

Mindfulness in schools: A conceptual review of well-being

Emma Dresler

Massey University, Massey University, New Zealand

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Background & Objectives: There is a growing portion of school-aged children experiencing social, emotional and behavioural problems. The practice of mindfulness has been adopted with increased frequency in schools to help children improve cognitive functioning and social-emotional resiliencies. There are international and regional providers that have developed their own customised programs adopting the practice of mindfulness. Thus creating much variation and confusion regarding the practice of mindfulness and how it works to improve health outcomes for children. The aim of this study is to analyse the concept of 'well-being' associated with mindfulness school-based initiatives to inform the targeting of messages.

Methods: A comprehensive and systematic search in eleven databases was conducted. Fifty four articles were sourced from 2005 to 2017. Twenty nine studies were located in North America, twelve studies in Europe, four in Asia, five in Australia and four in New Zealand. The articles were reviewed with a particular focus on the concept of well-being in mindfulness intervention initiatives.

Results: The analysis revealed a large variety of measures applied to investigate the effects of mindfulness intervention, consequently the concept of well-being carried a wide range of meanings. In North America, Europe and Australia, the mindfulness programs were delivered in a secular approach without any religious references. Studies with cultural-specific applications of mindfulness in Asia and New Zealand offered spiritual interpretations of the mindfulness and health domains. Most studies reported reduction in aspects of psychopathology following intervention. However, there was limited application of longitudinal designs to assess long-term health outcomes. Further many studies presented with methodological issues in the potential bias of reporting observations of the students and measuring their well-being.

Discussion: School-based mindfulness programs recognised the importance of a child's social, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being. Well-being associated with mindfulness school-based initiatives is an emergent concept and subsequently requires conceptual clarification to identify its significance, use and application.

Conclusion: Understanding of the well-being framework in mindfulness intervention programs has important practical and theoretical implications for the development and delivery of holistic health promotion initiatives in schools.