

Mindfulness in Schools – Trials and Tribulations: Results of Two Pilot Studies

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Background and Objectives

Mindfulness in schools is quite novel in Germany. We developed and implemented a new training in two classes (grade 4 and grade 2) and evaluated its effectiveness, acceptability – by teachers, parents and children – and adapted the program according to first results.

Method:

We used formative and summative evaluation in a controlled study in a natural setting. A first training was developed for children in grade 4 (i.e. 10/11 years of age), and 20 children participated in the program for 6 weeks. We adapted the program according to feedback and experience and offered a modified program to 25 children of grade 2 (i.e. 8/9 years of age) for 20 weeks (half a school-year) on a weekly basis. Children in a parallel class served as controls.

Results:

In the first study we saw significant results contrary to our expectations and received indications for adapting the program. In the second study we saw significant time*group interactions ($p < 0.01$) for the scales that were rated by teachers (behavioral problems) and by educators (problems with peers and prosocial behavior; $p > 0.05$), indicating a positive effect of the mindfulness training, but no effects in self-reported measures (psychological problems, well-being, self-regulation, empathy) and objective tests (attentional capacity). Qualitative data (interviews with parents and teachers) showed clear effects and a high acceptance of the training.

Discussion:

Current instruments for measuring children are not necessarily reliable for measuring healthy children or documenting effects, and third party ratings seem most sensitive to change with smaller children. We did not think of the potentially most important measure: an objective noise-level measurement device that in hindsight would have been the most sensitive measure of an effect.

Conclusion:

It is possible to implement and evaluate a mindfulness program for smaller children, but it is difficult to find reliable and valid measures. It might be necessary to spend time and effort on developing proper measurement instruments.

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