ABSTRACT

The myriad of benefits from the ancient practices of mindfulness have received growing recognition in the West over the last 20 years. Research in the areas of neuroscience, psychology, healthcare and education have all found positive results after training in mindfulness techniques. The first stage of this research will compare teachers self-reported levels of well-being. The second stage of this research will be a case study exploring teachers’ perceptions of mindfulness practices within their classroom. The final stage of this research will explore the potential benefit of including content on mindfulness in teacher preparation programs, as a method of incorporating such practices in schools.

THEORY

This study will use transformative educational theory as a framework for inquiry. The theory of transformative education is based on analytical or depth psychology, which incorporates the ideas of Jungian psychology by using symbols, archetypes and myths to reach beyond the conscious mind into the subconscious (Boyd & Meyers, 1988). These techniques bring us closer to the pure experience of contemplative practices. Transformative education is psychosocial in nature and incorporates the intuitive, imagination and the extraordinary (Taylor, 1998). For Boyd, transformative education is an inner journey of individuation and a deeper understanding of one’s inner self and the development of a greater sense of self-responsibility (Boyd, 1991). This will be the lens through which this research is conducted.

RESEARCH DESIGN STUDY 1

Critical Question

How does practicing teachers self-report their levels of well-being? What is the relationship between well-being and self-reported levels of mindfulness among practicing teachers?

Context & Participants

In a longitudinal study of 90 practicing teachers in the state of Washington County, recent research suggests that mindfulness practice leads to an increased sense of well-being. This has strong implications for education since teachers who well-being can have a direct effect on their students well-being (McCullum & Price, 2010). Therefore, there is a need to explore the relationship between practicing teachers’ levels of mindfulness and their levels of well-being in order to contribute to this emerging field of research.

What Data Will Be Collected

The Five Facets of Mindfulness Scale or FMFM (Baer et al. 2006) evaluates self-reported levels of observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging and non-reacting and will be used as the instrument for this study. In order to measure well-being in relation to their physical, mental and social well-being, the Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System or PROMIS scale will also be administered to participants. Both of these instruments have been widely used and are considered valid and reliable. The shortened versions of each of these scales will be send to participants via email.

How Data Will Be Analyzed

SPSS will be used to identify descriptive statistics and to perform T-tests in order to compare levels of well-being to levels of well-being among practicing teachers.

From Doing Well to Being Well: Embedding Mindfulness Practices in Education

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ABSTRACT

A qualitative case study approach will be used to address RQ 2: What are teachers experiences with mindfulness practices in schools?

Context & Participants

This study looks at the impact of mindfulness on educational practice in the context of individual teachers who already have their own personal mindfulness practices. This study will investigate the experiences of 2-3 teachers who are currently incorporating mindfulness practices in their classrooms.

What Data Will Be Collected

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with participants for this study. Classroom observations will be conducted as well as a review of the mindfulness curriculum being implemented. The FFMQ and PROMIS scales will also be administered to the participants in order to gain additional data for triangulation.

How Data Will Be Analyzed

Data will be analyzed in four stages. First, big ideas from interviews and observations will be identified. Next, data will be unid. After dividing information into units, those units will be categorized. Finally, general themes will be identified as how the categories support these themes (Vaughn et al., 1996). Individual statements, theory related to the literature and intuition will also aid in the analysis and interpretation of findings.

KEY LITERATURE FRAMING THIS PROJECT

The study will focus on Taylor, 1998). For Boyd, transformative education is an inner journey of individuation and a deeper understanding of one’s inner self and the development of a greater sense of self-responsibility (Boyd, 1991). This will be the lens through which this research is conducted.

John Kabat-Zinn (1994) defined mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (p. 4).

Mindfulness is a natural human capacity and it can be cultivated through meditation and contemplation, but also through simply paying attention to our everyday activities, such as, listening, walking, eating, gardening and even cleaning as described by Kabat-Zinn (1994).

Mindfulness training physically changes our brain. After attending an eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) training, researchers found increased grey matter in the hippocampus, the area of the brain that has to do with learning and memory, grey matter increases in the amygdala, the area of the brain related to emotions and stress. They also found that activity in the prefrontal cortex, the area related to higher level thinking, become heightened after mindfulness training (Hozel et al., 2013).

Lazar et al. (2005) found that after 8 weeks of mindfulness training, participants had changes in gray matter concentration in brain regions involved in perspective taking, emotional regulation, self-referential processing, and learning and memory processing. In addition, this study also found reduced activity in the amygdala, the area of the brain associated with emotions and stress. They also found heightened activity in the prefrontal cortex, the area related to higher level thinking, became heightened after mindfulness training (Hozel et al., 2013).

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Neurobiologist Daniel Siegel has identified nine specific ways that mindfulness contributes to improved brain function and interpersonal well-being to include: regulation, attuned communication, emotional balance, fear extinction or fear modulation, response flexibility, insight, empathy, and intuition (Siegel, 2009). He argues that mindfulness practices are important for healthy brain function and encourages us to incorporate them into our daily routines as a form of “brain hygiene.”

Improving teacher well-being, reducing their stress and increasing their ability to self-regulate could have profound impact on educational practice. Mindfulness practices support the ability to consciously respond, rather than impulsively react, to daily demands of life (Siegel, 2009). Responding rather than reacting is a crucial skill for teachers who are constantly interacting with students often in high stress environments.

Abrecht et al. (2012) conducted a literature review of mindfulness in education that looks specifically at teacher practice. Despite only finding a few studies in this area, initial findings were positive. Benefits included reducing teachers stress levels, increasing self-esteem, improvement in classroom behavior, self regulation and improving brain function and interpersonal relationships. The authors concluded by arguing for mindfulness training as crucial part of teacher development.

Social emotional competence is an essential component to teaching, however this is typically not taught in pre-service teacher training or offered as continuing education for practicing teachers (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In addition, teachers are not taught to deal with the stress associated with the classroom. This study argues that mindfulness practices embedded within their preparation programs.

A meta-analysis by McKeeljhn et al. (2012) also suggests mindfulness practices are an antedote to teacher burn out. This article explored the ideas of direct vs. indirectly teaching mindfulness to students, suggesting that indirectly teaching mindfulness, and mindfulness practices indirectly influence their students in beneficial ways. The authors argue that teachers’ development of their own practice create a more sustainable approach and a greater benefit to the education system as a whole.

A qualitative study by Reppetti (2010) examined the perspectives of college students who described mindfulness practices as refreshing, empowering and transformative. Colman et al. (2011) found that incorporating these practices into their courses increases students’ cultural sensitivity and appreciation for diversity, as first person experiences rather than simply intellectual ideas. These findings suggest that incorporating mindfulness practices into teacher preparation programs could have far reaching effects well beyond the classroom.

The theme running throughout the literature suggests that in order to teach mindfulness practices to students, teachers must establish their own practices first, “training teachers to embody mindfulness by developing a foundation of personal practice, creates a wider and more sustainable benefit to the system of education” (McKeeljhn et al., 2012, p. 8). The big question then is how to achieve this? A gap exists in the literature when looking at studies of mindfulness training among both preservice teachers and teachers practicing, indicating the strong need for further research in this area.

KEY LITERATURE FRAMING THIS PROJECT (cont’d)

REFERENCES


