

Introduction

Mind–Body Health in the Schools

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Most school-aged youth experience a considerable amount of stress from academic pressures, relationships, and extracurricular commitments. Living in a heightened and prolonged state of arousal has a negative impact on an individual's overall well-being. In addition to the negative experience of feeling stressed in day-to-day life and the impact that has on an individual's functioning, chronic stress also wears on the body at the cellular level, essentially resulting in premature aging (Sleek, 2017) and increasing the individual's susceptibility to illness.

In particular, there are many internal and external influences on the health and wellness of developing youth. Engel's (1977) biopsychosocial model promotes an understanding of interactions between the biological aspects of the physical being and one's genetic heritage, the psychological aspects of one's mind, and social factors such as birth into a given culture, socioeconomic group, community, and family system. Each of these aspects of the self, and the interactions among them, impact the functioning and development of the individual throughout the life span.

In addition, the ecological systems theory of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is helpful in conceptualizing how a child develops as part of multiple systems. For instance, a child is involved in reciprocal relationships with family members and peers that impact the child's development but that the child also impacts. The child's community and their parents' jobs are influenced by factors at the next level distal from the child, though there is still an indirect

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Promoting Mind–Body Health in Schools: Interventions for Mental Health Professionals,
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impact on the child's development. Beyond that, larger societal changes impact the community, which then influence the child, and all of these factors occur over time and throughout the child's life.

This thinking supports the study of mind–body health in that the individual should be viewed holistically; many factors contribute to positive development, just as many have to be considered when planning for intervention. All contexts and vantage points of the person are related; thus, the mind and body among other internal (e.g., cognitive, intellectual) and external (e.g., academic, occupational setting) systems interact and require coordination to achieve optimal functioning. All these influences affect a child's health and wellness, which impact school performance and overall success in many of life's arenas in the short and long term. Thus, school professionals, and in particular, school psychologists, have the opportunity and responsibility to intervene on behalf of positive youth development with all these factors in mind.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book is intended to provide an overview of the current state of various mind–body interventions, as well as other practical considerations for the use of these techniques in the school setting, to address the growing influence of stressors on school-aged children. The primary target audience for the book is school psychologists; however, other mental health professionals who work in or outside the school setting, such as counselors and social workers, are also likely to benefit from the content. The book is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on broad considerations for delivering mind–body health interventions in schools. The second section covers multiple mind–body health interventions for various school-related issues including academic, behavioral, and socioemotional concerns. The third section of the book discusses the application of mind–body interventions with specific populations of students.

In the first section of the book, the reader can find such topics as home–school collaboration, treatment integrity, school-based health services, the impact of chronic illness from a neurodevelopmental perspective, self-care for school psychologists and related professionals, an overview of traditional Eastern mind–body approaches with consideration for use in the Western school setting, and a critical, yet important, discussion of best practice recommendations for the use of mind–body interventions in the school setting. These chapters are intended to provide additional topics for practitioners' consideration in the thoughtful, successful implementation of the interventions discussed in the second section of the book.

The second section of the book presents various mind–body interventions. Each intervention chapter focuses on a different mind–body approach and the benefits that have been derived from its use, as well as the current state

of the research on the use of this intervention and how it has been or might be applied in the school setting. You will note that the research support for several of these interventions is still in the early phases, and some critics will question the appropriateness of using various mind–body interventions in the school setting. Before rolling out any new intervention, the mindful practitioner will consider several factors ahead of time to determine the appropriateness of fit with the intervention, such as the age of the student(s), training consultees, and space and setting (see Chapter 7 for more details). Interventions in the second section are discussed through the lens of a tiered service delivery model with suggestions for how the intervention might be adapted for a universal, small group, or individual application, where appropriate. Most also include a case discussion that best exemplifies the use of that specific approach. The first three chapters discuss positive psychology, mindfulness, and mindful gratitude more broadly, whereas the remaining chapters cover specific interventions. These include relaxation and guided imagery, physical activity, yoga, expressive arts including music therapy, written emotional expression, video self-modeling, hypnosis, and emotional freedom techniques (“tapping”).

The interventions proposed in this book are intended to be used with students to address various academic, behavioral, socioemotional, or other concerns within the school building. School psychologists and other school-based professionals with mental health training are the most likely to implement or at least to oversee the use of these practices in the school setting. School psychologists and related professionals working with school-aged youth outside the traditional school setting might also use these approaches with their clients. Further, some interventions are also indicated as appropriate for use among school-based professionals themselves to reduce stress and promote overall improved health and wellness. To this end, Chapter 5 focuses on self-care for professionals.

The level of experience and training required to implement the techniques discussed within this book varies from one chapter to the next, but details on the preparation of the mental health professional are included in their respective chapters. For instance, the physical activities that are described in Chapter 12 could be led by a classroom teacher or paraprofessional—there is no formal training required as there is in the case of music therapy (Chapter 15). However, an individual in the school who is trained in data collection and analysis, such as the school psychologist, should oversee the implementation of any intervention to ensure that it is being provided as intended (see Chapter 2), as well as to facilitate progress monitoring. Similarly, the age group of students for whom a given approach might be more or less appropriate is also discussed within each of the intervention chapters.

In the third section of the book, readers will find chapters that focus on specific populations of students for whom the use of various mind–body approaches might be beneficial. These include yoga for students with eating disorders and cognitive behavior therapy as applied to emotional regulation, as well as mind–body considerations for sleep concerns, chronic pain, and trauma.

WHAT IS MIND–BODY HEALTH?

A discussion of what constitutes mind–body health can easily turn into a confusing, cyclical conversation in an area with seemingly no boundaries. In the beginning stages of proposing this book, we found ourselves rapt and beguiled in these types of conversations on many occasions. At one such point, we realized that made perfect sense because what we are trying to describe here is how just about everything is interconnected; no thoughts or bodily processes occur in isolation. The mind is significant in all aspects of living; it impacts our behavior, relationships, academic and occupational success, and various physical outcomes, among others. The mind can affect change in brain physiology that then changes behavior, thereby moderating the mental to physical connection (e.g., psychoneuroimmunology, which defines how psychological functioning interacts with both the nervous and immune systems; Smith, Richardson, Hoffman, & Pilkington, 2005). The mind can also be responsible for more direct psychological to physical changes, such as the impact glucose levels have on stress (Jacob et al., 2013). We do not yet fully understand the relationship between the mind and the body; we have not fully recognized all of the many ways these two aspects of the self interact or how this information could be used to promote health. New research is continuously being published in this area. At this point, it would not be possible to provide a comprehensive review of mind–body research because this area is essentially boundless. Our intention with this particular book is to focus on how we can use what we know at this point about mind–body interventions that can be applied in the school setting to positively influence students.

The term *mind–body* has taken on various nuanced meanings, all of which speak to the relationship between psychological and physical aspects of the individual. This understanding dates back to early philosophers writing about dualism and the relationship between mind and body. Mind–body health relates to the seamless interaction of the mind, or psyche, with the physical body to result in the overall functioning of the individual. In this book, our focus is on the use of the term to address either mind- or body-based concerns with either mind- or body-based interventions, such that the strategies described within this text are either psychological and have an impact on physical functioning or are physical strategies that impact psychological functioning.

With this understanding in mind, a psychological intervention affecting a psychological outcome, such as guided imagery for depression, would not be included in our use of the term *mind–body*. Similarly, although an intervention that is physical and has a physical outcome, such as running to improve heart health, might have some direct effects within the body, we are more interested in the effects that the physical activity would have on psychological functioning (e.g., Steca et al., 2013; see also Chapter 12, this volume). In addition, we recognize that there is an emerging area of research investigating

the physiological (e.g., neurotransmitters, hormones, immune indicators) implications that physical and psychological interventions have on both physical and psychological outcomes (Menzies, Lyon, Elswick, McCain, & Gray, 2014). In other words, the underlying complex physiological (e.g., endocrine system, brain–gut connection) and psychological (e.g., self-control, depression) moderating pathways that explain how these changes occur and that further explore the depths of the impact of various behaviors or interventions are only beginning to emerge in the research in recent years. These exciting areas of inquiry shed more light on the complexities and intricacies of the mind–body relationship. Thus, although we introduce these concepts, the book as a whole focuses on mind–body and body–mind interventions, as described here, that might be of interest to school-based practitioners and that can potentially be implemented in the school setting.

It is our hope that school-based mental health professionals will find this book informative in considering the use of various mind–body approaches with their students and that this book will encourage the responsible implementation of more mind–body practices in schools to benefit students, teachers, and the overall school climate. Many of the practices discussed in the following chapters can be easily taught to students at a young age, allowing them to take advantage of the benefits of a given practice throughout their lifetime with little to no cost, specialized materials, or additional outside intervention. In this way, this book holds a substantial amount of knowledge that can be easily shared with young people to help them help themselves as they encounter challenges throughout their development.

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