Effects of Mindfulness Strategies on Student Self-regulation Skills in Primary and Elementary Students

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Research question:

- In what ways would incorporating mindful activities such as, MindUP and Montessori Exercises of Practical Life, affect self-regulatory skills in primary and upper elementary children?
Why did we choose this question?

❖ As educators, we observed that students:

➢ Sometimes lack social and emotional regulation

➢ Sometimes lack respect and empathy towards each other

➢ Often need redirection to focus and complete the task on hand
The stresses of modern childhood
The researchers wondered if children who lack self regulation skills would struggle to:

➢ appropriately manage time
➢ recall details
➢ pay attention to tasks and/or
➢ regulate their behaviors and emotions
Therefore:

- To further understand the problem the researchers would explore if implementing effective mindfulness based interventions can help students acquire and develop self-regulation (SR) skills.
What is Mindfulness?

❖ “Being deeply involved with, or concentrating on, what we are doing or thinking about in the present moment, without being distracted by what is going on around us or our thoughts about anything but what we are experiencing right now” (Stephenson, 2018, p. 1).
The literature: Mindfulness based intervention supports self-regulation

“Mindfulness [is] conceived of as a set of practices to cultivate [...] focused attention and EF, coupled with a non-judgemental, curious attitude toward moment to moment experience” (Zinn 2003)
The Literature: Executive functioning and Self Regulation are interrelated

❖ Executive functioning (EF):
  ➢ an umbrella term which refers to the attention-regulation skills that overlap with attributes of fluid intelligence
  ➢ involves thinking logically and solving problems in new situations

(Bridgett, Oddi, Laake, Murdock, Bachmann, & Desteno, 2013, p. 47).
The Literature: Why mindfulness based intervention in the classroom?

- Supporting self-management of children leads to a shift in focus from rewards/punishments to co-regulatory Social Behaviour (Burman, Green, and Shanker, 2015)
- Mindfulness interventions can help teachers provide “co-constructive interactions and nudges” (Burman et al)
- Better outcomes; less fuss!
The Literature: Why mindfulness intervention in the Montessori classroom?

- Montessori education incorporates mindfulness, emphasizing:
  - deep concentration,
  - integration of mind with body,
  - practical work, and
  - specific exercises including:
    - The Silence Game and
    - Walking on the Line.
Our Study:

❖ Three Montessori classrooms (one public, two private)
❖ Thirty-eight children, ages 3 - 12
❖ 4 - 6 weeks
❖ Examining the effectiveness of a particular set of mindfulness interventions, including training and activities, in supporting student self-regulation.
Our Intervention:

- Our research will incorporate mindful activities, such as MindUP and Montessori Exercises of Practical Life within primary (2 1/2 to 6 years of age) and elementary (9 to 12 years of age) Montessori environments to better understand and support children’s self-regulation skills development.
Our Data Tools:

- Students’ self-regulation skills were measured using:
  - (1) a pre and post parent assessment,
  - (2) observational field notes,
  - (3) tally sheets, and
  - (4) a behavioral student self-assessment (BSSA).
Our Findings:

Mindful Strategies Used and Found Effective

Different strategies used during stressful situations
Prior to the intervention, the parent’s tried:

- talking/consoling/calm down techniques
- breathing exercises and diverting the child’s attention.

After the intervention, some parents referred:

- back to talking/consoling/calming down
- others began utilizing discussing the problem and/or finding solutions.
Prior to the intervention, the parents answered “no” for their child’s ability to regulate their emotions.

They also responded that the children resulted in crying, yelling or blaming others when they do express their emotions.

After the intervention, the parents noticed an increase in their child’s ability to regulate their emotions.
Week 1: Beginning of Intervention

❖ Only 55.4% of the participants were able to self-regulate
❖ 37% were unable to self-regulate and 7.6% were sometimes able to or “maybe” able to self-regulate.
Week 4: End of Intervention

❖ A third of the population demonstrated an ability to self-regulate.

❖ Only 24% of the participants unable to self-regulate and 10.3% of the children were sometimes or “maybe” able to self-regulate.
Week 1: Beginning of Intervention

- Many students found that they were unable to focus on their work.
- Most students enjoyed the mindful activities, thought it helped them, and felt good afterwards.
Week 4: End of Intervention

- there was a significant increase in the number of participants that believed the statements to be true.

- Over half of the population believed that mindfulness activities were enjoyable and they helped them to focus, be happy and remain calm.
Conclusions:

- MindUp and Practical Life exercises promote self-regulation in primary and elementary children.
- Promotes self awareness and awareness of others.
- It promotes their inhibitory control and resilience.
Limitations:

❖ The population of the students for the study was very small

❖ The research should be conducted for a longer time period

❖ Preparation of adult is also a key principle
Research Recommendations:

- Larger group to determine if the mindfulness strategies are effective
- Authentic Montessori vs Traditional environment to understand the difference in the two settings
- Would training the adult support the action research
Practical Recommendations:

❖ The researchers propose that Mindful practices should be a part of daily practices
❖ Allowing the child to practice mindfulness anytime they feel the need
❖ The adult in the environment consistently models self regulated behavior
References:


