

Running Head: Wellness In Elementary Schools

Wellness In Elementary Schools

Grade 3-5

Mindfulness and guided meditations as a tool for the alleviation of disability oppression,
and to actively promote the development of inclusive communities.

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Wellness In Elementary Schools

Mindfulness and guided meditations as a tool for the alleviation of disability oppression, and to actively promote the development of inclusive communities.

Diversity, civil rights movements, technological changes, globalization, shifts in educational goals, the field of psychology and a stronger emphasis on the more holistic development of a child, are all the factors that are coming together in society and our classrooms today. Using the tenets of UDL, our goal is to use these changes and to use “innovation – emphasizing flexibility and individuality – to remake how teaching and learning happens....To take advantage of the opportunity present in the great variability of students; offering paths for those currently disenfranchised and developing the talents of all.” (Meyer, Rose, Gordon, 2014, 84)

In order to do this we will look at the spheres of wellness, educational goals and the disability oppression to determine where they intersect. The suggested program is based on this learning, is grounded in using mindfulness and guided meditations, and is used in concert with content based lesson plans to create classrooms and schools where students and teachers can “live an ethic of care in our day to day interactions” (Danforth, 2005, 96)

Charlton (1998) quotes Audre Lorde in *Sister Outsider* (1984) who says “Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy we have been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion.” (p. 77)

Our hope is that the program we are suggesting will teach students to intrinsically question the context of their thoughts and self correct oppressive behavior leading to more inclusive classrooms and a societal shift in our approach to the variability and difference that is present in the human condition.

Rationale

Wellness and Education: Where do they intersect in our world today?

Wellness is not a new concept. The term has been used in the English language since the 1600s (Miller 2005). Dunn (1961) was one of the first authors to expand upon this concept and said, "Your body should be eager for activity. Your mind should sparkle with interest. For maximum wellness, the environment should be such as to encourage you to live life to the very full." (pp., 2-3) Almost 50 years later, as Universal Design for Learning becomes a benchmark for education, British educator Ken Robinson says essentially the same thing. "The key is not to standardize education but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions." (Meyer et al., 2014, 84) What makes these comments worth noticing is that Dunn and Robinson come from fields that seldom intersect, and their comments were made almost half a century apart.

Even just a decade earlier the suggestion that elementary level students would benefit from mindfulness and that it might serve, as a disruptor might have seemed bizarre. But today's students are preparing to be part of a global society, immersed in an extremely diverse student body, and with access to technology that is changing at an extremely rapid pace. As a society we are also at crucial juncture with civil rights

movements for different immigrant populations, LGBTQ and disability rights being burning issues facing us. Additionally, researchers like Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor (2010) whose work has examined the effects of a mindfulness-based education program for children argue that there is a paradigm shift in the field of psychology. They say that over the course of the last 15 years, psychologists are moving their attention from “human illness and all the things that can go wrong in a person’s life and are beginning to bring more attention, regard and consideration to all the things that can go right in a person’s life.” (Albrecht, 2014, 31) This is notable for 2 reasons, first, since psychology and the medical model have been the foundation for disability studies and applications in school settings, and second this is the same shift that meditation and mindfulness aim to bring. Closely related, another shift in recent years has been the focus on the holistic development of the child, as San Francisco schools Superintendent Richard Carranza, says, ““The research is showing big effects on students’ performance, our new accountability standards, which we’re developing in tandem with the other big California districts, emphasize the importance of social-emotional factors in improving kids’ lives, not just academics.” (Kirp, 2014)

The point is that today wellness and educational goals do connect, and with all the changes we face it is the perfect time to innovate and use these changing ideas to address disability oppression by creating a paradigm shift in our culture.

What do we want to create? What is our destination?

Our goal is to create a school environment where the academic, social and emotional well being of students is balanced and therefore leads to “the growth of students as healthy, competent moral people.” (Noddings,1992.p.10). In order to ensure

this goal is reached, the key is the creation of appropriate lesson plans that affect real and lasting change. Therefore, we must use what mindfulness, guided meditation, education goals, and disability oppression look like today and then identify how and where they intersect to create effective curriculum.

Mindfulness and guided meditation are ancient practices and some of the earliest written records are from around 1500 BCE. (Wikipedia,2018) But in order to bring these practices into schools it is critical to keep the program secular. Therefore, we will work with how they are described in academic literature. Considered to be wellness oriented, they are “described as a natural human capacity, which involves observing, participating, and accepting each of life’s moments from a state of equilibrium or loving kindness” (Albrecht et al., 2012, 21)

Our education goals as presented by Meyer et al. (2014) emphasize that we must “go beyond the mastery of knowledge and skills to the mastery of learning itself.” (p. 84) and finally the big shift in disability studies has been the realization that although in the past,

“ Power and disability were felt in a visceral way to be mutually exclusive and ... the popular misconception is that what people with disabilities need are the following: first, to gain inspiration from a “supercrip” like Roosevelt, ... and second, like Tiny Tim to serve as an inspiration to non disabled people. Worthwhile as these symbolic roles may be, they are not the major needs of people with disabilities.... unanticipated conclusion: this population’s most urgent need was a political movement to remove social impediments. Not burdened by stigma, discrimination, or inaccessibility, many people with disabilities, like most other people, would be resourceful enough to recognize their own potential.” (Fleischer & James, 2001 2-3)

The common thread that ties the most significant ideas from mindfulness, disability studies and educational goals is that we as educators must create an environment for all of our students, where they want to learn, where stigma and discrimination have no

place, and where they can become master learners or experts and can develop an interest, purpose, motivation and most importantly strong self regulation as a learner.

Why might mindfulness and guided meditations serve this as opposed to other tools, techniques or educational resources? Must schools be involved?

We believe there are three reasons that support using a wellness component in curriculum or wellness based curriculum that would bring change in the way disability studies, ableism and a school environment interact.

First, currently “children in the United States face myriad psychological challenges, including depression, anxiety, and attention deficits. It is estimated that the prevalence among American youth of a mental disorder resulting in severe impairment is as high as 22.2%” (Britton, 2014, 263). The direct connection between this data and disability is best described by Charlton (1998) in what he lists as his third component for disability oppression – psychological internalization.

“Most people with disabilities actually come to believe they are less than normal, less capable than others. Self pity, self hate, shame and other manifestations of this process are devastating for they prevent people with disabilities from knowing their real selves, real needs and their real capabilities and from recognizing the options they in fact have.” (pp. 27)

There is a significant body of research that supports the findings that, “Mindfulness appears to strengthen foundational skills in self-regulation, support the cognitive skills needed for learning, and expand the capacity for distress tolerance.

“(Broderick and Metz, 2009, 42)

Second, Schonert-Reichel and Lawlor (2010) further argue, in line with wellness theory’s guiding principles, that introducing mindfulness skills early in a child’s life is

essential in promoting positive psychological health and preventing the development of unhealthy behaviors; with schools widely acknowledged as the major setting in which wellness enhancing activities should be undertaken. (Albrecht, 2014,31)

And finally, the authors Britton, Lepp, Niles, Rocha, Fisher and Gold (2012) conducted a study so they could find out if it was possible to cultivate this environment of caring, intrinsic motivation by simply promoting a means to reduce stress such as studying something novel or doing a project? (Research details Appendix 1) Their results had one stark finding, "Meditators were significantly less likely to develop suicidal ideation or thoughts of self-harm than controls." (Britton, 2014,263) All of this data give substantive proof that mindfulness and meditations would work as excellent disruptors in the current disability dialogue and support all students.

Are there cultural factors that make mindfulness even more important for our students?

Charlton (1998) says,

“ Cultures are not independent or static formations. They interface and interact in the everyday world with history, politics, power, economic conditions and institutions and nature. To neglect these important influences seems to miss important interstices where culture happens, is expressed, and, most important, is experienced. The point is not that one culture makes people do or think this and another that but that ideas and beliefs are informed by and in cultures and that cultures are partial expressions of a world in which the dualities of domination/subordination, superiority/inferiority, normality/abnormality are relentlessly reinforced and legitimized.” (p.26)

Keeping Charlton’s view in mind, if we look at happiness, contentment and well being research, “Terms like happiness, contentment and the good life are not reducible to cultural universals, rather they act as reflections of the values, morals and ideals of a

culture within a specific time and place. Yet the task of picking apart the various meanings and applications of these terms remains an important task for understanding the good life in modernity.” (McKenzie, 2015, 260-261) In our own cultural beliefs as a western modern society, we have a habitual pattern of taking a negative feeling and pondering on it to problem solve and take us back to the past time where we might have felt like this to understand and prevent it in the future. Cultural beliefs make us believe that this is the most effective way of finding a ‘way to solve our problems’. However, writings on Mindfulness suggest that going back to problems and focusing on them even with the best intention of trying to problem solve does not help us but rather likely to precipitate a “cascade of mental events that draws us down into a depression”. (Lea, 2015, 55) Now the issue with this isn’t the feeling we feel when life doesn’t go how we want it to or we experience events that scar us. The problem is how the mind reacts to this feeling. (Lea, 2015, 55).

Conclusion

Tying all the threads together we can confidently say that keeping our culture, political and world economy and the current needs of the disability rights movement and education goals for our students would be greatly served by incorporating mindfulness and guided meditations as part of the curriculum. The eventual long-term goal with this program is to change the context of the thought instead of the content so that we can ultimately move away from a response of fear and loathing to the differences between us and relate across those very differences as equals. (Charlton 1998)

Method

The core tenet of UDL that “Essential for some” is almost always “good for all” (Meyer et.al 2014) underlies this program and every lesson plan as each one serves students with impairment as well as others. Danforth (1995) summarizes Noddings and explains our strategy to incorporate wellness best, “emphasis is not arranging for lessons that drill children on some sort of moral skills. Her emphasis is on the difficult to define yet crucial process of developing and maintaining caring relationships between individuals.” (p.96)

Overall Objectives

Support all students

Alleviate disability oppression

Actively promote the development of inclusive communities

Reteach and reconceptualize disability

Foreseeable Limitations

Considering that the origins of wellness practices especially mindfulness and meditation are rooted in history dating back to prehistoric times and especially in religious contexts, we can anticipate a lack of school, teacher or parental support and the assumption that this program would try to train students in a religious activity. This is also the reason the program does not include any cultural, historical or religious references. Although we personally feel that it’s a disservice to students to miss out on opportunity to learn about the world, different cultures and themselves, the acceptance of the program is a higher priority.

The second challenge we then faced was creating curriculum that would be interpreted by the teachers accurately to actually guide students to go from feeling or believing that caring is important to living an ethic of caring. What we are absolutely aiming to do is steer clear of eliciting feelings of pity for their impaired peers by being cognizant of the language used.

The Program

An app that will feature

- A theme for 8 months of the school year and one teacher-training module.
- The themes have been chosen so that there is a deep connection to a fundamental issue of disability rights.
- The themes will further incorporate major events in students' lives such as, the beginning of the school year, thanksgiving, the holiday season, testing months, etc.
- Teachers will have access to an audio that combines guided meditation and mindfulness, book list that corresponds with the meditation and additional activities that further incorporate these themes into content areas like math, literacy and engage different learners using multiple means of expression.

We believe that using a free app [Apple and Android] will make the program accessible to teachers and easy to incorporate into their classrooms. It will also allow us to update audio files, book lists and activities as new resources and needs are identified.

NOTE: For the purpose of this paper we have developed the teacher training module and the lesson plan for the month of September in depth. All other lesson plans are available in Appendix 1.

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Month	Theme	Objective What Students Learn	Disability Label/ Issue It Addresses
September	Shine Bright	Strengths & Weaknesses exist in us all and we must respect this truth	Differences in ability are natural
October	My Words Have Power	Words are very powerful whether written or spoken and can give you power and strength or hurt.	Bullying
November	Be Kind	Kindness is a not only good for others but it is a wonderful way to feel good about you. Whether lending a helping hand, offering encouragement or a smile, we can make a difference in the lives of others.	Be inclusive
December	Gratitude	Practicing gratitude can increase your happiness by 25% (McCullough et al, 2002) Don't focus on what isn't happening but look at all the wondrous things you do have in life.	Don't focus on what isn't
January	Celebrate Differences	We each come into the world with our own beliefs, ideas and differences, we are also the same.	Differences are to be celebrated
March	I am Ready For the Day	Perseverance and determination are incredibly important skills that we need to teach ourselves. Frustration is normal but don't let it stop you. Although uncertainty can feel uncomfortable, it can be full of surprises and adventure	Don't let anyone get you down
April	Choices & Responsibility	Making good choices can be easy when we quiet our minds and listen to our hearts. They understand the science behind a mindfulness practice and how they can choose to make good choices.	Make smart choices and be responsible

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Appendix 1

Teacher Training Module/ Instructional Moves:

What is Mindfulness/Guided Meditation?

We practice mindfulness so that we can change the context of our thoughts, not the content.

What this means is that we are essentially working our brain muscles and teaching them to pause before we react.

Why would being mindful or meditating help?

Negative emotions can be tough for anyone to deal with. Fear and anger can hit us unexpectedly and when we do not have a prior plan for dealing with these feelings, we can be thrown off balance and react badly.

“When a 4th grader reports that she felt she “was going to die” from test anxiety, she’s telling the truth. The responses of her autonomic nervous system are the same whether she’s taking a math test or sensing actual physical danger.” – Mindful Schools

Science tells us that an impulsive reaction, triggered by emotions like fear or anger, rises up from the amygdala and hippocampus—the most ancient parts of our brain.

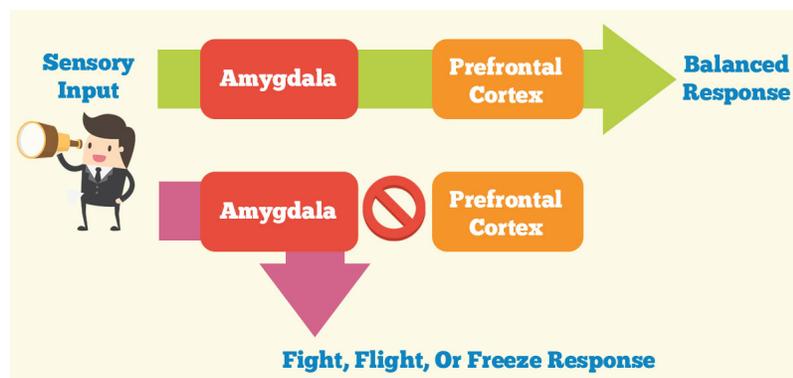
These parts evolved to respond with defensive action to threatening situations.

If we can delay this reactivity, the newer pre-frontal cortex of the brain can respond from a place of reflection and thoughtfulness. The PFC (pre-frontal cortex) is associated with maturity, including regulating emotions and behaviors and making wise decisions.

Mindfulness practice, as you may have guessed, diminishes the reactivity from the amygdala and strengthens the pre-frontal cortex.¹

How?

Scientists call this experience-dependent neuroplasticity, which means that we can shape our brains by what we do and experience. So the more we practice being calm and relaxed, the more calm and relaxed we become.



Key Points For Teachers/Facilitators

1. Keeping this in mind, and using mindfulness as a training tool, by very definition requires that there is no judgment. This means that we:
 - Do not attempt to ask students to modify how they choose to rest. Meaning do not ask them to sit up, or cross or uncross their legs, or sit or stand or lie down. The position they choose is entirely their choice as long as they can manage to have mindful minds and bodies for the entire time frame. Allow them to experiment and realize what works and what doesn't.
 - If a student is defiant, not participating or continues to act out, offer them a choice to sit silently and not participate. Allowing them to leave or go for a walk sometimes can lead to students choosing these options simply to be defiant.
 - Do not force them to close their eyes, many students feel the need to keep their eyes open owing to their personal experiences or trust issues. Allow them time and they will eventually participate.
 - If they make noises, try to speak to others or seem disengaged, walk up to them and speak to them kindly and gently and request that they respect their friends and classmates for this short time. Another option is to use a visual they could look at such as mindful minute –snow
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=8y0QzKXb_U8
 - We also do not ever place negative connotations or use mindfulness time as a punishment

2. The change in classroom atmosphere must be evident.
 - Speak in low, calm and gentle tones. Do not call out names loudly or correct them in a public manner.
 - Although we all have much to do, this time must be without activity in the class. Ask your TA's, Paraprofessionals and yourself to stay seated and participate or leave the room prior to the start of the mindful minutes.
 - The guiding sentence of each mediation which students repeat during deep relaxation is critically important and cannot should be used in context of all content whenever possible. E.g. ***I allow my light to shine with love and kindness for September. Allow students to draw their interpretation when there is free time.***

Lesson One: Introduction to Mindful Moments

(Italicized portions are actual scripts teachers can use. Regular text is notes for the teacher)

Start the school year by choosing one of the four suggested read aloud books or something from your repertoire you think would be appropriate for your particular grade and student mix.

As an initiation to this practice, invite students to a small class meeting on day one and explain what you will be doing everyday after recess. This is the perfect time to incorporate mindful moments into the day as it helps greatly with the transition from playtime to focused concentration.

Welcome to 3rd/4th/5th grade!

It must be so exciting for you to be here and I'm sure you're also all a little nervous.

I wanted to share with you a practice we will be doing after recess called mindful time.

Can anyone tell me what you think the word mindful means?

Jot down their ideas

I see so many great explanations here. So to add to your answer/ consolidate it, here is what it will mean for us as a class.

Being mindful basically means being present.

Paying attention to what is happening in the present moment. It teaches us to pay attention to many things, and we observe our emotions, our thoughts, our surroundings, in an even-minded, nonjudgmental way. We apply this same focus of attention to situations both good and bad. This is being mindful.

Our "Mindful moments" time will be right after recess when you come back to class and will be deep relaxation time, which will begin when you hear the sound of chimes and means it is time for us to find a comfortable spot. I will play an audio after the chimes are silent and we will then sit for a few minutes.

Complete silence is the goal for us during this time.

Even if you feel like this isn't something you understand right away or something you're not sure you want to participate in, I want you to have a growth mindset and try it. I am sure you will come to understand it very soon.

Lesson Two: Mindful Moments in Practice

Teacher before audio plays:

Everyone find a comfortable spot. This can be sitting in your seat, on the floor, or resting against a wall.

We will begin with the sound of a bell. Once you stop hearing it I want you to raise your hands and close your eyes so I know when it is time to begin your deep relaxation.

Once the audio beings to play please remember, there is only one voice and our goal is to bring complete silence into this room. This means obviously that there is no talking, but I also want you to be mindful of your body

I want you to observe if you feel the need to tap your hands on the table, tap your feet, do your eyes want to open and look around, do you really want to say something to your neighbor or giggle? As you notice things that you are thinking of, I want you to gently tell them to wait till this silent class time is over.

Please be respectful to your classmates and me by observing complete silence so that all of us may be able to get some deep relaxation. I would like for you to close your eyes for the next 5-7 mins but if you are absolutely unable please look towards a wall or a direction where your friends won't be distracted.

Teacher once audio is over: move ahead with the regular activities of the day.

Teacher intervention if there is student activity during the audio:

Gently repeat: I want you to observe if you feel the need to tap your hands on the table, tap your feet, do your eyes want to open and look around, do you really want to say something to your neighbor or giggle? As you notice things that you are thinking of or doing, I want you to gently tell your mind to wait till this silent class time is over.

Monthly Lesson Plan – Text Version

Month: September

Theme: “Shine Bright”

Rationale: With the start of a new school year all students enter a new grade with various levels of anxiety, new relationships to be maneuvered and an advanced workload. This is the perfect time to allow them to accept that they and their peers are learners and each of them has something special about them to be celebrated.

Objective: What should all students learn?

This theme focuses on the strengths and weaknesses we all have as individuals and how we must support each other through this as a class, school, neighborhood and global community.

Audio Script:

Bell sounds...

Once the sound is over, audio plays.

“Have you ever heard the expression “don’t hide your light under a bushel?” Well it’s been around for a long time and means don’t hide who you really are. Here your light means your uniqueness or who you really are.

Your light is your own special spark and completely unique.

Sometimes we all dim our light a little. Sometimes we are afraid to use our voice, or worry what others will say when we share our talents. Or maybe we see someone making fun of us or hear mean words of gossip. It’s normal to feel discouraged when our feelings get hurt. But its very important in those times to realize that no one has the power to dim your light but you.

Everyone’s special inner light is different, which means everyone’s strengths, opinions, talents and what brings us joy are different too. Our differences are what make each of our lives so beautiful but that also means that you might be better at doing something than someone else or someone might be better than you at something For e.g. at singing, dancing, sports.

No matter what the special talent we must never use these talents to bring others down or using our special light at making feel badly about themselves. When we allow our light to shine with kindness and love we are sharing a wonderful gift and inspiring others to do the same.

Now pause for a minute and get completely relaxed. Adjust your arms, legs or whatever part of your body needs to move. Once you’re comfy and cozy, take deep breaths. Feel your belly filling up like a balloon as you breathe in and deflating as you breathe out. Count to three as you breathe in and then to three as you breathe out.

For the next few minutes of silence and deep relaxation repeat this sentence to yourself.

I allow my light to shine with love and kindness.

When it is time to come out of the deep relaxation, you will hear the sound of the singing bowl again.

Bell Sounds and mindful moments time comes to an end for the day.

Read Aloud Book List:

The Treasure Tree, John Trent

Written for a younger learner, it details the journey of four furry friends—a lion, a golden retriever, a beaver, and an otter—and takes the reader along as the characters navigate their way through a treasure hunt. As the animals' personalities unfold, the reader quickly sees that the strength of each animal complements the weakness of another. The reader ultimately figures out that each animal is a valued member on the quest for the treasure. And though the book is written for elementary-age children, students at any stage of development could have fun trying to figure out which animal has characteristics that parallel their own. They can even take [this personality inventory](#) based on the book. (Gruener, 2016)

Gerald McBoing Boing, Dr. Seuss

The journey of Gerald who makes sounds instead of speaking and eventually shows us that everybody can have a place that they fit. Something, which seems like a flaw at first can be a strength when viewed from the right angle.

Wonder, R.J. Palacio

Seeing how Auggie is just a normal kid with a difference in how he looks and we shouldn't judge a book by its cover.

Because of Winn Dixie, Kae DiCamillo

How India Opal navigates life and makes friends after moving to Florida. Winn-Dixie often leads Opal into situations that give them opportunity to offer unconditional friendship to someone who's been feared, scarred, ignored or misunderstood.

Means of Representation

1. **The guided meditations**
2. **Quotes:** Have a quote wall or use posters to put up quotes from influential people from different communities and different fields. For E.g. If in a predominantly latin American student community use quotes from people they can identify with so you can give your students role models they can identify with.

If you used Frida Kahlo one month, use Gandhi the next, Deepak Chopra the following, Martin Luther King, Stephen Hawking, Albert Einstein etc.



"I used to think I was the strangest person in the world, but then I thought there are so many people in the world. There must be someone just like me who feels bizarre and flawed in the same ways I do. I would imagine her, and imagine she must be out there thinking of me too. Well, I hope that if you're out there and read this and know that, yes, it's true I'm here, and I'm just as strange as you."

Means of Expression

Reading & Comprehension

- Students will look up the meaning of the words from the text and related to the theme
 - o Strengths
 - o Weaknesses
 - o Unique
 - o Indomitable

Group Work

- What's Your Talent? Pair students up and they need to create a drawing, record or write about their partners talent that will be shared with the class.

Individual Work

- Use a journal to give yourself a glow and a grow every morning
- Who am I? Find a character in The Treasure Tree who you think you are most like and explain why.

The Arts

- Have month end parties where students can enact the books or a favorite scene.