

Listening: The effects of a mindfulness-based story program on comprehension and autonomous practice of children aged 6 to 7 years.

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In Australia, 1 in 5 children arrive at school developmentally vulnerable and experience difficulties in their ability to learn (The Australian Early Development Census (2015)). If basic skill foundations are not established by the age of 8 years when children go from learning to read to reading to learn, it is difficult for children to develop more complex skills. Mindfulness has grown as an intervention for psychological health and wellbeing that promotes listening, paying attention, and resisting distractions, and programs such as MindUp (Hawn 2001) and Smiling Mind (<https://smilingmind.com.au>) are steadily increasing their uptake in schools across Australia. However there is no evidence to show that children will practice the skills to be in the moment, or the strategies that they use following the teachings.

This research investigated a 5-week mindfulness-based story program with three children aged 6 to 7 years. It is inspired by the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program, which suggests participation in meditation leads to increased awareness, effective communication and reduced stress.

Stories play an important role in the development of relationships through listening and understanding, and draw our attention to the way we create order, while mindfulness brings us back to our experience.

Mindfulness is delivered through the sharing of a story loosely based on ‘Parzival’ (Hatto, 1980) called “The Knights of Orr – A call to practice.” Each week children listen to a new chapter and participate in developmentally appropriate mindfulness practices (based on the weekly theme) and story structure instruction.

Pre- and post (descriptive statistics) story comprehension tests and weekly self reported home-based mindfulness practices was supplemented by semi- structured interviews with the participants' parents.

The study provides preliminary support for a mindfulness-based story program that targets comprehension and awareness of children aged 6 to 7 years. The findings show that children can participate in mindfulness practices at home, autonomous home-based practice increases with parent support, age, and positive past experience, and changes in child listening comprehension can occur in relatively short time frames with the support of story structure instruction.