meditation, and self-reflection practices. Yoga specifically comes from a Hindi spiritual and ascetic discipline. The practice of yoga includes breath control, simple meditation, and the adoption of specific

bodily postures. Mindfulness and yoga are becoming increasingly popular in American culture for health and relaxation practices (Wokia & McGinnis, 2020). This is important information to recognize to respect the cultural connections rooted in Mindfulness.

Evidence-Based Model

Mendelson et al. (2010) utilized a 12-week yoga intervention program, where students attended 45-minute mindfulness sessions four days a week. This study focused on reducing involuntary stress responses and improving social adjustments and mental health outcomes. This could be used during physical education time and allow for students to have a different form of exercise not typically delivered in school. It is an appealing intervention to students, teachers and administration because of the nature of feasibility. The results of this study demonstrated a positive impact on problematic responses to stress including: emotional arousal, intrusive thoughts, and rumination. Additionally, Teachers and administrators generally found positive outcomes in student behaviors in the classroom.

Role of a School Psychologist and COVID-19

The role of a school psychologist is multi-faceted and there are numerous aspects to consider for implementation of an intervention. This includes, evidence-based interventions (similar to the one previously discussed), school's characteristics (e.g., resources, environment, needs), and conducting needs-based assessments to see school specific concerns when implementing programs. A school psychologist would also have to consider the acceptability of an intervention. In the example of mindfulness, how can we ensure respect for the culture during implementation as well as considering

how students' families and the community will respond. One way this could be implemented is through incorporating a component within the intervention for a discussion about the cultural roots Mindfulness has in Buddhism and Hinduism. This would recognize the cultural roots and take the next step to ensure integrity of the practice. Furthermore, having the instructors that have similar racial and ethnic backgrounds as students they are presenting to. This would ensure that the intervention is tailored to the specific student population and demonstrate student-instructor race congruence which would boost overall student engagement (Pigott & Cowen, 2000). Some skills that would benefit a school psychologist would be good communication skills and good leadership skills (Strein & Koehler, 2008). This information is valuable for school professionals in response to the global pandemic that is COVID-19. Research has continually demonstrated that mindfulness interventions can lead to a plethora of positive outcomes. While education has taken a back-seat to the pandemic, student stress is skyrocketing in response to the drastic change in educational routines and social climates. In order to be responsive to student's needs, implementing an intervention such as this would support student mental and physical health.

Conclusion

Mindfulness intervention strategies come in various forms and have different levels of feasibility depending on the school and its resources and needs. A school psychologist has a multi-faceted role that requires well-constructed decision-making. It is important for a school psychologist to utilize data-based decision and research and evidence-based practices for interventions while exploring different studies, the research, and what fits the needs of the school best. While using this intervention, a school psychologist should

make considerations for how to respect the culture and integrity. Mindfulness interventions have meaningful research support and can be implemented in schools in a seamless manner. A school psychologist

role in this process would involve careful consideration for the culture that mindfulness comes from, as well as the acceptability of the intervention to families and the community.

References

- Chhabra, H. K., & Parveen, H. (2017). Dynamizing performance during cognitive interference: The role of anxiety, mindfulness and self-efficacy. *Journal of Psychosocial Research, 12*(2), 407–416.
- Colaianne, B. A., Galla, B. M., & Roeser, R. W. (2020). Perceptions of mindful teaching are associated with longitudinal change in adolescents' mindfulness and compassion. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 44*(1), 41–50.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025419870864>
- Mendelson, T., Greenberg, M. T., Dariotis, J. K., Gould, L. F., Rhoades, B. L., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Feasibility and preliminary outcomes of a school-based mindfulness intervention for urban youth. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 38*(7).
doi:10.1007/s10802-010-9418-x
- NASP 2020 Domains of Practice. (2020). Retrieved October 22, 2020, from
<https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-2020-professional-standards-adopted/nasp-2020-domains-of-practice>
- Pigott, R. L., & Cowen, E. L. (2000). Teacher race, child race, racial congruence, and teacher ratings of children's school adjustment. *Journal of School Psychology, 38*(2), 177-195.
- Strein, W., & Koehler, J. (2008). Best practices in developing prevention strategies for school psychology practice. *Best practices in school psychology V, 4*, 1309-1322.
- Woika, Shirley., McGinnis, Anne, M. (2020, November 4) *School Law for School Psychologists: Beyond Special Education* [PowerPoint slides 14-34] Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania.
https://www.aspponline.org/docs/School_Law.pdf

Recommended Citation

Murphy, S. M. (2021). A systems-level approach for mindfulness training in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Made in Millersville Journal*, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.mimjournal.com/paper-46>