Positive Education and Mindfulness in schools

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Workshop Aims

• Mindfulness Exercise

• Why adopt a positive education approach?

• Mindfulness in schools - Scientific evidence

• Putting Mindfulness into practice in schools
Introduction

• Registered Psychologist = 20 years
• University Researcher = 17 years
• Positive Psychology researcher and consultant= 10 years

• Current roles:
  – Gerry Higgins Chair in Positive Psychology
  – Director, Centre of Positive Psychology, University of Melbourne
  – Scientific Chair for the 4th World Congress in Positive Psychology (IPPA)
1. Why did you attend this workshop?

2. What interests you about the topics of
Positive Psychology is a growing field of science.

Rusk, R., & Waters, L. (2013). Tracing the size, reach, impact and breadth of positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 8*(3), 207-221

410% increase
Source: Rusk & Waters (2013)
Schools serve as an important institutional vehicle through which positive psychology can serve to promote flourishing individuals and a better society.

Why do we need positive education?

Seligman et. al. (2009)
1. As an antidote to rising depression rates

2. As a vehicle for increasing satisfaction

3. As an aid to better learning and more creative thinking

Yates (2007), Waters (2011)
4. To promote social citizenship

Waters (2014)
5. To normalise conversations about mental health
Does positive education work?


**Positive Psychology Programs increase:**

– Hope
– Gratitude
– Serenity
– Resilience
– Character strengths
– Life satisfaction
– Self acceptance
Students with high wellbeing:

- Find school more interesting
- Feel good at school
- Report that they are learning a lot
- Are eager to go to school
- Are more satisfied in their school relationships

What is mindfulness?

“Knowing what you are doing while you are doing it” Jon Kabat-Zinn

• Awareness

• Being in the present moment

• Acceptance
Mind Full, or Mindful?
Mindfulness is a structured mental process

Mind rests on stable focus

Strengthen awareness

Present

Less reactivity, better choices, and deepening experience.

Example: the breath

Mind (awareness) is more stable, clear, steady, deep

Source: Baime, 2011
Mindfulness in schools:
Richard Burnett (UK)

What is the effectiveness of meditation in mainstream schools?
School meditation programs

- Emotional wellbeing
- Social competence
- Academic achievement
A review of meditation in schools

- 15 peer reviewed studies
- N = 1,797 students (76 effect sizes calculated)
- 61% were statistically significant
  - 67% small effect sizes
  - 24% medium effect sizes
  - 9% large effect sizes

- Effective program elements
  - Duration of program
  - Frequency of practise
  - Type of Instructor
Meditation vs Mindfulness

• Meditation refers to the deliberate act of regulating attention through the observation of thoughts, emotions and body states (Black, Milam & Sussman, 2009; Zylowska et al., 2008).

• Mindfulness is deliberately focusing attention in the present moment, without judgment, to the experience that unfolds (Kabat-Zinn, 1990);
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meditation Practice</th>
<th>Intention of the Practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acem</td>
<td>Thoughts, memories, emotions and sensations emerge and pass through the objective awareness of the practitioner, without any volitional attempt to control the content.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centering Prayer</td>
<td>A method of silent prayer that prepares the practitioner to receive the gift of contemplative prayer, prayer in which the recipient experiences God's presence within them.</td>
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Academic achievement

- N studies = 9
- N sample = 1,483
- N results = 17
- 59% of the results were significant
- 65% small effects
- 42% medium effects
- 0% large effects

Social competence

- N studies = 6
- N sample = 776
- N results = 6
- 33% of the results were significant
- 83% small effects
- 0% medium effects
- 17% large effects

N studies = 3
N sample =
N results =
100% of the results were significant
25% small effects
25% medium effects
50% large effects
‘AT RISK STUDENTS’
125 low performing middle school students in a Californian Public School

Experimental
2 x 12 mins
Transcendental Meditation

Control
12 mins quiet time

Academic grades: The California Standards Test

Maths = 41% meditation group one performance level gain compared to 15% controls.

English = 37% meditation group one performance level gain compared to 17% controls.
All girl Catholic School
7th and 12th graders

Pre-tested on
- emotions,
- self acceptance
- somatic complaints (e.g. feeling over-tired, headaches, nausea)

12th graders
6 week mindfulness curriculum

7th graders
Control group

At post-test, relative to control students, the students in the mindfulness group reported:
- decreased stress
- increased calmness,
- increased relaxation,
- increased self-acceptance
Whole-system mindfulness?

- Campion & Rocco (2009)

- A mindfulness programme conducted across 31 Catholic Schools which engaged more than 10,000 students aged between 5-18 years.

- Semi structured interviews with individuals and groups of students, staff and parents were conducted as a preliminary assessment of the program
What is mindfulness?

Student reports

• Less anger
• Better stress management
• Feeling more relaxed
• Less stressed about exams

Teacher reports

• Increased concentration in class room
• Neater classwork
• More co-operation in the classroom and the school yard
• Calmer students
What the students said

“You are a lot more relaxed afterwards, you get to clear your mind and it calms you down if you are a bit angry or stressed or something”

“Meditation gives you a chance to cool down and to think of asking them to say sorry instead of hurting them

“You are more concentrated, but your not hyper and stuff, you are just more focusing”
What the teachers said

I see that now when they are in confrontation... you say ‘stop, take a couple of deep breaths’ and they can do it and then we can actually talk about the situation rather than me being the boxing referee”

“I am a lot calmer and accepting of things that happen to me”
School meditation programs

- Emotional wellbeing
- Social competence
- Academic achievement
The School-Based Meditation Model

School meditation programs

Improved cognitive functioning

Improved emotional regulation

Emotional wellbeing

Social competence

Academic achievement
Meditation/Mindfulness Activities

- Mindful walking
- Relaxation Exercises & scripts
- Prayer
- Visual stimuli e.g. the dancer; 3-D art on line
- Sensory stimuli: Feathers, light, heat, seats
- Mindful eating
- Breathing exercises
- Art
- Music
Meditation/Mindfulness Apps

- LiveHappy
- Meditator
- Mindfulness
- Pranayama – universal
- Smiling minds
Meditation/Mindfulness programs

- Mindfulness in Schools Project, DotB (England)
- Mindful Schools (USA)
- MindUp (USA)
- Learning to Breath (USA)
- Mindful Education (Canada)
- The Mindfulness Language (Israel)
- The Alice Project (India)
Mindfulness Programs
1. For into teams

2. Brainstorm as many ways as you can think of to increase a more mindful culture in schools.

3. What changes and resources would you need to successfully implement your ideas listed in step 2 above?
Sharing the benefits of mindfulness?

- Parkdale school, Oakland, USA
- Emerson Elementary, Oakland USA
Mindful Schools
A Community Outreach Program of Park Day School

Website: www.MindfulSchools.org
Email: info@MindfulSchools.org
Take home insights

• Please record three insights that you will take back to school from this workshop

1) 

2) 

3)