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Implementing Mindfulness: The Effect on Student Behavior and Focus at the Elementary Level

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Implementing Mindfulness:
The Effect on Student Behavior
and Focus at the Elementary Level

A Project Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

Brianna Anderson

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in
Curriculum and Instruction

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Abstract

The practice of mindfulness is being used with increasing regularity in classrooms around the world. Mindfulness is the idea of being present in the moment without thinking about the past or wondering about the future. Teaching students about practicing mindfulness has several components including breathing, seeing, stretching, and listening. Provided is a literature review and research on the positive effects mindfulness has on a students' ability to focus, self-regulate, and release anxiety and stress in a Title 1 elementary classroom. Analysis of the data showed a decrease in the frequency of off-task behaviors in four out of six students during a 55-minute math block. Two students involuntarily opted-out of the study due to their high academic achievement and no longer needing Title 1 services.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the people who inspired and supported me throughout the completion of my action research as well as my journey in completing my MS degree. My three daughters, Jocelyn, Tenley, and Evelyn are my inspiration. Although they are small, they are always watching and learning. They inspire me to chase after my dreams to show them that they can do anything they set their minds to. They are my biggest cheerleaders, and it is my hope that one day they will push themselves to achieve their own dreams with the work ethic that I have taught them. My husband, Kyle, is my rock. He has kept me grounded throughout this entire journey and often reminds me to remain calm and not to stress. He has stepped up in caring for our girls and helping with endless jobs while I pursued this degree. I am extremely grateful for the love and support of my family.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE	6
Introduction.....	6
General Problem/Issue.....	6
Subject and Setting.....	7
Description of Setting.....	7
Student Description and Selection Criteria.....	7
Research Ethics.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	8
CHAPTER TWO	10
Review of Literature.....	10
Impact of Stress on Elementary Students.....	11
Effects of Mindfulness on Students' Behavior and Attention.....	11
Increased Self-Regulation.....	12
Decreased Levels of Stress and Anxiety.....	13
Improved Attention Skills.....	13
Improved Prosocial Behaviors.....	14
Teaching Mindfulness Strategies.....	14
Mindful Stretching.....	15
Mindful Breathing.....	15
Mindful Listening.....	16
Mindful Seeing.....	16
Mindful Eating.....	16
Journaling.....	16
Conclusion.....	17
CHAPTER THREE	18
Methodology.....	18
Research Questions.....	18
Action Plan.....	18
Schedule.....	19

Data Collection.....	20
Data Analysis.....	20
Ethical Issues.....	21
Anticipated Results.....	21
CHAPTER FOUR.....	22
Data Collection.....	22
Data Analysis.....	26
Conclusion.....	29
CHAPTER FIVE.....	30
Action Plan.....	30
Plan for Sharing.....	31
APPENDIX A.....	33
APPENDIX B.....	36
REFERENCES.....	37

Chapter One Introduction

General Problem / Issue

Students are encountering stress at levels never before seen in the history of U.S. education (Armstrong, 2019). The expectations to succeed at school continue to rise and teachers are feeling the pressure to teach all the standards and motivate their students to do well on the high stakes testing which may determine the school's funding. The push for more academics and higher rigor has left children feeling overwhelmed, defeated, and frustrated. Because of the higher demands, schools are giving children less time to socialize with peers, less time for art and music, and little to no social-emotional learning. In other words, our students are not receiving the support they need to maintain their mental health and well-being.

Working as a Title 1 teacher, my primary job is to provide interventions to students who are below grade-level in math and reading. A majority of the students I work with have been struggling academically for several years. Rather than coming to my room excited to learn, I see a similar mindset in many of my students. They are discouraged, lack motivation, and would rather not try at all than to try again and fail like they have in the past. As their teacher, it is my responsibility to instill a growth mindset in my students and give them the ability to be in the present moment without the stress of what has happened in the past or what will happen in the future. The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of mindfulness on student behavior and focus. Mindfulness is the nonjudgmental awareness of each present moment in time. Some may argue that we do not have the instructional time to teach children about mindfulness; however, if kids do not feel safe and supported, then no learning is going to take place (Wagner, 2018).

Teaching children mindfulness skills empowers them with practical ways of reducing stress, managing their emotions, improving their attention span, and strengthening their working

memory. Research also suggests that giving students self-control abilities through mindfulness practices makes a direct positive contribution to their future health outcomes, financial status, and social adjustment as adults (Armstrong, 2019). This study will investigate the impact mindfulness has on student behaviors as well as their ability to focus and engage during instruction.

Subjects and Setting

Description of setting. Students involved in this action research will be from a variety of 2nd grade classrooms for the 2020-2021 school year. The students attend an elementary school in Northern Minnesota in a community of about 4,200 people. The elementary school consists of 635 students in preschool- 4th grade. 53% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The student body makeup of the elementary school is 49% male and 51% female, and the total minority enrollment is 16 percent (see percentages below).

- Hispanic 7%
- White 84%
- Two or More Races 9%

The mindfulness activities will take place as part of my regular instruction in my Title 1 classroom.

Student description and selection criteria. The subjects in this research study will be approximately 6-8 seven and eight-year old students who make up one of my second-grade math groups. The students in this group are performing below-grade level in math; therefore, a small group math intervention is necessary. I work with these students for one hour each day, with the first 5 minutes being devoted to a brief mindfulness activity which might include breathing, listening, or stretching. A subject could involuntarily leave the study if they make significant

progress to being on grade-level in which they return to their regular classroom for math instruction. In the past two years as a Title 1 teacher, I have noticed my second graders have the most difficulty with staying focused and attending to lessons.

Research Ethics

Permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Minnesota State University Moorhead and from the school district to conduct this study. Protocol from the Review Board at the University and the school district was strictly followed. Protection of human subjects was assured. Student participants and their parents were informed of the purpose of the study, time required, minimal risks, and benefits. There were no risks involved in this study. This study took place within my Title 1 classroom environment, under my supervision, as their Title 1 teacher and researcher. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms rather than students' names to record data. Recorded data was kept personal in a locked filing cabinet located in my room unless in use. The choice to participate or withdraw from the study at any time was included on a consent form that was signed by the parents and/or guardians, giving written consent for their child to participate. Assent was requested from the children participating in this study by reading a statement describing the study, their option to participate, and the choice to stop participation at any time with no consequences. This took place after parent consent was obtained.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

Mindfulness: Present-centered nonjudgmental awareness, is about slowing down and being fully present in the now (Higgins & Eden, 2018).

Focus: The act of concentrating on a particular lesson or activity (eyes are looking, ears are listening).

Student affect: The attitudes, interests, and values students exhibit in an educational environment.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Elementary school students are facing more stress than ever before. The higher demands at school combined with poor life circumstances are causing students to be anxious and resistant to learning. Children often bring their stress and anxiety into the classroom which has a negative impact on their learning, their behavior, and their ability to focus and participate in lessons. Mindfulness has been shown to have a positive impact on reducing stress, increasing participation and engagement, and creating a more positive classroom culture. This study investigated if incorporating mindfulness techniques prior to each session will enhance my students' ability to focus and participate in lessons.

As children enter our classrooms, we are tasked with building relationships, teaching the standards, and equipping students with the skills to be successful in their lives. However, often we are faced with bigger challenges when behavior problems arise, and children lack the focus and engagement to actively participate in lessons. Children struggle to stay in the present as their brains are buzzing with worries about the past and future, which can make it hard to them to focus on what's happening in class or keeping their emotions in check (Butler, 2019).

Mindfulness is a means to center your focus on singular task that clears your mind of all other thoughts. In other words, it means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. According to Butler, teaching students mindfulness practices can be efficient in bringing one's attention to the present moment. We can temporarily release our worries about the future and past while freeing up space in our minds for the here and now. Teaching mindfulness to students has the potential to increase their focus and participation, lower stress, create a respectful classroom culture, and improve cognitive function (Butler, 2019).

Impact of Stress on Elementary Students

Children are suffering from more stress than ever before. Research by Costello and Lawler (2014) suggests that many factors are contributing to children's perception of stress, including everyday hassles which are contributing more strongly to psychological and behavior problems than major life events. Children who come from families at greater risk of poverty have an increased prevalence of stress and mental health problems compared with those in the general population. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are at an increased risk for a range of negative results including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, aggressive behavior, and conduct disorders. Understandably, students suffering from emotional difficulties and behavioral problems are more likely to struggle at school, underperform academically, and drop-out (Costello & Lawler, 2014).

Research suggests that circumstances of poverty often mean that students have less resources to cope with daily stressors such as attending to their teacher's lessons, unreliable transportation, high mobility, malnutrition, poor healthcare, etc. Because they are lacking the resources to cope, they face increased stress and anxiety that negatively impacts their ability to focus, think deeply, and learn which ultimately affects their academic performance (Harpin et al., 2016). Unmistakably, there is a need for students to improve their ability to cope with stress to improve their focus to find more success in school.

Effects of Mindfulness on Students' Behavior and Attention

Teaching students mindfulness techniques will give them the tools that help them channel their focus, practice compassion and empathy, and self-regulate their emotions. Mindfulness entails many aspects (stretching, listening, seeing, and eating), but much of it revolves around breathing and focusing on breath. Breathing affects our bodies in ways we do not normally think

about. Breathing has been shown to have positive influence on respiratory muscle activity, heart rate variability, and blood flow dynamics. Furthermore, there is a notable elevation in mood, release of tension, and pain relief (Butler, 2019).

Increased Self-Regulation

Giving students a chance to practice mindfulness allows them to be in the moment and let go of negative feelings. Through several research studies, mindfulness has been shown to help students be more aware of their own feelings, be able to better explain their feelings, and self-regulate their behavior. In one study, parents expressed that their children had improved positive behavior such as self-managing behavior, calming down their temper in stressful situations, improved communication, increased attention span, and being able to complete tasks with little inappropriate behavior (Kim & Kwon, 2016). Similarly, in another study, mindfulness activities conducted in preschool settings revealed children had greater delay of gratification, emotional regulation, and behavior control (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2018). Furthermore, mindfulness activities helped individuals with disabilities to develop a greater ability to manage negative reactions to stress (Fuchs et al., 2017). In a study of first graders, one student demonstrated the ability to identify her feelings and talk about them with classmates without judgement. She even expressed that the discussion left her with a “calm mind”. This same study found that the majority of students were able to successfully define mindfulness, identify their own feelings and words, and name specific strategies that helped them calm down and be mindful (Schrodt et al., 2019). Observing children in context often provides the best proof of the effect of mindfulness on young children. One observer shared, “I watched this little girl raise her foot to kick the blocks, take a breath, and then walk away” (Armstrong, 2019).

This is further validation that mindfulness can help children to self-regulate and ask themselves what they need rather than to make the choice to hurt someone else.

Decreased Levels of Stress and Anxiety

In addition to helping students self-regulate, mindfulness has been shown to help decrease the skyrocketing levels of stress students in our classrooms are currently facing. In one study, students participated in daily mindfulness practices over a five-week period. Upon completion of the study, students recognized they were able to detach themselves from feelings of stress. Almost 40% of students interviewed stated that they put their stress and worries into bubbles or balloons and when they floated away they felt calm and relaxed (Costello & Lawler, 2014). Another study found that when combining mindfulness training with Social-Emotional learning, students improved more in their cognitive control as well as their stress physiology (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). As school gets more demanding and students' home lives continue to move at a rapid pace, it is vital to give students strategies for controlling their stress.

Improved Attention Skills

One of the greatest challenges educators face is the high percentage of children who demonstrate an inability to focus during instruction. Mindfulness techniques have proven to help students be mindful about when they are distracted. Once a student realizes they are off task, they simply recognize it, and regain focus. In one five-week study focusing specifically on low-income, ethnic-minority primary school children, the program consisted of mindful meditative practices to help children pay attention, build empathy, increase self-awareness, improve self-control, and reduce stress. Immediately following the intervention, significant improvements in children's behavior were evidenced pertaining to increased attention, self-control, classroom participation, and respect for others. In another program, children were taught mindfulness

meditation and breathing exercises. At the end of the program, teachers reported significantly less hyperactive behavior, ADHD symptoms, and inattentiveness among the children (Costello & Lawler, 2014). In another study, a mindfulness-based intervention greatly improved all three participants task-avoidance behavior as well as their on-task behavior. A mother of one of the participants thought that the intervention was very effective in improving behavior not only regarding task avoidance but also daily life skills (Kim & Kwon, 2016). Another study specifically analyzed the effect mindfulness had on students' attention by administering a computerized performance task. All children in the study showed improvement from the first administered test to the second following the principles of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction method (Tarrasch, 2018).

Improved Prosocial Behaviors

Similar to social-emotional learning, mindfulness has shown benefits in improving students' prosocial behaviors with their peers. In one study, children participated in MindUP, a mindfulness-based program, which lead to improved emotional control and decreased aggression. Children demonstrated increased caring and kindness among students which may have been due to students performing acts of kindness which is part of the MindUp curriculum (Schonert-Rechl et al., 2015). In addition, mindfulness studies conducted in preschool settings revealed that participating students were more willing to share and used verbal statements of kindness (Lux et al., 2020). Another study gave students an opportunity to have discussions about the mindfulness activities they were participating in. The study found it gave students the opportunity to become engaged in authentic classroom life discussion. The program gave them a voice and assisted them in building relationships with their peers (Higgins & Eden, 2018).

Teaching Mindfulness Strategies

According to Butler (2019), stretching, breathing, listening, seeing, and eating comprise the five facets of mindfulness. These exercises can be completed in five minutes and can be implemented according to what works best for your classroom. The best results come from doing at least one stretching and one breathing exercise a day. Setting a consistent time each day will help students benefit the most from daily mindfulness.

Educator Skills

Before moving into the discussion about Butler's five facets of mindfulness, it is important to call attention to the importance of educators developing mindfulness skills before attempting to instill the strategies into their own classroom. In order to be successful, teachers must possess the skills they need to promote a calm, relaxed, but enlivened learning environment. Teaching is an "emotional practice" with both positive and negative emotions. Learning how to apply mindful awareness to the emotional experiences can help teachers to recognize, understand, and effectively regulate those experiences (Jennings, 2015). Teachers' attitudes and emotions set the tone for the entire classroom, so it is important to practice mindfulness and become masters of self-regulation to instill the same skills in our students.

Mindful Stretching

According to Butler (2019), stretching is a great way to begin each day. Stretches should be performed slowly and students should be guided into the pose using the script provided. Each pose is accompanied by three slow, deep breaths to help students to be present in the moment.

Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing can be used after stretching at the start of each day. Students will have some choices based on if they are able to breathe in and out through their nose and if they will close their eyes or keep them open. Students can be led in guided breathing, in which a

teacher provides verbal prompts that guide them to think about a social-emotional learning topic. Students can also be led through intentional breathing, which helps kids to feel centered and can help during difficult times that might be caused by strong emotions (Butler, 2019).

Mindful Listening

Mindful listening involves students listening for ambient sounds of nature, nonliving objects, and humans. It can be used during transitions as well as being used as a prompt for journaling or self-reflection (Butler, 2019).

Mindful Seeing

Mindful seeing can be used in transition as well. Students are encouraged to look around and notice their surroundings in depth and detail giving thought to every observation (Butler, 2019).

Mindful Eating

Mindful eating involves taking one bite at a time and focusing on one sense for a period of time. Students make observations about what the food looks like and what it tastes like while creating a calmer, slower, and more appreciative experience (Butler, 2019). This can be especially helpful in the cafeteria if students need to be refocused.

Journaling

Journal writing is a reflective practice in which students are processing the raw material of experience and making sense of confusing and conflicting thoughts and emotions. It is also a form of self-report, or participants' representation of their mental and emotional perceptions during a therapeutic experience (Keller et al., 2017). Journaling is a great way for students to share what they are thinking when they may not be comfortable speaking in front of their peers.

Conclusion

It is evident in today's classrooms that children are struggling with the pressure of school and life at home. Educators are seeing more behavior issues, more difficulty with focusing and participating during lessons, task avoidance, and peer conflict. Students are in dire need of coping skills and strategies to assist them in dealing with the stressors they face. Mindfulness strategies can be used in and out of the classroom. Once students have been taught a strategy, they can use it wherever they might be when stress levels become elevated. Mindfulness has been shown to have a positive impact on reducing stress, increasing participation and engagement, and creating a more positive classroom culture. Focusing on breathing and stretching would merit further study to determine its effect on elementary students.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Research Questions

In my role as a Title 1 teacher, I often work with some of the most discouraged students in our school. At this point, many of them have struggled academically for several years. One of the biggest issues I face each day is how to keep my students' attention during instruction as well as during independent practice time. These challenges led me to devise the research questions:

- How will completing daily, brief mindfulness activities increase attention and focus during classroom lessons and independent work time?
- How will mindfulness impact time on-task and time off-task in an elementary classroom?
- What is the effect that mindfulness will have on student behavior?

Action Plan

For the 2020-2021 school year, I have chosen to incorporate mindfulness practices into my 2nd grade daily math block. Action research methods were used in this study. Prior to beginning the mindfulness techniques, students completed a pre-survey I have adapted from Mindful Schools (Appendix A). Students rated themselves on a Likert scale answering questions about their thoughts and feelings about things that happen during school and how they feel during the school day. This survey was used to compare how students felt prior to mindfulness and how they feel at the conclusion of the intervention.

Once students completed the pre-survey, I began incorporating mindfulness techniques into our daily lessons. For the first 5 minutes of class, our focus was on the mindfulness activity

for the day. I explained each activity and modeled how it would be completed. Each day, we will incorporate a mindfulness strategy such as:

- Mindful breathing
- Mindful stretching
- Mindful listening
- Mindful gratitude

I used strategies from Butler's book, *Mindful Classrooms Daily 5-Minute Practices to Support Social Emotional Learning*. I varied the activities so that students would not become bored doing the same thing each day. However, I was careful not to introduce too many new strategies taking the focus away from our mindfulness.

At the conclusion of the intervention, students completed the same survey they completed prior to beginning the intervention. This survey gave me important data about how my students' thoughts and feelings changed over the course of the intervention and was key in showing the impact mindfulness has on students' behavior, attention, and focus.

Schedule. This research was completed at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. Title 1 services typically begin on week 2 of the school year. I waited 1-2 weeks as my groups often fluctuate at the beginning of the year depending on if students are a good fit for Title 1 or not. This also gave me an opportunity to make observations and anecdotal records about individual students before the mindfulness activities begin. On week 3 of Title 1 services, I administered the pre-survey, and began the mindfulness techniques immediately following. This happened approximately on October 5th. Students completed 5-minutes of mindfulness practice each day for the following 4 weeks finishing up around the second week in November.

Data collection. For this action research study, it is vital to gauge students' feelings about the mindfulness activities we have completed. If students had a negative outlook about completing the activities, I knew it would not be successful in improving student behavior and focus. Student surveys adapted from Mindful Schools (Appendix A) helped me to understand my students' feelings regarding the activities we were participating in. I was also interested in finding out if they thought the activities helped them to regulate their behavior and focus during lessons. Relationships needed to be developed prior to completing surveys so students felt confident and comfortable being honest with me.

Direct observations played a huge role in my action research. The focus of my research question was to determine if student behavior and attention improved from implementing a mindfulness routine. Therefore, I completed observations and recorded everything I noticed. Student anecdotal records were documented to track individual student behaviors. Along with recording observations during class, a time on-task versus time off-task record was helpful in analyzing whether students' attention had improved. I planned to implement the intervention and gather data for approximately 6 weeks, but only ended up with 15 days of data (broken into 3 weeks).

Data analysis. I carefully analyzed the data from the pre and post survey to determine if incorporating mindfulness techniques helped improve the students' thoughts and feelings regarding school. I broke down each question and calculated the percentage of students who had improved feelings and thoughts at the conclusion of the intervention. In addition to the surveys, I have observational data that was collected to assess whether students were focused and actively engaged during lessons. This is in the form of time on-task versus time off-task (Appendix B).

Ethical Issues

A possible ethical issue in this study is the concern from parents that mindfulness is some kind of “religious” practice being pushed on their child. I was clear that mindfulness taught in public schools is entirely secular and grounded not in religion, but in science. I explained that the context for mindfulness is that it is an evidence-based set of practices with a growing scientific base. I have also had parents in the past who are concerned that their child is doing yoga in school. The word yoga as it is used in schools refers to nothing more than certain postures, poses, or movements that students do with mindfulness (Armstrong, 2019).

Should any of these ethical issues arise, they would have been handled in a professional manner. In the Armstrong text, *Mindfulness in the Classroom Strategies for Promoting Concentration, Compassion, and Calm*, the author lists two pages of claims parents or community members may make about mindfulness and includes a clarification response for each item. This is something I have studied and referenced so I can help parents to feel comfortable and see the benefits of mindfulness techniques. Overall, I wanted parents to work as partners in my research and understand the incredible benefits their child might encounter when participating in the mindfulness intervention.

Anticipated Results

At the completion of the 6-week research period, I anticipated seeing progress in student focus as well as increased student affect. If daily, brief mindfulness activities are implemented by the teacher, students’ focus, attention, and engagement in lessons and assignments will improve.

Chapter Four

Results/Findings

Data Collection

Working as a Title 1 teacher, the students who enter my classroom are typically functioning well-below grade level. Since becoming a Title 1 teacher three years ago, I have noticed many similarities in my students including fixed mindsets, negative feelings and emotions towards learning, and many off-task behaviors making it difficult for me to teach and them to learn. This led me to devise my research questions:

- How will completing daily, brief mindfulness activities increase attention and focus during classroom lessons and independent work time?
- How will mindfulness impact time on-task and time off-task in an elementary classroom?
- What is the effect that mindfulness will have on student behavior?

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect that daily, brief mindfulness activities such as breathing, listening, and stretching would have on my students' attention, focus, and behavior. Prior to beginning the mindfulness intervention, students completed a pre-survey (Appendix A) where they rated themselves on statements regarding their thoughts and feelings about school. After having students complete the pre-survey, I began to implement daily, 5-minute mindfulness activities prior to beginning our 55-minute math block for the day. Throughout the remaining 50 minutes of class each day, I kept track of individual student behaviors as well as tallying off-task behavior.

Impact on Student Attention and Focus

To measure students' attention and focus, I documented how many times each student was off-task during the lesson as well as independent work time. I categorized each off-task

behavior as: peer distractions, environment distractions, self-distractions, attention seeking, or avoidance to see what was causing my students to be off-task. I also coded each behavior by setting (learning spot on carpet or desk) to see where the off-task behaviors occurred most frequently. Figure 1 shows the instances each student was off-task over the course of 3 weeks of data collection. Figure 2 shows which off-task behaviors are more prevalent in my classroom.

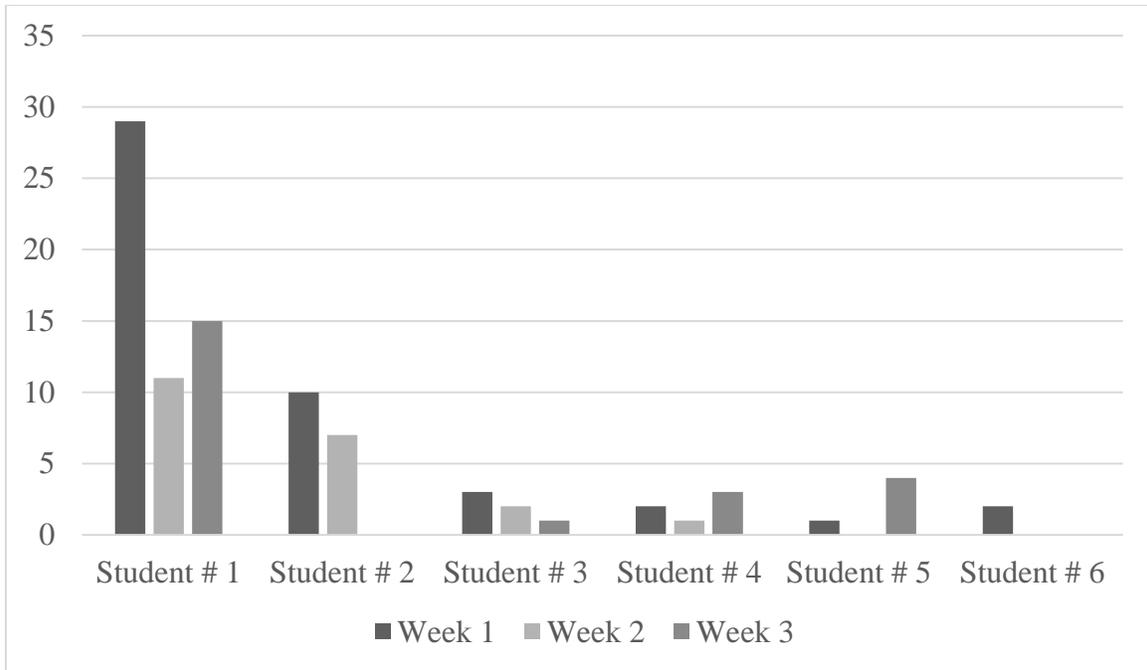


Figure 1. Instances students were off task over the 3-week data collection period

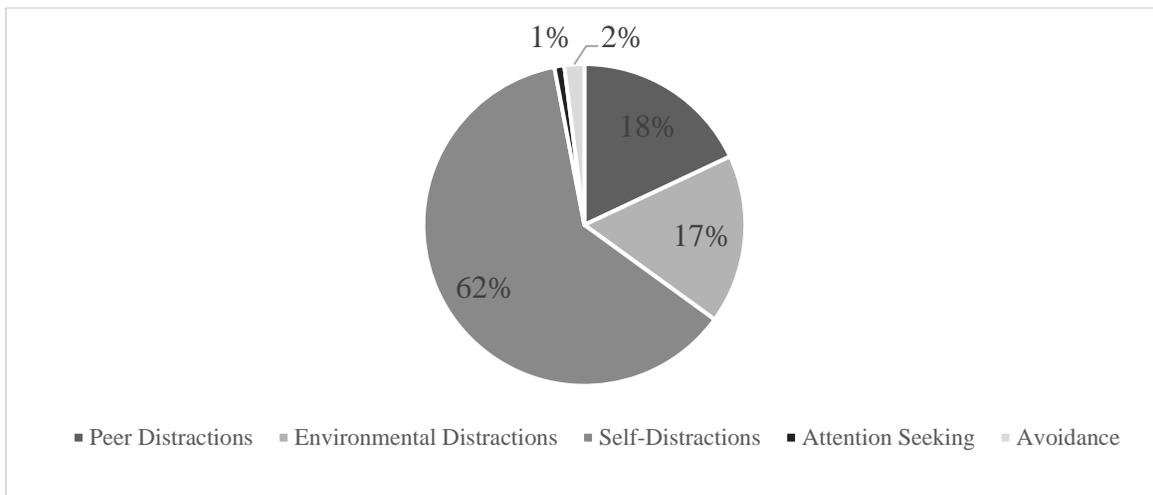


Figure 2. Percentage of each type of distraction that was observed

Impact on Student Behavior and Affect

Prior to beginning the mindfulness activities and collecting observational data, the students took the mindfulness pre-survey. At the conclusion of the 3 weeks of data collection, my students took the post-survey which included the same questions to rate their thoughts and feelings about school. I also included a new section to determine if students enjoyed the mindfulness activities and if they thought it was helping them to be more successful in school. Figures 3-6 provide the data from the survey questions that were directly related to the students’ ability to focus, stay on-task, and complete their schoolwork.

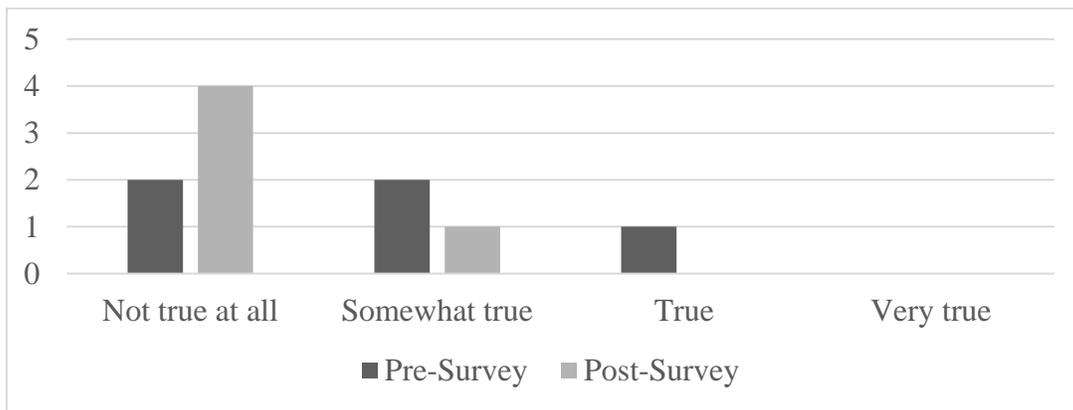


Figure 3. Shows number of student responses on pre- and post-survey for question, “I feel angry when I have trouble learning”.

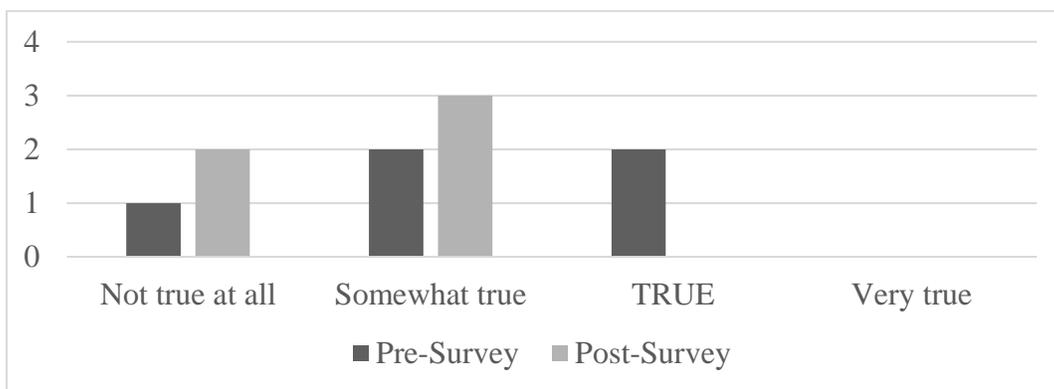


Figure 4. Shows number of student responses on pre- and post-survey for question, “It’s hard for me to pay attention.”

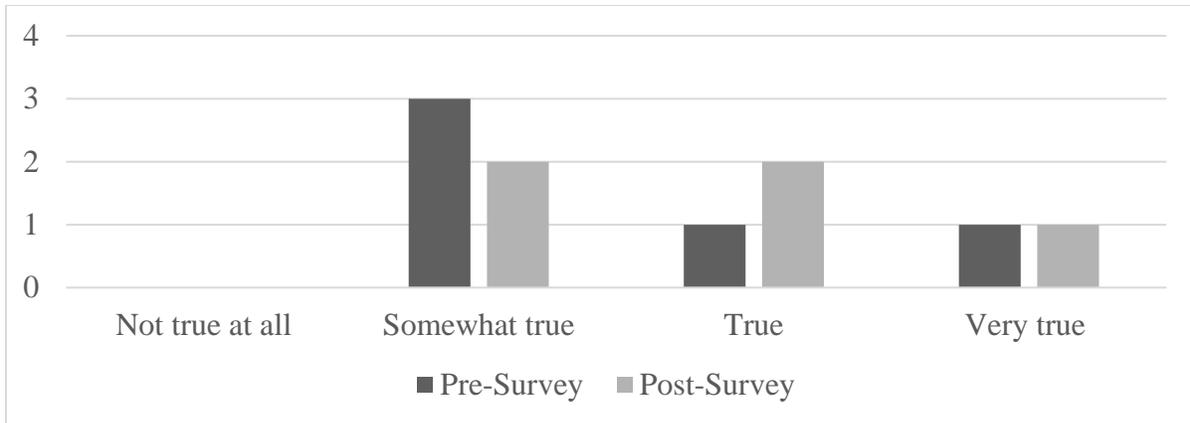


Figure 5. Shows number of student responses on pre- and post-survey for question, “I get distracted easily”.

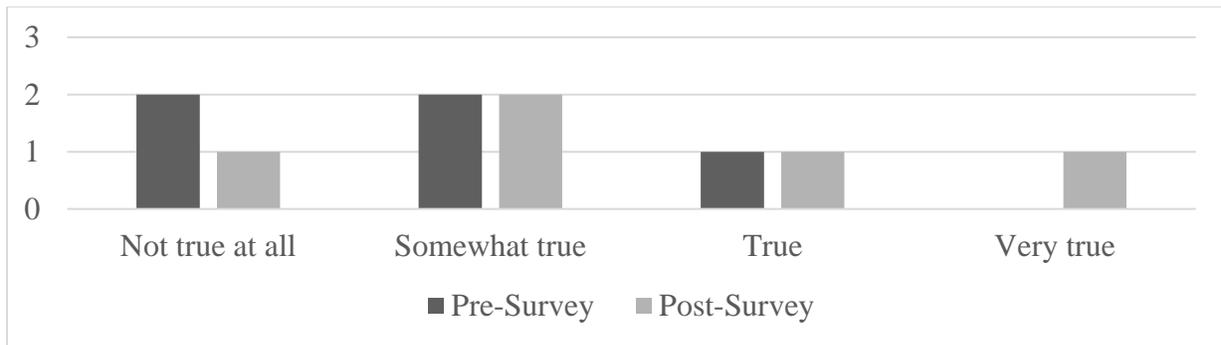


Figure 6. Shows number of student responses on pre- and post-survey for question, “It’s hard for me to finish my schoolwork”.

During the post-survey, I also had students answer several short answer questions to gauge their true feelings about the mindfulness activities we completed. The students’ responses are listed in figure 7.

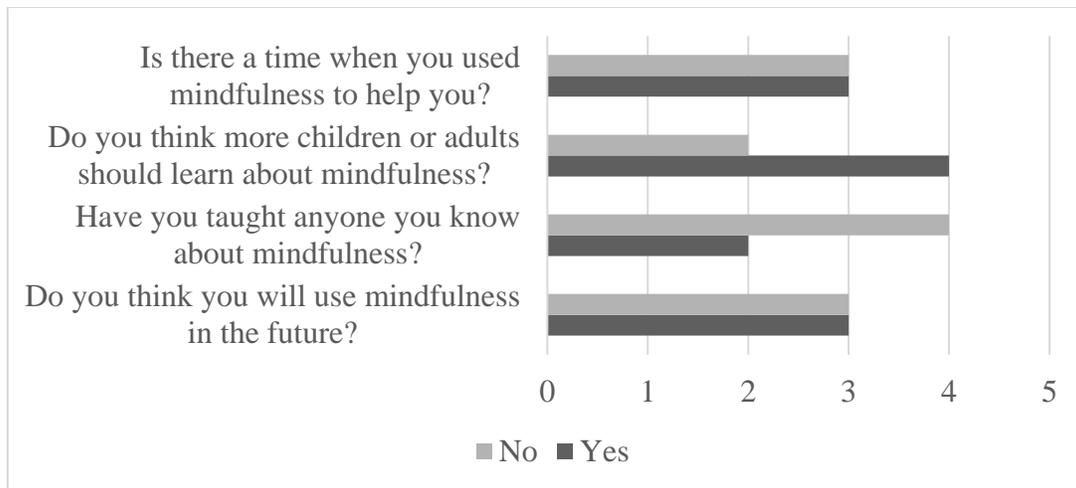


Figure 7. Shows student responses regarding students' feelings towards the importance of mindfulness

Data Analysis

As with any program, mindfulness has different effects on different students. I expected to see students demonstrating less off-task behaviors while focusing their attention on the lesson or assignment. Studies have shown that completing mindfulness activities such as breathing, stretching, or listening can have a positive impact on a students' ability to focus and regulate their behavior (Costello & Lawler, 2014). I was also hopeful that my students would learn to be more mindful during lessons and have the ability to recognize they were off-task and self-regulate their behavior. As you can see in figure 1, most of the students in this group were able to remain on-task for the majority of the 55-minute class each day. When I began my research, I was working with 8 students; however, two of the students were demonstrating high achievement which led to them exiting the Title 1 program. For this reason, I did not include their data in my final calculations. Student #1 and student #2 struggle with focus and attention due to an ADHD diagnosis. I was pleased to see that the two students with the most off-task behaviors improved

significantly from the first week to the third week that data was collected. Student #2 remained on-task for the entire last week of data collection.

Student #4 and student #5 slightly increased their time off-task in the final week of data collection. However, with such low numbers of off-task behaviors, it is difficult to say if mindfulness influenced their self-regulation. Some of my students were great at participating in the activities each day while others were not super receptive. Student #5 seemed to have a negative mindset while participating in the activities each day. The student did choose to participate, but in a very sullen manner. Student #1 needed reminders to listen and focus to complete the activities each day. I thought it was interesting that after completing each activity, the students did seem to settle in and remain sitting quietly to begin the lesson (even if they entered the room acting noisy and silly).

Figure 2 shows the percentage of each type of off-task behavior that was recorded over the 3-week span. I was a little disappointed to see that nearly 70% of my students' off-task behavior were self-distractions. It was my hope that my students would be learning how to be mindful and recognize when they are causing themselves to be off-task. It is interesting to me that they are not particularly distracted by peers or environmental distractions; but by doing things on their own that take their attention away from the lesson. Some observations of self-distractions included playing with shoelaces, unfastening velcro on shoes or boots, and pulling their masks over their faces. Student #1 struggled with self-distractions which lead to them not knowing what we were doing or how to complete the independent assignment.

Ideally, I would have liked to collect data for 4-6 weeks. I feel like to recognize if something is truly making a difference, it takes more than 3 weeks- time. At the conclusion of my research, I had 15 days of data collected which is why I grouped it into three weeks.

Unfortunately, I was quarantined with my family for one week during my study due to a pending COVID-19 test. It would also be interesting to see if students' time off-task begins to rise once the novelty of the program wears off.

Looking at the pre- and post-survey results side by side shows slight differences from week 1 to week 3. First, I would like to point out that I was only able to utilize the pre-and post-survey data for 5 of my students. I disregarded the two students who left the study due to their high achievement. I also had one student in quarantine for the first week of the study, so was unable to have her complete the pre-survey. I believe this data would be more beneficial if I were able to include more students after using mindfulness for a greater amount of time. I was pleased to notice that students reported feeling less angry when they have trouble learning as shown in figure 3. Figure 4 shows that several students felt they improved at paying attention. However, looking at figures 5 and 6 the students ranked themselves quite similar in the areas of getting distracted easily and having difficulty improving their schoolwork. It is my belief that students will continue to improve in these areas with increased learning about mindfulness.

The data in figure 7 was a bit discouraging to see. The students did seem to enjoy the activities we participated in and it did seem to calm their bodies to prepare them for learning. However, about 50% of the students responded that they would not use mindfulness in the future and that they have not used mindfulness to help them. It is my hope that with continued practice, the students would learn to use mindfulness as a helpful strategy to keep themselves on-task.

The greatest difficulty I had while collecting data was the ability to constantly monitor whether my students were on-task or not. This proved to be most difficult during the independent work time. Typically, I am busy during this time helping students who are struggling or need a quick re-teach of the lesson. It is difficult to manage both tasks at once. I

am certain I missed off-task moments when I was busy helping other students. Furthermore, I think it would have been helpful to gather baseline data prior to beginning the mindfulness intervention. My first couple of weeks with this group of students were extremely challenging which was the reason I chose this group of students to observe. I believe looking at baseline data would have given a better idea of how much growth my students made during this short period of time.

Conclusion

When looking at the data as a whole and working with these students each day, I feel as if the mindfulness activities have helped me to build positive rapport with students. I believe it helped my students to calm their bodies and minds before beginning their math lesson each day and helped them to improve their focus and attention. Ideally, I think students need more than 5-minutes of mindfulness practice each day to really learn how to be fully present in the moment. I believe when practiced consistently each day without a 5-minute time constraint, it could really make a positive impact on students who struggle to focus and stay actively engaged in lessons.

Chapter 5

Implications for Practice

Action Plan

I believe that mindfulness has a place inside classrooms. With the rising pressure and stress our students are facing due to increased workloads, less time for playing and exploring, mask wearing, being at school during a pandemic, etc., our kids need a way to calm their body and mind and learn how to live in the present moment. Mindfulness has been shown to decrease stress, improve self-regulation, and increase attention and focus. It also gives teachers an opportunity to let students know we care more about them than just getting through curriculum each day.

Even though the data did not show significant improvement for all of my students, I do believe it helped them prepare for the lesson each day and helped them to be more focused and engaged than if we had simply jumped into the lesson immediately. I plan to continue implementing mindfulness techniques not only during this group time, but my other 60-minute groups I service during the day as well. I believe it is well worth it to take a few minutes of learning time to get our minds ready to focus on the day's task.

I plan to use the information collected on the post-survey to plan my mindfulness activities each week. My students listed their favorite activities and their least favorite activities to give me an idea of what they would prefer to do. They also gave recommendations for other activities they have done in the past in other classrooms that they have enjoyed. Using student recommendations should help them to become even more engaged which will help them to experience more positive benefits.

It is also important for me to continue to refine my own mindfulness practices. My personality and work ethic drive me to always push myself hard to get things done and this is reflected in my classroom. I need to remind myself to slow down and be mindful of what is going on around me. It is easy to get sucked into the hustle and bustle of the day which can lead to stress. Slowing down and taking time to be present in the moment with my students helps me to build positive relationships as well as taking a moment to calm my own body and mind.

Plan for Sharing

Since mindfulness has the power to improve focus, increase self-regulation, and build positive relationships among students and staff, it is important to share with classroom teachers in my district the positive effects it can have. Classroom teachers have a bit more flexibility and time in their day to spend more time implementing an intervention such as this. My first step in sharing is to bring up the topic of mindfulness during our monthly PLC to provide information on how mindfulness can help our students. I am willing to share my resources as well as ideas for getting started with any teacher who might be interested.

I also plan on sharing this important work with a committee I serve on in our district called the Intervention Team. The Intervention Team works to come up with ideas to help classroom teachers when dealing with students with academic or behavioral concerns. Teachers come to our team to get intervention ideas they will take back to their classroom and try before moving forward with the referral process. Mindfulness is a tool we can use to help improve student focus and self-regulation. This might be especially useful for students experiencing behavior problems.

It is essential for staff members to learn about mindfulness and practicing on their own before implementing it with their students. I will be happy to share literature and resources with staff who might be interested in learning how mindfulness can positively affect their students.

APPENDIX A

Pre/Post Survey

Mindfulness Pre-Survey

Name: _____

Directions: Please fill out this survey as honestly as you can. Your answers will not reflect a grade for this class. Your honest answers will help me to see if mindfulness has an impact on our thoughts and feelings about school.

Rate each statement from 1-4 with 1 being not at all true and 4 being very true.

Draw an X where you rank each item.	Not true at all	Somewhat true	True	Very True
1. I feel angry when I have trouble learning.				
2. I worry about taking tests.				
3. I often feel lonely.				
4. I feel sad a lot of the time.				
5. I worry about doing well in school.				
6. I worry about finishing my work.				
7. I worry about having someone to play with at school.				
8. I feel ashamed when I make mistakes at school.				
9. I often argue with other kids.				
10. It's hard for me to pay attention.				
11. I get distracted easily.				
12. It's hard for me to finish my schoolwork.				

13. I get in trouble for talking and disturbing others.				
14. I get in trouble for fighting with other kids.				

Mindfulness Post-Survey

Name: _____

Directions: Please fill out this survey as honestly as you can. Your answers will not reflect a grade for this class. Your honest answers will help me to see if mindfulness has an impact on our thoughts and feelings about school.

Rate each statement from 1-4 with 1 being not at all true and 4 being very true.

Draw an X where you rank each item.	Not true at all	Somewhat true	True	Very True
1. I feel angry when I have trouble learning.				
2. I worry about taking tests.				
3. I often feel lonely.				
4. I feel sad a lot of the time.				
5. I worry about doing well in school.				
6. I worry about finishing my work.				
7. I worry about having someone to play with at school.				
8. I feel ashamed when I make mistakes at school.				
9. I often argue with other kids.				
10. It's hard for me to pay attention.				
11. I get distracted easily.				

12. It's hard for me to finish my schoolwork.				
13. I get in trouble for talking and disturbing others.				
14. I get in trouble for fighting with other kids.				

Please answer the following questions:

Do you think you will use mindfulness in the future?

Have you taught anyone you know about mindfulness?

Do you think more children (or adults) should learn about mindfulness?

Is there a time when you used mindfulness to help you? If yes, explain.

What is your favorite thing about mindfulness?

Is there anything you don't like about mindfulness?

Is there anything you would change about how we practice mindfulness in class? If so, explain.

Is there anything else you want me to know about mindfulness?

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