



Mindfulness- Jennobia Kock

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Our current reality in WCED schools

- Data- Driven Decision Making System (DDDMS)

VS

- WCED vision: *Quality education for every learner, in every classroom, in every school in the province*

VS

- Teachers, children, principals and parents are struggling to survive on an emotional level due to the constant impact of socio- economic challenges (domestic violence, community violence, drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment, sexual abuse, dysfunctional relationships, moral decay)



Questions:

- How can teachers focus on instruction when their learners bring emotional issues from unstable home circumstances and communities into the classroom? (DDDM ???)
- How equipped are teachers to manage their emotions when children act out and present with behaviour problems?
- What **therapeutic interventions** can be offered to **teachers, learners and parents** to better equip them with ***soft skills*** when facing challenging situations, thoughts and emotions?



Rationale for pilot study

Empiric evidence indicate that **social and emotional skills** are better predictors of academic and career success than IQ. The brain, once believed to be hard-wired during childhood, has been found to be neuroplastic throughout the life span. Understanding the elements of social and emotional learning is a critical competency for all teachers, children and parents seeking to foster academic success.

Broadest definition of **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)**: SEL refers to the “process through which **individuals learn and apply** a set of **social, emotional, behavioural, and character skills required to succeed in schooling, the workplace, relationships, and citizenship**” (Jones et al.,2017:15)



SEL model in three domains (Jones et.al., 2017)

- **Cognitive regulation:** attention control, inhibitory control, working memory and planning, and cognitive flexibility.
- **Emotional processes:** emotion knowledge and expression, emotion and behaviour regulation, and empathy and perspective-taking.
- **Social and interpersonal skills:** understanding social cues, conflict resolution, and prosocial behaviour.
- Each skill set builds on the other.

WHY Mindfulness and WHAT is Mindfulness?





Mindfulness

- *“The mindful approach to education is eminently practical for preparing us for a fulfilling personal and professional life. It will help us to better understand and remember, to better manage stress and organise ourselves. It can also help us to be happier, more engaged with the community and, importantly, to find learning as interesting as it should be”* (Hassed and Chambers, 2014:2).
- It is all about being conscious and aware. If we really look we have a chance of understanding, because that which is within us is connecting with what we are observing. Thus connectedness, or unity, goes hand in hand with learning mindfully. The journey of becoming a mindful teacher, learner and parent is a lifelong project.



Mindfulness

- **A simple way of defining Mindfulness is as a mental discipline aimed at training attention. There are also other aspects, for example:**
 - ✓ Utilizing the senses upon which to train the attention
 - ✓ Engaging the mind in the present moment
 - ✓ Fostering self-control through non-attachment to transitory experiences such as thoughts, feelings and sensations
 - ✓ Encouraging an attitude of openness and acceptance, or being non-judgmental about such transitory experiences
 - ✓ Cultivating equanimity and stillness by being unmoved by, or less reactive to, moment-to-moment experience (Hassed and Chambers, 2014:6)



The science of Mindfulness

- One of the most important findings in the past twenty years regarding our understanding of the brain has been the fact that our brain constantly changes in response to what it experience.
- It continually produces new connections and pathways between its nearly 100 billion nerves cells (neurons), and can actually sprout new neurons in certain areas of the brain.
- Research shows that how we use our brains – and particularly what we pay attention to and practice repeatedly – actually gets hardwired into the brain.
- What is even more fascinating is the fact that **mental** rehearsal (imagining oneself doing an activity without physically doing it) produces the exact same changes.



Correlation between SEL model and Mindfulness

SEL

- Cognitive regulation
- Emotional processes
- Social and interpersonal skills

Mindfulness

- Train the attention (senses)
- Engaging the mind in the present moment
- Fostering self-control
- Encouraging an attitude of openness and acceptance
- Cultivating equanimity and stillness



Pilot study: Overberg Education District – Circuit 3

- December 2018: Swartberg Primary School (Staff development session) – Introduction to Mindfulness
- February – March 2019: Orientation on group therapy sessions with high risk boys (extremely challenging behaviours). Mindfulness and Reality Therapy focussed Intervention Programme to be implemented in term 2.
- February 2019: SBST Cluster meetings (Introduction to Mindfulness and needs analysis, teacher training sessions to follow in term 2 and 3)
- February 2019 : Follow-up session (could not realise due to crisis intervention needed at a different school)
- April 2019: Planned follow-up session (Mindfulness techniques to improve classroom management skills)
- Term 2 & 3 2019: Parental sessions with identified parents (high risk boys’ and girls parents)

Challenges

- Data – Driven Decision Making System (DDDMS),
- Focus of Psychological Services within the District (Assessment weighs more),
- Collaboration between SLES and Curriculum (e.g. too much workshops, focus on underperforming schools, but no common, strategic plan for schools / teacher support/ learner/parent programmes),
- Expectations (paradigm shift), passion, willingness, and resources (teachers, parents, District Officials, learners),
- Mindfulness is a lengthy individual process (not easy),
- IQMS and PMDS (evaluation and monitoring tools) focus on compliance not on quality and strategic personal and professional development.



Recommendations

- Greater focus on strategic therapeutic intervention programmes in schools (learners, teacher, parents),
- Mindfulness programmes should be build into the Life Orientation Curriculum,
- Teachers, Learners and parents should be trained in child development and brain development,
- Teachers, learners and parents would benefit from workshops that focusses on mindfulness therapeutic strategies,
- Greater emphasis on social and emotional skills is crucial and should align with Curriculum workshop sessions (revise DDDMS)



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Thank you

“Inner work teaches us that despite all things that happen out-side our control, our responses still mean that we can author our own lives”

– Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD