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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Dominican University of California
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.

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

Mindfulness & Special Education
- Social-Emotional Regulation
  - increased inhibitory control led to improved emotional control and decreased aggression
- Academic
  - 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

- **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?

Past

Present

Future

Your body is present.  

Is your mind?
Works Cited


