The Effects of Meditation/Mindfulness on Elementary Students in Crisis

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The Effects of Meditation/Mindfulness on Elementary Students in Crisis
by

Nicole C. Bixler

An Abstract of a Project
in
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

May 2018

Buffalo State
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies
ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

The Effects of Meditation/Mindfulness on Elementary Students in Crisis. This project explores the effects that meditation and mindfulness practices have on elementary students in crisis. Changing the old methods used during the Time Away period, students will have the opportunity to utilize, explore, and take new risks while they experience the innovative opportunities to help cope with their stress and anxiety. The stressors that occur in school or in their personal life affect their performances and quality of life in school. The ultimate outcome from integrating new therapeutic methods is for student to use creative thinking to help create positive behavioral outcomes.

*Keywords:* Meditation, Mindfulness, Therapeutic Approaches, Time Away

5/09/2018
Date
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__________________________                    ______________________________
Dr. Cyndi Burnett
Associate Professor

5/9/2018

Nicole C. Bixler
Graduate Student
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I would like to thank my Mom, Dad, and sister, who have been here every step of the way. For always being here to listen to my visions on how I can change the future for my students. You have never doubted my abilities and always shared encouraging words to help keep me going.

Thank you to my boyfriend Jay, you have been here for all the tears and all the smiles. I could not have pushed myself without the constant reminders from you that I could do this.

Thank you to my main girls, Ashley, Tina, and Sara, who have listened to my thoughts, ideas, and vision throughout this whole program. The continuous support from all of you pushed me past any boundaries I could ever imagine.

Finally, thank you to Cyndi Burnett for believing in my project. You have been there to answer any questions or concerns I had, even if I did it quite often. I believe we had a shared vision and without your positive and encouraging words I could not have done this.
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SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Purpose and Description

The purpose of this Master’s project is to observe the effect that meditation, mindfulness, and a calming environment can have on the behavioral outcomes of students who are in crisis. By reworking old methods that have been in place at the school I work for, I am hoping to integrate more modern therapeutic approaches for the students to work through when they are upset. This will be done using meditation and a new calming/therapeutic space for students to use.

Throughout this process I will be utilizing a facet of meditation techniques and mindfulness practices. Both will be integrated in lessons and used in the meditation room for students in crisis. The following definitions have helped guide this study:

- Ritchhart and Perkins (2000) defined mindfulness as, “a facilitative state that promotes increased creativity, flexibility, and use of information, as well as memory and retention. It is an enabling state in which individuals tend to feel more in control of their lives” (p. 29).

- Weizsäcker (2014) defined meditation as, “more than just physical relaxation for it engages the mind as well as relaxing the body. It is often regarded as heightened state of conscious awareness- a state of mind such as a state of inner peace, of stillness or silence, of union, of oneness” (p. 1).

My main goal is to understand what techniques will help students manage their stress and feelings during a time of crisis so that it produces positive behavioral outcomes. I want to push the boundaries that have been set by the school that will allow for change by both the teachers and students. I want to be aware of the student’s emotions
throughout this period of change and understand that change might not be easy for these students. I also want to stress the importance of having an open mind for the teachers and myself, knowing that this new therapeutic technique may not bring the results we are looking for.

**Rationale for Section**

Last semester there was an opportunity to create an Instagram feed that allowed students to share articles and events that pertained to the creative thinking world. While I searched for things to share, I came across an article of a school that experimented with meditation techniques with students who constantly received after school detention. After reading and sharing about it, I thought about all of the positive effects it had on their students and began to think of ways I could incorporate these strategies into my classroom.

The population of students that attend the school I work at are a mix of Emotionally Disturbed (ED) students and students with Special Needs. Throughout the day, each classroom will usually have a student who goes into crisis due to a variety of reasons. Students can become emotionally triggered by another student, teacher, or even by a subject that they do not like. When students go into crisis, the schools policy is to ask the student to remove themselves from the rest of the class and go to the designated “Time Away” area. This area is located in the corner of the classroom where the student is asked to face the wall with their hands to their sides and not to speak. This time “allows” the students to calm down on their own, however, 95% of the time the results from this method produce negative reactions rather than positive ones. This method never
really addresses the emotions the student is feeling and also does not teach them self-calming strategies.

Eliminating “Time Away” and replacing it with a new therapeutic approach is what I believe will add to the quality of life for both teachers and students. Over the course of 6 weeks, students will learn new approaches for calming down when they are in crisis. Students will be taught different breathing techniques and yoga/meditation strategies. Once students are able to do these techniques by themselves they will also be introduced to a new calming space for them to go to instead of the designated corner in the room. A room will be set up for one student at a time to use where dim lighting, soothing music, weighted blanket, lavender diffuser, and a bean bag chair can be used to help aide in calming the student down. In this room, the student will have access to a yoga mat, posters to help assist them through their feelings and a variety of therapeutic anti-stress coloring books.

My goal is to make sure the students know that their feelings are valid and that there are different opportunities for them to have a better and more positive outcome by engaging in these meditation techniques.

SECTION TWO: PERTINENT LITERATURE

Introduction

Many elements that have been incorporated into my Master’s project reflect the research and information gathered from the following literature review. Decisions made throughout this process during the creation of lessons, as well as the construction of the meditation room contain essentials from these scholarly journal articles and books.
Each section throughout this literature review highlights information that was chosen to build a more stable and effective therapeutic environment and approach. The categories reflect the importance each had on the development and structure for this project, including, mindfulness, meditation, yoga, and therapeutic calming tools.

**Mindfulness**

Stress, anxiety or fear can have a paralyzing grip on one's mind. However, a person who is able to relax their mind can free themselves from these negative holds. The students who I have observed in this Master’s project have had many stressors from their personal lives as well as ones brought on by school related experiences. Because of these experiences, they have negatively impacted their performance in school when it comes to being able to think creativity, as well as make positive decisions.

The way that our schools are constructed make it very difficult for students to have any down time, where their mind and body can take a break and relax. When we don’t provide time for such breaks to happen throughout the day, a student’s stress and anxiety has the opportunity to build up until they break, resulting in negative actions and bad behaviors. Orr (2012) explained that, “a mind under such conditions as stress or fear is apt to “freeze” and not even be able to remember let alone be creative” (p. 82). Because there are negative effects to our brain when we are under stress, integrating mindfulness practices in the classroom and meditation room can allow students the opportunity to refocus their thoughts, make better decisions, and allow more time for creative thinking. Orr (2012) believed that, “mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally, and that it nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality” (p. 81).
A study done by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003), examined the effects that “Mindful Breathing” exercises had on his lower level college course. He began each class with two minutes of mindful breathing in conjunction with no electronics, such as cell phones. His findings over the course of the semester showed that “students are responding well and do seem more calm and focused. In fact, they objected when I failed to have our practice before the midterm test” (p. 81). Small studies like this with college students shows that there are benefits to incorporating small instances of mindfulness practices throughout the school day.

**Meditation**

A school-based study conducted by Barnes et al. (2003) assessed the effects that meditation had on African American students to see if this practice would reduce stress and study what effects it would have on student’s behavioral management (p. 154). The students who participated in this study were instructed to practice meditation for fifteen minutes twice a day for four-months. Wisner, Jones, and Gwin (2003) study found that “students in the meditation intervention group showed significant decreases in days absent from school, decreases in rule violations, and fewer days of suspension from school” (p. 154). The group of students who participated in this study showed the same characteristics and actions of the students who attend my school. Because the students who attend my school have been sent here for their behavioral issues, meditation practices seemed to be a factor that could contribute greatly to more positive actions. As stated in the article, Wisner et al. (2003) explained that, “students experience high levels of stressful life circumstances, physical or emotional health concerns, learning problems
that involve difficulty paying attention or concentrating, or low self-esteem may be particularly helped by this type of intervention” (p. 154).

According to Barnes, Bauza, and Treiber (2003), “self reported feelings of anger have shown to be predictive of aggression in youth. The escalating prevalence of anger and violence in youth has been associated in part with increased levels of anxiety and stress” (p. 2). Transcendental Meditation (TM) programs have been studied and researched as a form of behavioral stress reduction that has shown improvement in school related behaviors in youth. These studies conducted by Barnes, Bauza, and Treiber explained that (2003), “TM produces improvements in mental health, including reduction of various forms of psychological distress, such as depression, anxiety, hostility, and emotional instability” (p. 2). Students who participated in the four-month, long study engaged in 15-minute group meditation sessions as well as individual meditation sessions at home. The data that was collected from both in school sessions and out of school sessions was recorded using a self-reporting participation card. After the four months the study concluded that there was a decrease in absentee periods, rule infractions and suspensions.

Students that will be participating in my Master’s project have shown signs of aggression and anxiety due to situations in school as well as situations out of school. Most crises the students go through have some form of physical aggression due to the feelings they are going through. Because of this, most times students are placed in restraints to protect not only themselves from harm but also the students around them and teachers. Restraints are done by teachers who have gone through Therapeutic Crises Intervention training (TCI). Unfortunately, this method does not have any long-term
positive effects for both the student and teacher. Meditation however, has been studied and shown to have the long-term positive effects that I believe my students could benefit from. Meditation practices throughout this Master’s project will be implemented not only in the meditation room but also in the classrooms throughout the day.

Yoga

Most educators understand that not every student learns the same. If we don’t begin to find ways to adapt lesson plans or incorporate new strategies, these students who don’t “fit” the mold our educational system has set up the anxiety and stress may lead students to exhibit negative behaviors. There are many ways to address these concerns, one being a therapeutic approach. Yoga, which addresses many areas of a student’s wellness such as the physical, mental, and emotional aspects, also provides a different way from children to learn. According to Harper (2010), “academic skills can be combined with engaging and fun activities, music, movement, and storytelling that allow students to learn in a holistic way that is accessible to all learning styles” (p. 102).

Harper found that (2010):

- Yoga gives students a framework for processing and handling their emotions, helping to defuse anger and stress. Improved emotional regulation and focus can increase students’ ability to work independently and productively, despite the wide variety of environmental and personal distractions that surround them. (p. 101)

- Yoga is one avenue the students who attend my school could benefit from when feelings of anxiety and stress begin to mount. The meditation room created will have a corner specifically set up for yoga practices, where visuals will help aide in different
yoga positions and breathing exercises. Yoga may not be a typical way to teach students new material but it may help clear the minds for new ways of thinking so that learning material can be a lot less stressful.

**Therapeutic Calming Tools**

When students begin to work through a crisis situation, more than one approach is taken to help aide in a positive outcome, because of this, therapeutic calming tools are an added approach. Mullen et al. (2008) explained, “When used in an individualized manner, the weighted blanket appears to facilitate the ability to feel safe, comforted, and grounded in the world” (p. 66). Some of the students who attend the school that I work at have learning disabilities such as Mild Autism, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), and ADHD. Because of the population of students with these learning disabilities, a weighted blanket has been a source of comfort for the students when upset. Mullen et al. (2008) explained

Although it is well established that no one therapeutic tool is helpful to all consumers, the use of the weighted blanket as a prevention and/or crisis intervention tool, classifies as a primary and secondary crisis prevention approach, which may ultimately help to decrease the need for the is of restraint and seclusion. (p. 67)

**Lighting:** According to Wilmes, Harrington, Kohler-Evans, and Sumpter (2008), “each color has its own wavelength and affects our bodies and brains differently” (p. 661). Colors can also affect students’ emotions. Red is a color that excites the brain, it can raise a persons blood pressure, pulse rate and respiration, where as the color blue seems to have the opposite effect, lowing ones blood pressure and pulse rate. The color
blue is considered a tranquil color and has been seen to be effective in calming hyperactive students in the classroom.

When I began to consider what lighting would be most useful in the meditation room, I researched how color and lighting could affect a student during crisis. Since the meditation room had no windows for daylight lighting, a lava lamp and a light up diffuser became the source of light. I choose a lava lamp that had greens and blues and a diffuser that could be set to also green and blue as my source of light because dark colors lower stress and elicit feelings of peacefulness.

**Smell:** Wilmes, Harrington, Kohler-Evans, and Sumpter (2008), explained that, “the use of aromas produces similar effects as music in the learning environment. Both can energize, set or change a mood, relax, reinforce memory, and make the surroundings more pleasant and welcoming” (p. 664). Lavender essential oils have been linked to reducing stress in students when inhaled through the nostrils. The use of an essential oil diffuser had two purposes in the meditation room, one was the use of a calming light source and the second was the use of diffusing the light smell of lavender to reduce and soothe stress.

**Bibliography**


Beauchemin, J., Hutchins, T. L., & Patterson, F. (2008). Mindfulness meditation may lessen anxiety, promote social skills, and improve academic performance among


**SECTION THREE: PROCESS PLAN**

**Goals**

Throughout this project, there are many goals that I would like to achieve for both my students and myself as well. First, I want to integrate more mindfulness approaches
throughout the school day to refocus students thinking. Second, I want to create a therapeutic meditation room for students to utilize when they begin to go into crisis due to stress, anxiety, or personal feelings. Third, I want my students to use deep breathing, meditation and yoga techniques that have been taught and practiced to help calm down during a crisis situation. Finally, I want my students to recall the deep breathing and meditation techniques to help aide in self-regulating their feelings during crisis situations that may happen outside of educational system.

**Project Timeline**

Prior to week one of this project, I reflected on some of the challenges that my school faces on a daily basis. The one that stood out to me was our use of Time Away and the negative effects it is having on our kids. I began to focus on breaking down the steps and procedures for Time Away and started generating ideas to help solve the problems. After diverging and converging, I concluded that creating a meditation room and incorporating deep breathing exercises and mindfulness skills in the classroom could help prevent using the Time Away space.

**Week One: Planning Period**

- Discussing the problem (Time Away)
- Generate ideas using Brainstorming to help solve the problem
- Creating lesson plans based on meditation and mindfulness

**Week Two: Set Up/Collection of Information**

- Research on calming tools
- Research on therapeutic spaces
- Gathering information and collecting items/visual posters for the meditation room
Week Three:

- Teaching lessons to students on how to incorporate mindfulness into their daily routines at school
- Teaching lessons to students on meditation techniques and deep breathing exercises they may use in the calming environment
- Collaborating with the school counselor on group counseling lessons that incorporate yoga and deep breathing

Week Four:

- Introducing students to the meditation room
- Explaining how to use it
- Going over what calming tools they may choose from to help when in the meditation room
- Using GoNoodle breathing exercises and stretches with students

Week Five and Six:

- Observing the outcomes of students behaviors when using mindfulness/meditation during class time as well as in the meditation room
- Listening to students suggestions to better the new approach
- Gathering observations on how many students utilize the meditation room verses Time Away area
- Creating action plans based on observations and suggestions to ensure that new therapeutic techniques are being used
**Timeline Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Time to Complete</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>● Planning Period</td>
<td>10 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/12/18-2/19/18</td>
<td><strong>Concept Paper</strong></td>
<td>Combined hours: 10 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>● Set up /Collection of information</td>
<td>10 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>● Teaching lesson on meditation, mindfulness, deep breathing and yoga.</td>
<td>10 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>● Introduction to meditation room</td>
<td>10 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Rules for room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Students choose what calming tools they would like to utilize</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● GoNoodle exercises</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5&amp;6</td>
<td>● Observing behavioral outcomes</td>
<td>30 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Gathering observations from teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Observing students using the meditation room/breathing exercises</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Creating an action plan to extend the therapeutic techniques</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Week</td>
<td>Research: 4 days a week through the 6 weeks</td>
<td>4 hours per week (24 hours total)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Week</td>
<td>Project write up</td>
<td>3 hours per week (18 hours total)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every Week</td>
<td>Planning and Creating: posters, visual aides, room set up</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
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**Total hours: 130 hrs.**

**SECTION FOUR: OUTCOMES**

**Introduction**

This section reveals the outcomes of integrating the meditation room as a place for crisis situations, behavioral outcomes, mindfulness/meditation activities, as well as GoNoodle activities to help with stress and anxiety. The outcomes from this project are based on the observations from the students who participated.

**Creation of Meditation Room**

**Collection of Items**
Before this project, I had never set up a meditation room, so I felt as though I needed to research what needed to be incorporated while thinking of my students’ needs. Once I gathered my data from research articles, I reached out to people on Facebook to see if they had any of the items I had listed. Many people, such as family and friends, donated items. I also discussed with both the Physical Therapist, Art Therapist, and Occupational Therapist on things they believed would be beneficial for students when they are in crisis.

**Lighting:**

- Essential Oil Diffuser
- Lava Lamp
- Christmas Lights

**Seating:**

- Three different types of bean bag chairs
- Large rug
- Plastic seat

**Calming tools:**

- Play-Doh
- Coloring books
- Sensory bottles
- Stuffed animals
- Fidget spinner
- Stress ball
- Yoga mat
• Mermaid pillow

Visuals:
• Yoga poses for children
• Meditation breathing activity
• Breathing reminder on the wall “Breath in…and out”
• Sensory star activities

Extras:
• CD player
• Meditation Music

Set-up

Clean Slate

While the students were being introduced to this project, I started to clear out the space that would be used for the meditation room. The room that I was using was a storage room where random items had been placed such as extra paper, tables, chairs, and clothes for the students. Once all the items had been cleared, I swept and mopped the floors so that it was clean for the students to practice their yoga or meditation. Unfortunately, there were items that had to stay such as the sink area (could not demo that out) and the microwave.
Storage room that was used for the meditation room

Room Transformation

Once there was a clean slate, I sat in the middle of the empty room and visualized where my items would best go. Once I had a clear vision, I started to bring in items one by one. I started with covering the sink area with two see through pink curtains to sort of hide what was there. I brought in the large blue rug to soften the floor. Two beanbag chairs were placed in one corner and the third chair was placed in the opposite corner. This chair was a structured beanbag chair, but definitely softer than their classroom plastic chairs. The other two beanbags were floppy and were placed in other areas of the room. I then positioned a plastic chair opposite of the beanbag chair for the adult who
would be in the room with the student who is in crisis or even if the student wanted to sit in it.

Once seating was figured out, I set up the yoga corner with a blue yoga mat and placed cartoon visuals of different poses the students could try. These visuals helped the students who did not know what yoga poses to do and also helped show them what it should look like. Next to the yoga area, I plugged in the essential oils diffuser. This had multiple purposes, one to make the room smell better, two to help with stress (due to the lavender smell), and three to be a calming light source.

The next step was to add the meditation breathing activities to help as a visual aide when students find they need a breathing exercise. I also created a saying to help as a reminder to “Breathe in… and out”. Other visuals around the room included our sensory star wall. These posters were there to help students when they needed a physical activity that would help calm their anxiety, stress, or negative feelings.

Located on the shelves were different calming tools the students could utilize. I wanted to make sure there was a wide variety so that everyone’s needs were met. On the top shelf was the lava lamp; this was used as a visual calming tool as well as another calming light source. Next to that, was the fidget spinner, tissues, and the CD player, which was on low and constantly played calming meditation music. The shelf below, which was labeled Drawing tool, held different drawing activities. There were blank sheets of paper so students could draw whatever they were feeling. Also under that was a clipboard so the students could draw wherever they wanted to. There were also two different zentangle books they could choose from as well as two sets of markers. On the last shelf was the Play-Doh and Play-Doh sheet so they could use it on the carpet. At the
end of that shelf were sensory bottles that two of the classes made. Each student in the
class learned what a sensory bottle was and why it could help during crisis situation. The
students were able to pick any color dye they wanted as well as different shapes and sizes
of beads to add to the bottle. Both class teacher names were labeled so the students could
easily grab their bottles when needed.

Another calming tool the students used was stuffed animals. I put all different
kinds in a cloth bin; students could choose whichever one they wanted during their time
for self-calming.

The last part of creating the room was what was on the back of the door. This
element seemed so small but was very helpful. Students were introduced to the
meditation room class by class after everything was set up. I explained what everything’s
purpose was and went over every calming tool that was in the room. For about five
minutes, I allowed the students to look around and use some of the tools. Once the time
was up, I went around one by one and asked what two calming tools the student thought
would help them out the most when they began to feel upset. Each student picked two.
Once I had the data from every class, I created a sheet with the teachers’ name, students’
names, and what tools they choose. I would like to mention, however, the tools the
students chose did not mean they could not use something else if those tools weren’t
helping them. I created this list so that when a student was in crisis the student could look
at the sheet and know which ones they chose. This helped by getting the student to start
using the tool right away, rather than play around with different tools. It also eliminated
any stress by being there as visual reminders of what they choose rather than having them
try to remember what tools they picked.
Behavioral Outcomes

Based solely on the meditation room, there were positive outcomes with 100% of the students who went in there during a crisis situation. I was able to sit in with many students when they were in crisis and observed how they interacted with the room. Below are some of the observations captured.

Observations:

*Student A:* Upset he could not spell a word, went into crisis over situation.

Time: 10:15-10:25

Calming tool: Sat in structured beanbag chair and played with the mermaid pillow.
I asked the student if he would like to use the meditation room, he responded with a head nod. Student went into the room and sat on the structured beanbag chair. He grabbed the mermaid pillow and played with it. For the first five minutes, I let him calm down without talking to him. After five minutes, I asked how he was feeling. He said better but needed more time. Student proceeded to play with the pillow for a couple more minutes and said he was ready to go back to the classroom. Before we reentered the classroom we talked about other ways to handle not knowing how to spell a word. (Ex. Instead of getting upset, raise your hand and ask for help).

**Student B:** Upset about missing potential adoptive parents

Time: 9:32-9:55

Calming tool: Stuffed animal (named it Peanut) and drawing tool

   Student became upset in class when he started to think about his potential adoptive parents and how he misses them. He could not focus or calm down so he asked to remove himself from the class and use the meditation room. As soon as he entered the room he asked if he could color, he chose a rocket ship picture and laid on the floor. As he was coloring he opened up about why he was upset. He said that he was nervous to meet his potential adoptive parents family. He then began to get upset again so he asked if he could grab a stuffed animal that he name peanut. He grabbed the stuffed animal and sat on the beanbag chair. He then hugged the animal and gave the animal all the nerves he was feeling. We came up with a plan to make the nerves go away. He then whispered all the things that scared him into the stuffed animals’ ear and said he was feeling less nervous and was ready to get back to class.

**Student C:** Upset he lost his math test answers on the computer.
Time: 11:29-11:38

Calming tool: Play-Doh

Student’s teacher asked if I could take student C into the calming room. We entered the room and he looked at what tools he chose. He grabbed the play-doh and sat on the rug and began to form it into different shapes. As he did that, I began to ask him questions, the play-doh was acting as a distraction. We talked about how his family was doing and how his dogs were. He began to relax and we talked about what ways we could have handled that situation better. I walked him back to the classroom and asked the teacher if the student could have more time for the test, which she answered yes.

**Student D:** kickball incident in gym

Time: 2:00-2:27

Calming tool: Yoga and deep breathing

Teacher escorted student back from gym. The student was visibly upset, throwing his hands everywhere and screaming. I entered the room with him but reminded him that we need to be respectful to the items that were in there. Once the student entered the room he threw himself to the ground on the rug. I allowed him to do this for about a minute and then turned the music up. He noticed and stopped screaming; I asked him if he would like to use one of his calming tools when he was ready. He shook his head and went over to the yoga mat. He started doing some poses and I reminded him while he did that, that he could add some deep breathes in between. Student started to calm down and then ask if I wanted to do yoga with him. I stood next to him and we did some yoga for about 5 minutes. The student then asked to sit on the rug and we came up with a plan for next gym class.
Mindfulness Activities

The students at our school are set on a very structured timeline throughout the day. This helps keep the student on track with their academics but does little to help incorporate down time or relaxing moments. I believe because of this, students tend to become overwhelmed and stressed out because they simply do not have time to breathe between each subject. I observed what subjects caused most of our crisis situations, finding that the time during reading and math caused the most stress. My goal was to fit in some mindfulness and breathing exercises in between certain subjects that caused the students to feel stressed. By doing so, students became more focused during the next lesson and also showered signs of a calm mind and body.

Activity One: Meditation/ Mindfulness breathing

The time between our reading groups and math is where I implemented this activity in between the transition. The students were handed a sheet that said, “Simple Meditation”. Below it, it gave the directions that they would be following, and since most of my students struggle with reading, I told them I would read it for them and they could just follow along.

Steps:

1: Sit on the carpet with your legs crossed, upright, straight position.

2: Place your hands gently on your knees.

3: Close your eyes and take a couple deep breaths.

4: Continue to breathe and keep your eyes closed, but while you’re doing that, start to think of your “happy place”. Imagine yourself there. Keep the thought as long as you need.
5: Once your feel calm and ready to “leave” the happy place, count in your head to three then open your eyes.

I did this with the students almost everyday, this is where they could take a break, calm down and practice breathing. I observed after doing this a few times most of the students didn’t need me to read the directions for them and they were eager to do it. They also showed that they were more focused during their math lesson after doing this activity. The teacher also had to stop less throughout her math lesson to refocus a student or give a direction.

**Activity Two: GoNoodle**

GoNoodle is a website teachers will use when they want to get their students active in the classroom. However, over the past year GoNoodle has incorporated activities to help with stress management. These activities included mindfulness, anti stress, deep breathing, and stretching.

At the end of the day, many teachers have a student go into crisis because they do not want to go home. This could be due to not having a positive point sheet that their guardians have to sign or the student has something going on at home. Because of this Go Noodles activities were used to help distract the students as well as calm them down before they entered the bus.

I began using Go Noodle about ten minutes before buses were called. The students collectively decided what they would like to do. Their favorite activity was “Rainbow Breathing”. The students would stand up and the person would ask them to stick out their arms. As they breathed in, they would raise them up like a rainbow. There was a visual of a rainbow that helped them with their timing. The person then asked them
to breathe out and slowly extend their hands down. They did this move about five times and then at the end, the person would recite some positive words.

What I observed from using these activities were that the students had little to no issues getting on the bus and also there were no bus incidents reported from the bus driver or bus aide.

SECTION FIVE: KEY LEARNING’S

There are many key learning’s that have derived from this project. In the beginning of this project, I believed that the outcomes from the activities and meditation room were going to be how I evaluated the success. However, this mindset shifted once I began to realize that the journey and growth that I was observing each student who participated was the most important evaluation for the success. I was able to see that each
student’s journey was his or her own, and that they were able to calm themselves down when they were in crisis different ways each time they entered the room.

**The importance of the meditation environment**

Before the start of this project, students who went into crisis were sent to the corner of the room, away from other students to calm down. Unfortunately, with this method most of the students cannot calm themselves down, students behaviors are not addressed, and their feelings aren’t being heard. Using this method, the behavioral outcomes resulted in negative ones and most students would cycle back into a crisis situation later in the day. Observing the outcomes using the Time Away method, a new therapeutic approach was severely needed to help improve our students.

The room was set up to help foster creative and positive behavioral outcomes. From what I observed over the weeks, it did just what I intended it to do. All of the students who used the room were able to calm down in an appropriate manner either by using their calming tools, breathing excises, or even with help from a teacher. I found that making sure a teacher accompanied a student into the room helped build stronger bonds with that student. The students were able to see that the teachers were making great efforts to understand why they were feeling this way, as well as being there to listen.

Throughout this project, I learned a lot about the effects these therapeutic techniques have on the quality of the day for both the students and teachers. I realized that once the students understood how to use the room and the tools, they were the ones who could truly help themselves calm down. Each student knew what tools could help them and each experience was different with each of the students because they had different situations and feelings.
Towards the end of the project, I asked the students who participated individually to tell me why they did or did not like the meditation room. A quote from one of my students was that “he doesn’t like to be embarrassed, and being able to remove himself from his peers helped him calm down without having an audience with him”. I found that the growth from this student utilizing this method was tremendous, he exhibited less outbursts throughout the day, and when he did have a crisis situation happen, he immediately knew that the best way to handle his emotions were to go to the room and grab his favorite stuffed animal and calm down.

**The importance of mindfulness/meditation activities in the classroom**

Although I focused more on how the meditation room could help with student’s behaviors, I did realize that it was not the only thing that contributed to the positive behaviors throughout the day. When students become stressed or started to have feelings, they shut down, which means learning cannot happen for that student. By integrating mindfulness and meditation practices throughout the day, fewer students became stressed and the focus during lessons was significantly better. When students are more focused lessons go a lot quicker because they are not stopping their lesson to address a behavior or to give a direction to refocus a student. Because of this it opened more time for creative thinking and for students to generate more novel ideas during a lesson.

With the mindfulness activities in mind, I began to pick up on cues I would have never seen before. During lessons, I started to observe students body language and moods, when I began to see that they were becoming unfocused I would stop my lesson and either do a meditation breathing exercise or a GoNoodle stretching video. I did this about four to five times throughout the day. The effects from taking two minutes from the
lesson helped improved students’ focus and reenergized them. I was able to get through
lessons a lot easier because students were able to take a two-minute “brain recess”.

**Evaluation**

Throughout this Master’s project, I was able to evaluate how it was going from
both the students and teachers. I had team meetings after school to listen to any
suggestions the teachers had throughout this journey. I also had conversations with
teachers to listen to how the students behaviors where changing after leaving the
meditation room. While there was down time during the school day, I was able to ask the
students how they felt about the meditation room. Many students said that it was good to
separate themselves and take some time away from both the classroom and their peers.
They also said that they enjoyed the calming tools because it helped them calm down
faster and open up more. They enjoyed the one-on-one conversations they were able to
have with a teacher and that they were able to have these conversations away from their
peers. Some of the students who used the room two to three times a week said they hoped
this would be here next year because they haven’t been put in a hold due to their negative
behaviors.

**SECTION SIX: CONCLUSION**

I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to use me degree to make a
difference for the school I work for. It could not have been as successful as it was if it
wasn’t for my principal who was open minded to changing an old method they used, or
for the teachers that were so excited and supportive throughout the process, and even the
students who were able to learn new therapeutic techniques to help with their behavioral
outcomes.
This whole journey has been a learning opportunity for myself as a creative leader. Northhouses’ (2002), *Leadership: Theory of Practice* has been valuable in examining effective leadership skills. One chapter that has stuck out to me was the chapter on Transformational Leadership, which I believe expresses everything I stand for as a creative leader. Northhouse (2002) explained that transformation leadership is, “the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower” (p. 162). A transformational leader does not think about what things can benefit them; they believe that focusing on the needs and motives of their followers (teachers and students) will in return help them achieve their greatest creative potentials. I feel as though, opening the minds of administration and teachers to new ways for handling crisis situations, has started conversations on how we can improve the quality of life for students when they are in school. The journey and outcomes have been very positive, after the six weeks of these new approaches both the teachers and my principal asked if I could keep the meditation room there for the rest of the school year. Because of the success, the meditation room was open and used throughout the whole semester, longer then the six weeks it was intended to be up. My hope is for the meditation room to be running next year and as well as in our other locations. For this to happen, I will be having a meeting with my principal to open a discussion about the future of the meditation room and hopefully making it a permanent therapeutic approach.

**In the future**

I believe there is a future for these new therapeutic techniques for how we deal with crisis situations in our schools. With the success at my location, I am hoping to
incorporate these techniques at our other locations by starting conversations with other teachers and presenting what I have observed. I believe that I can change the old methods we have been using so that there is creative growth within our teachers and students.

References


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I hereby grant permission to the International Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State college permission to place a digital copy of this master’s Project The Effects of Meditation/Mindfulness on Elementary Students in Crisis as an online resource.

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