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The Effects of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention on Middle School Special Education Students

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The Effects of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention on Middle School Students with Special Needs

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Scholarly and Creative Works Conference, April 2019
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Statement of the Problem

- 6.1 million students ages 6 to 21 received special education services for the 2017-2018 school year.¹
- 3.8 million spent 80% or more of their day within the general education setting.²
- 31% of teens felt overwhelmed due to stress.³
- Middle school students typically lack the strategies to manage stress.

What is mindfulness?

- According to the Literature:

The process by which we pay attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally ⁴

- For the Purpose of this Study:

The act of paying attention in an intentional way while focusing on one's breathing



Review of the Literature

Mindfulness in Schools

- Potential benefits ⁵
 - improved functioning and academic performance
 - decrease in suspensions
 - increase in attendance
- Potential barriers ⁶
 - fiscal restraints
 - person delivering mindfulness intervention

Mindfulness & Special Education

- Social-Emotional Regulation ⁷
 - increased inhibitory control led to improved emotional control and decreased aggression
- Academic ⁸
 - increased executive functioning skills had a direct correlation to higher measures of academic success. Practicing mindfulness enhanced working memory capacity.

Gap in Literature

Little to no research on the effectiveness of mindfulness on:

- Middle school students
- Middle school special needs students
- Special needs students' behavior in the Gen Ed setting

Research Questions

How does incorporating a mindfulness-based intervention affect the school experience of middle school students with special needs?

- How does the intervention affect special needs students' attention and behavior in the general education setting?
- How do these students' self-perceptions change in response to the intervention?

Methodology

- Northern California middle school
- 10 participating students
 - 6th-8th grade
 - male
 - Latino
 - qualify for Special Education services under OHI, SLD, ID
- 5 participating staff
 - 4 Gen. Ed. Teachers
 - 1 Instructional Assistant

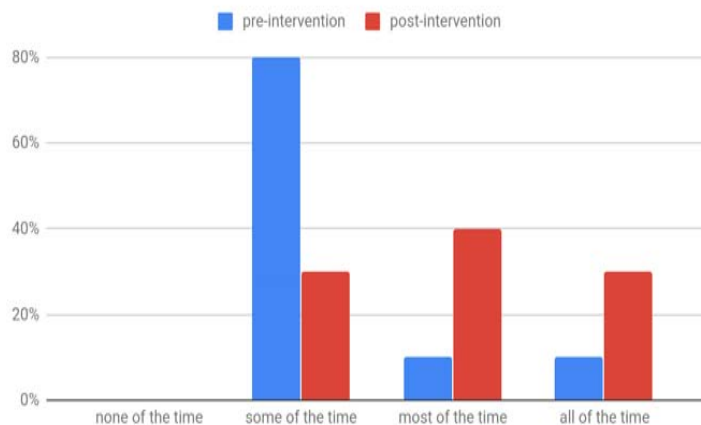
Convergent Mixed Methods:

- Anonymous student surveys
- 6-week long intervention sessions
- Focus groups
- Student journals
- Classroom observations
- Staff interviews

Findings

- Students' Self-Perception
 - overall increase among all students

When others are having a hard time, I'm kind and encouraging to them...



- Effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Intervention
 - Highly effective for students who qualify for special education services under OHI
 - decline in number of off-task behaviors
 - “In the beginning of the year, he was more spastic and talking more to peers around him. I can arguably say that that has improved.”
 - Little to no improvement for students who qualify for special education services under SLD and/or ID
 - slight decline in number of off-task behaviors for 3 students
 - no improvement/increase in number of off-task behaviors for 3 students

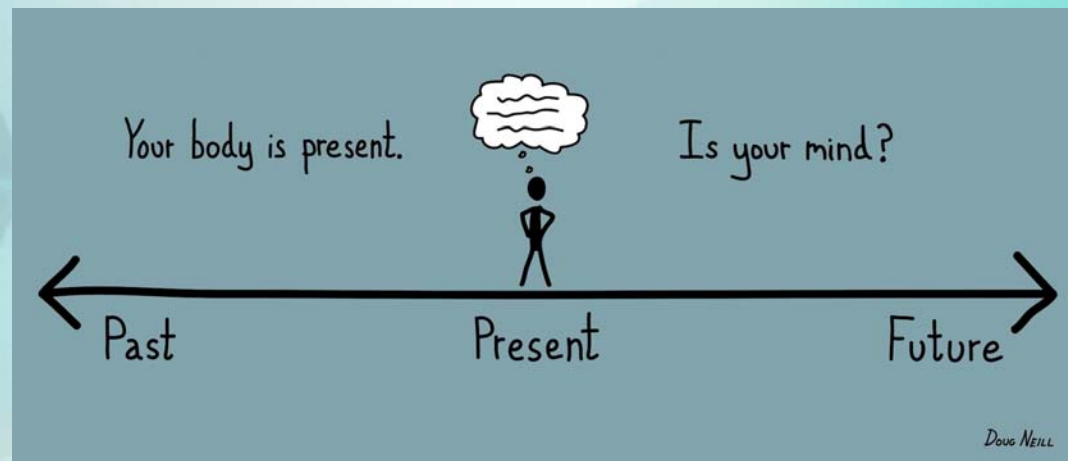
Implications

- Importance of student mindset
 - growth vs fixed
 - student willingness to participate
- Mindfulness across all classroom settings
 - takes up as little as one minute of instructional time
 - little to no cost to implement mindfulness
 - consistency is key



Thank you.

Questions?



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