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Does meditation have a place in education or is it all a bit ‘feel good, ooom, tinkling bells... that sort of thing? A Google search on ‘meditation’ found 153,000,000 results and suggested in Australia any number of meditation classes, teachers, learn-to-meditate websites, Buddhist and Maraheshi schools, serious discussion on The Conversation website... and the rather strange Shibari suspended bondage meditation technique.

Addie Wootton, CEO of not-for-profit Smiling Mind, which has a growing presence and following in Australian schools, acknowledges that to achieve its goal to have the mindfulness meditation program included in the Australian curriculum by 2020 would need quality research to justify its claim for time in the busy school day.

"Funded by the Victorian Government, we conducted a large randomised controlled trial over eight weeks last year to examine the benefits of teaching mindfulness meditation to students. Twelve Victorian schools took part – seven inner metro, four outer metro and one regional school," Wootton said. "In total 1853 students and 104 teachers participated."

Deakin University, Insight SRC, Young and Well CRC and Smiling Mind reviewed the literature and developed the research methodology. Participants were allocated to one of two groups using a three-wave counter-balanced design. In the first wave, baseline data was collected from the control group and treatment group (Time 1).

These data were used to establish the
Students who reported psychological distress, enhanced positive wellbeing at the commencement of the program reported significantly better sleep and ability to cope with student misbehavior in their classrooms than students in the control group who did not receive the intervention.

To further explore the effects of the program, students were split using the median score on the psychological distress measure Kessler 10 (Kessler et al., 2003). Students who reported lower emotional wellbeing before participating in the intervention were compared to the participants in the control group. Students with lower levels of wellbeing at the commencement of the program reported significantly better sleep quality, reduced negative wellbeing, enhanced positive wellbeing, enhanced ability to manage emotions, improvements in concentration, and reductions in bullying and classroom disruptions after completing the eight-week intervention.

Teachers completed a brief survey about their own wellbeing, the culture and climate in the school and their experiences of implementing the Smiling Mind program at Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3. Teachers also completed this survey at Time 0, which was used as a baseline before they completed the training and undertook the five-week program to introduce them to their own personal mindfulness practice.

Data analysis followed with the results released in September this year.

**Results**

**Significantly improved sleep**

All students who participated in the Smiling Mind Education Program experienced significant improvements in sleep quality compared to the control group.

**Significant increase in student safety at school and decrease in classroom disruptions**

Participation resulted in significant improvements in student reported safety at school as well as significant reductions in classroom disruptions.

**Students at-risk for emotional distress experienced the most benefit**

Students with lower levels of wellbeing at the commencement of the program reported significantly better sleep quality, reduced psychological distress, enhanced positive wellbeing, enhanced ability to manage emotions, improvements in concentration, improvements in student safety, reductions in bullying and improved classroom behaviour.

Tracy Allinson, Literacy Leader, at 800-students Lara Secondary College near Geelong, Vic, said that six teachers and 250 students participated in the study at her school. "I thought that it was great for students with issues like anxiety, trouble sleeping and concentration."

"Sessions after breaks and lunch helped the children to settle down and get on with their work."

Rosebud Secondary College at Rosebud on the Mornington Peninsula, 90 minutes by road from the Melbourne CBD also participated in the study and Assistant Principal Geoff Seletto has been impressed by the results. The school had been approached by Smiling Mind during 2014 and introduced mindfulness meditation at the start of 2015 so the opportunity to be one of the 12 schools in the study was welcome.

"Anecdotally, we had seen positive benefits from the meditation with teachers reporting that their classes settled down faster and concentrated better..."

There are several different Smiling Mind programs, developed by psychologists and based on mindfulness meditation techniques that are available to download free for people of all ages. In addition, Smiling Mind also offer schools a range of professional development workshops and training programs.

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Smiling Mind

Smiling Mind's Education Program of mindfulness meditation has lesson plans tailored to each age group across primary and secondary school levels. It provides schools with the skills and resources needed for an optimal learning environment. The program aims to create a generation of mindful students who are equipped with the essential skills needed to be resilient, resourceful and able to cope with the many challenges they face in today's fast-paced culture.

The programs are delivered through the Smiling Mind app. This approach makes the programs accessible, cost effective and scalable.

**Mindfulness in the classroom**

- 72 modules
- 249 sessions
- 7–9 years
  - 16 modules
  - 55 sessions
- 10–12 years
  - 16 modules
  - 55 sessions
- 13–15 years
  - 20 modules
  - 69 sessions
- 16–18 years
  - 20 modules
  - 70 sessions

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