

Mindfulness-based program in schools making a positive impact, study finds

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Credit: The Hawn Foundation

A social and emotional learning program started by Academy Award winning actress Goldie Hawn to help school children improve their learning abilities, be more caring, and less stressed is now backed by new scientific evidence.

In a study from the University of British Columbia, researchers from across multiple disciplines - a neuroscientist, developmental pediatrician, developmental psychologists, and education experts - examined the effectiveness of the program [MindUP](#), which teaches a number of mindfulness practices, including breathing, tasting and movement exercises.

They found fourth and fifth graders who participated in the program were better at regulating stress, were more optimistic and helpful. They were also better liked by their peers than [children](#) in a program that taught caring for others but without a mindfulness component. They also found the children in the mindfulness program performed better at math.

"Our findings suggest that children who are taught mindfulness - to pay attention to the present intentionally and without judgment - are better positioned to succeed both in school and in life,"

said lead author Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl, an education professor and interim director of the Human Early Learning Partnership, a collaborative interdisciplinary research network who helped conduct the study.

Schonert-Reichl said it's also one of the first studies of its kind to investigate the value of a social and emotional learning program that incorporates mindfulness techniques for children's well-being using a variety of scientific measures, including both biological and neurological tests. Other studies have mostly focused on adults, showing positive results.

To measure the MindUP program's effectiveness on stress physiology, the researchers collected saliva from the children to analyze their cortisol levels, a stress indicator. They also relied on peer and self-reporting and also measured the children's cognitive abilities, testing skills like memory, concentration and focus.

Background

Schonert-Reichl said there are multiple explanations as to why a mindfulness program could improve a child's math scores.

"One explanation is that learning occurs in social interaction, so if you are less stressed and more attentive, you will be able to share and help others, and then be able to achieve more, including excelling in school," she said.

The study, Enhancing cognitive and Social-Emotional Development Through a Simple-to-Administer Mindfulness-Based School Program for Elementary School Children: A Randomized Controlled Trial, is published in *Developmental Psychology* in January 2015.

The study was carried out in four elementary schools in Coquitlam, B.C. in 2008 in what is called

a [randomized controlled trial](#). The program which taught caring for others, but without a [mindfulness](#) component, was a social responsibility program developed by B.C.'s Ministry of Education.

More information: Study paper:

[www.scribd.com/doc/253552773/S ... -Reichl-Et-Al-MindUp](http://www.scribd.com/doc/253552773/S...-Reichl-Et-Al-MindUp)

Provided by University of British Columbia

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