Quieting the Buzz: Drama Therapy and Mindfulness in the Classroom, An Intervention

Karole A. Rose
Lesley University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses

Part of the Counseling Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/331

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences (GSASS) at DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lesley.edu, cvrattos@lesley.edu.
Quieting the Buzz: Drama Therapy and Mindfulness in the Classroom, An Intervention

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

April 2020

Karole A. Rose, MA
Drama Therapy
Laura L. Wood, PhD, RDT/BCT
Abstract

From an incredibly young age, children in the United States of America are faced with significant stressors due to challenging life circumstances, parental pressures and ever increasing demands for success in all aspects of life including academics achievement, physical ability, and strong social skills (Allen & Klein, 1996; The Hawn Foundation, 2011). Yet, they often do not have the tools to manage the strong feelings and emotions that come along with these challenges and high expectations, leading to significant levels of stress and anxiety (Reilly, 2015). This thesis will explore the development of a drama therapy method in response to the aforementioned challenges at a school in suburban Massachusetts. Specifically, the integration of drama therapy techniques that emphasized play, embodiment, and mind-body connection were applied to enhance a new mindfulness curriculum that the school was in process of adopting. The new curriculum enabled students to better acknowledge and understand strong emotions and behaviors in themselves and others and incorporate successful strategies for reducing their own anxiety.
Quieting the Buzz: Drama Therapy and Mindfulness in the Classroom, An Intervention

Introduction

“Twenty-first-century life brings many stressors to children at a young age. Lack of downtime, parental stresses, pressures to achieve, exposure to violence, overstimulating and noisy environments, families dealing with substance abuse, unrealistic expectations and poverty” (The Hawn Foundation, 2011, p. 85) can be difficult for young children to understand and manage on their own, leaving them feeling scared and unsure. This uncertainly may lead to high levels of stress and anxiety and affect all aspects of their lives including mental health, social connections and academic success. As has been observed in some of the children at a small elementary school in suburban Massachusetts, if left unsupported or unchecked these emotions and situations can overwhelm the child and manifest in several ways including; strained friendships, missed class time, work avoidance, learning challenges, absences, emotional dysregulation, low self-esteem and withdrawal that affect their academic success (Reilly, 2015, The Hawn Foundation, 2011). School administrators at the state and local level have committed to helping combat these negative experiences and outcomes through the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) standards and curriculum that give the children the concrete tools needed to manage these strong emotions and find success in school and in life (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

In many school systems, implementing and supporting social and emotional learning (SEL) programs is the responsibility of the guidance department. “The job of the school counselor has evolved over the years, from academic guide to something deeper: the adult in a school tasked with fostering students' social and emotional growth, a mental health first responder and a confidant for kids” (Turner, 2020). In an elementary school of one small
suburban town in Massachusetts, SEL was being approached through classroom-based lessons that teach mindfulness and self-regulation strategies to support the growing mental health needs of the young students. At the start of the year, the guidance department in this school committed to working collaboratively on developing a curriculum based on the C.A.L.M.M. approach (Constant contact, Affirmation, Locomotion, Meditation and Metacognition) (Williams, personal communication, n.d.), that focused on enhancing students’ self-awareness and self-confidence and introducing coping skills and self-regulation strategies. “A mindful, focused student is able to redirect her attention to the task at hand” (The Hawn Foundation, 2011, p 53). Teaching children skills such as deep breathing, focused listening and positive self-talk, help them to be calm, thoughtful and present in the moment and support the students in succeeding socially and academically. Utilizing a drama therapy lens to develop this method provided both an overall framework and structure to the intervention and employed experiential techniques to engage participants and effect change on a deeper level.

The primary intent of this thesis was to develop a method and pilot a 4-week mindfulness curriculum integrating drama therapy techniques that encourage active participation through storytelling, enactments, and imaginative play. It was expected that this experiential and embodied approach would enhance the internalization of the mindfulness strategies presented during the weekly sessions. Additionally, this method was intended to increase teacher and staff knowledge of drama therapy approaches that are may be easily incorporated into classroom lessons. Although comprehensive integration of these strategies would require more than four weeks, it was anticipated that students would develop a basic understanding and comfort level with key concepts and have the opportunity to practice some of the strategies introduced through individualized and collaborative activities. Positive influences were expected to be observed in
enhanced social relationships among the students, as well as students’ ability to identify feelings within their own bodies and engage with coping and calming skills. It was further expected that these four weekly sessions would serve to highlight which drama therapy strategies and techniques best fit the classroom environment of this elementary school.

These sessions were facilitated by the drama therapy (DT) guidance counselor in three lower grade classrooms. Teachers and staff were encouraged to participate in order to create a foundation of understanding, reinforce the techniques being introduced to the students and build a common language across all classrooms. This method also provided insight into group size and structure, and the effectiveness of drama therapy and mindfulness interventions with large groups. Furthermore, the method shed light on the importance of the collaborative process between teachers and guidance counselors in supporting the growth and wellbeing of the students within the classroom setting. The preliminary outcome of the intervention is expected to inform the further development and integration of a complete calming and mindfulness curriculum.

**Literature Review**

This literature review touches on the current statistics around mental health challenges facing young children in the United States of America today and the effects these difficulties may have on the academic success of some of our youngest students. A brief overview of child development will provide a general understanding of brain development in young children and will highlight key milestones to consider during this transitional stage of life. Additionally, the literature review will discuss some of the current programs and strategies being used in the classrooms to support personal growth and self-regulation. Finally, literature focusing on drama therapy processes and techniques that support mindfulness and enhance the outcomes in the classroom will be explored.
Stress and Anxiety in Children

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2019) anxiety and behavior disorders are among the most diagnosed mental health disorders in children. A study of children ages 3 - 17 released by Ghandour et al. (2019) indicated that 7.1% of that population has been diagnosed with anxiety, and 7.5% diagnosed with behavior problems, equating to over 4 million children in the United States of America alone. Challenges with behavior are the most common among children ages 6 -11 at 9%, with anxiety reported at 6% for the same population (p. 258). Furthermore, the Child Mind Institute (2018) reported a 17% increase in anxiety in young people over the previous 10 years (p.2). Allen and Klein, (1996) argued that there was “a critical need for stress management programs at all levels of education” (p. 31) citing research that showed a close relation between stress and anxiety, potentially lowering academic performance, decreasing a child’s ability to learn and negatively affecting their problem-solving skills. This can be true for even the youngest of students.

“The transition from preschool into the more structured learning environment of elementary school presents a significant time of adjustment and change for children” (Reilly, 2015, p. 3). Having days filled with new friends and experiences, separation from family members, long hours of focused learning and many rules and expectations to manage, school can feel both exciting and overwhelming, causing stress and anxiety for some students. Furthermore, studies that looked at parental influence on mental health of the children (Kortlander, Kendall, Panichelli-Mindel, 1997; The Hawn Foundation, 2011; Whaley, Pinto, Sigman, 1999) showed that certain behaviors and interactions between parents and children, such as rejection, neglect and criticism, contribute to the development and intensification of childhood anxiety. This could suggest that some children are coming to school already feeling anxious, thus inhibited and not ready to learn. In the Kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms of this suburban elementary
school, faculty and staff often see these challenges manifest in ways such as class disruptions, work avoidance, emotional outbursts, struggling friendships, withdrawal, and low self-esteem. In return these may affect the child’s sense of safety, academic success, social connections, and overall well-being.

**The Developing Child**

The elementary school years, generally ages 5-12, span two important transitional periods in a child’s development, from early to middle childhood and into adolescence, which inherently brings about change and uncertainty. While there are typical stages and milestones for growth throughout this period of development, it is not static or absolute. Development is fluid, happens differently for each individual and is significantly influenced by environmental factors, such as home life, culture, socioeconomic status, and availability of resources. “The culture and society into which someone is born plays [an important role] in the transmission of knowledge” (Broderick and Blewitt, 2015, p. 108-9). Experiences which allow children “the freedom to explore their environments,” enhance a child’s natural ability to learn (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015, p.12).

The acquisition of gross motor skills is an important part of physical development in early and middle childhood. Muscle control and coordination are needed to master skills that provide a foundation for physical development including activities such as running, jumping, hopping, throwing, and catching a ball (Berk, 2014). While mastery is not a concern for enjoying or benefiting from the type of organic movement that happens in expressive therapies (Rogers, 1993), awareness of one’s body may build a child’s comfort level with participating in the expressive movements inherent in the approach.
Significant cognitive and language skills also begin to solidify in middle childhood. Vocabulary and grammar increase dramatically, storytelling becomes clearer and sequential, and reading and writing both for function and understanding become the focus (Berk, 2018, p. 294-295). This increase in language skills, coupled with the enhanced abilities in logical thinking, emotional regulation and building self-identity (Berk, 2018, p. 294-29) may enhance a child’s ability to express their feelings and ask for support in handling difficult situations. This is an important distinction to consider when creating programs that support the healthy growth and development for children at this stage in life.

Cognitively, creative play such as role-playing, personification of toys, and the introduction of an imaginary friend is important to the healthy development of children and helps them learn about the world and their place in it (Berk, 2014). Noted psychoanalyst Erik Erickson stated that “to play it out is the most natural self-healing measure childhood affords” (Erikson, 1950, p.222). This ability to play spontaneously and without reservation enables children to work through the successes and challenges in life and is an essential component to the therapeutic process of drama therapy (Emunah, 1994).

Peer relationships soon begin to play a critical role in a child’s life and “by the end of middle childhood, [they will likely] display a strong desire for group belonging” (Berk, 2014, p. 267). The ability to understand the meaning and importance of being a good friend is vital as the child becomes more interested in fitting in. Receiving emotional support from peers, helps to create a sense of connection and belonging, leading to a rise in empathy (Berk, 2014), and aiding in building “a secure base, permitting [the child] to navigate the many changes inherent in the adolescent transition without feeling isolated” (Broderick and Blewitt, 2016, p.232). These social and emotional milestones intertwine with the physical and cognitive development of
children to build a foundation for learning and success. Developing interactive programs that focus on the mind/body connection can provide children with opportunities to practice techniques and enhance skills and confidence in a safe, supportive environment. “In today’s complex culture of stress and challenges, self-awareness that leads to self-reliance is an undeniable skill set. We must offer more to our children, a way of gaining tools for sensing, kindness for others, and self-reflection. These tools help kids by learning from ‘the inside’ in an experiential way” (Neiman, 2015, p.1).

**Experiential Learning in the Classroom**

There is much literature to support the theory that therapies with a focus on movement, play, creativity, embodiment and the mind/body connection are extremely effective in treating anxiety disorders as well as supporting the social and emotional well-being of children (Vollestad, Nielsen and Nielsen, 2001; Heath, Smith and Young, 2017; Anari, Ddadsetan, & Sedghpour, 2009; D’Amico, Lalonde, & Snow, 2015; Bazzano, Anderson, Hylton, & Gustat, 2018; Smith, Esat, & Kanojia, 2020; Vickery & eDorjee, 2016; Degges-White, S. 2020). Vollestad, Nielsen and Nielsen (2001) stated that mindfulness and acceptance-based interventions “are associated with robust and substantial reductions in symptoms of anxiety and comorbid depressive symptoms” (p. 239). Additional studies have shown approaches such as storytelling (Heath, Smith and Young, 2017) and drama therapy to be effective in working with children diagnosed with social anxiety (Anari, Ddadsetan, & Sedghpour, 2009) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (D’Amico, Lalonde, & Snow, 2015; Corbett, Blain, Ioannou & Blaser, 2017).

A recent study released by Felsman, Seifert & Himle (2019), showed an in-school, group based, improvisational theater program to have a significantly positive effect on overall mental health and reduction of anxiety in adolescents. Furthermore, several compelling research studies
Quieting the Buzz: Drama Therapy and Mindfulness

recently released (Ilievová, Zitný, & Karabová, 2015; Hylton, Malley, & Ironson; 2019; McLachlan & Laletin, 2015) showed a significant link between drama therapy and a decrease in stress and anxiety in children and adolescents experiencing traumatic events, citing the use of improvisation, role play and embodiment as key contributors to the decrease. This growing body of evidence for the use of creative and expressive therapies to support the well-being and healthy development of children served as a strong foundation for the examination of drama therapy methods and tools integrated in school-based programs.

**Drama Therapy Framework**

"Drama therapy is the intentional and systematic use of drama/theatre processes to achieve psychological growth and change," (Emunah, 1994, p.3). School based programs grounded in drama therapy such as ENACT (Feldman, Jones and Ward, 2009,p. 284)) and Animating Learning by Integrating and Validating Experience (ALIVE) (Sajnani et al. 2019), are valuable examples of how this work can be successfully integrated into the classroom to teach social and emotional skills and significantly impact the physical and emotional wellbeing of children. Drama therapy approaches such as Developmental Transformation (DvT), can support a child’s ability to navigate through the tricky and every changing world of school and friendships by introducing skills that “focus on building self-confidence and capacity to remain balanced in unbalanced situations” (Johnson, 2013, p.32). Furthermore, several core processes and strategies utilized in drama therapy strongly support mindfulness by drawing on tools and techniques for deep breathing, meditation, self-awareness, being present in the moment and building relationships (Johnson, 2009; Rogers, 1993; Jones, 20007). “Experiencing embodiment, opening oneself to encounters with others, and embracing continuous change…this is what we mean by Presence” (Johnson, 2009, P 91).
A further examination of the literature highlighted specific drama therapy methods that create structure, encourage movement and creativity, build relationships and increase children’s mind/body connection.

**Self-as-Instrument**

A drama therapy approach often encourages the participant’s use of self-as-instrument. While some materials may be brought into the space to initiate interactions or guide the group down a particular path, the absence of props is intentional. This eliminates the impulse to project onto these inanimate objects and fosters the children’s ability to focus on their own bodies and be mindful of their personal experiences. Additionally, this approach allows the development of positive peer relationships as “participants are encouraged to bring their attention to their encounters with others” (Johnson, 2013, pp. 46-47).

**Warm-up and closing rituals**

“Warm ups [sic] are the signal that the work has begun” (Bergman and Hewish, 2003, p. 20), an opportunity to transition from the outside world and focus on the work ahead. Emunah (1994) stated that a group warm-up at the beginning of the session “eases emotional expression and serves to energize and enliven the group, [and] establish a playful environment” (p.145), making it an important and beneficial part of group dynamics and peer relationships.

Similarly, a consistent closing ritual across all sessions may also be an important part of the process in drama therapy. The closure “brings the session to an end . . . reinforces the group bond and leaves the student with a sense of accomplishment and excitement” (Feldman, Jones and Ward, 2009, p. 303). Emunah (1994) contended that dramatic ritual provides a time of transition back to the outside world and allows for recognition of and connection to the
experience for the individual and the group as a whole. This is particularly relevant for fixed
membership groups that allow for progression, relationship building and group cohesion.

*Embodiment*

Embodiment is an essential element of drama therapy and an important distinction from
traditional therapy. “Drama therapists have long known that it is only through embodied enacted
experience that change can occur” (Lewis, 2009, p. 254). Jones (2007) reminded us that “the
body is the main tool of communication and expression,” (p. 239) and when used in drama
therapy it can affect how others perceive us, change the way we see ourselves, and enable a
deeper sense of self-awareness (p. 239). “By physically participating in a dramatic activity the
body and mind are engaged in discovery. Issues are encountered and realised [sic] through
physical embodiment” (Jones, 2007, p. 114). Embodied approaches such as role playing, group
statue and mirroring, increase empathy and enhance social connections. “I know no greater way
to empathize with another person than to become him or her through a Mirror Exercise”
(Emunah, 1994, p. 151).

*Storytelling*

Stories are frequently used in expressive therapies and are rooted in both emotional and
physiological development. “Narrative is basic to the way the brain makes sense of the world
around it,” both sides of the brain working together to turn memories into words, giving them
purpose and meaning (Bailey, 2006, p.375). Storytelling “encourages the participant to take on
different roles and dramatize the story . . . [often incorporating] art, poetry, music,
reality form when it’s too hard to find meaning and make sense. Stories help put things into
place” (personal communication, 2019).

*Improvisation and role playing*
Role playing and improvisation are very often some of the first techniques that come to mind when thinking about drama and drama therapy. “The role serves as the single most significant feature that distinguishes drama therapy from other forms of psychotherapy and healing” (Dunne, 2009, p 181). Dunne (2009) went on to argue that “encouraging participants to assume different roles expands their world and their understanding of others” (p. 181). This strongly aligns with the developmental stages of elementary school children who are focused on building their own self-image while forming peer relationships and a sense of belonging (Berk, 2018, 294 – 295). As a young child’s school day is often filled with sitting quietly and patiently for long periods of time, techniques incorporate the use of role give them the opportunity to play. ‘Stepping outside of oneself’ and into a role is freeing; it provides relief and release from the constraints, both internally and externally induced, that are experienced in everyday life” (Emunah, 1994, p. 37).

**Method**

Prior to the development of this method the school’s teachers and guidance counselors conducted significant research and worked diligently to understand key components and strategies for reducing stress and anxiety in young children. Furthermore, many of the SEL programs and lessons already being implemented in classrooms throughout the elementary school incorporated creative, experiential approaches to support the students’ learning and wellness. Teachers and staff enhanced their daily academic plans with resources such as sensory walks, movement breaks and Gonoodle (https://www.gonoodle.com) which provides web-based movement videos and activities. The diversity, bullying and growth mindset curricula introduced important social skills through storybooks and videos and the *Second Step* (Committee for Children, 2011) social and emotional learning curriculum used photos, puppetry,
music and art to share important messages. The teachers’ familiarity and openness to these creative approaches allowed for the possibility of drama therapy techniques to be easily incorporated into class lessons.

The C.A.L.M.M. approach (Williams, personal communication, n.d.), provided a general overview of the importance of mindfulness in the classroom, breaking down the key components into five main areas and offering ideas and possible activities for implementation.

**C – Constant Connection:** Being present allows us to focus on what is happening right now, let go of the past, helps disregard the future, increases respect and aids focus.

**A – Affirmation:** Positive self-talk increases self-esteem and self-confidence, improves the ability to be aware of yourself and your impact on your surroundings, enables you to be present and calm and to reflect.

**L – Locomotion:** Promotes moving the body and learning self-regulation that encourage presence and reduces stress and anxiety.

**M – Meditation:** Allows time to slow down and be in the moment with a calm body and mind.

**M – Metacognition:** Reflecting objectively on your experiences and actions is a part of developing a sense of self and allows you to make more logical decisions in the future. (Williams, personal communication, n.d.)

This information was used as the basis for developing the 4-week intervention that incorporated drama therapy. Each session was designed to align with the first four areas of the C.A.L.M.M. content, with the fifth component, metacognition, being integrated throughout the four weekly sessions through processing and reflection exercises.

**Curriculum Development and Implementation**
The guidance department at the elementary school worked collaboratively to develop a curriculum that translated well into a classroom setting. Several resources were accessed included in-class lessons designed previously, books on yoga and mindfulness for children, and yoga, calming and wellness cards. Additionally, there were several parameters that needed to be considered and remain in the forefront throughout the process including: 1. Group size - each class has approximately 20 students; 2. Timing/length of the intervention - approximately 25 minute sessions one time per week in each classroom; 3. Space available - 8x10 rug areas in the classroom; 4. Generalizability and flexibility of the curriculum across different ages and developmental abilities - grades K-5 (ages 5 – 12) and special education integrated classrooms.

The method included techniques and approaches that complemented and enhanced the main goals of the curriculum; specifically, greater awareness of mind/body connection, positives social connections with peers, enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem and increased understanding of concrete tools and techniques for self-soothing and self-regulation. Each week built upon the previous lesson to create a strong foundation of mindfulness.

This method was intended to be four, 25- minute introductory sessions. All four sessions followed a similar structure and tied in breathing techniques, growth mind set and other classroom themes that had been introduced to the students earlier in the year, which provided some degree of familiarity and consistency for the children. Implementation of the 4-week curriculum began in early February and was expected to be completed in March.
### Week 1: Constant Contact/ Being Present

- Increase focus and calming presence
- Build self-esteem
- Encourage social connections/ friendships

### Week 2: Affirmation/ Building Self Esteem

- Increase focus and calming presence
- Build self-esteem
- Build Confidence and self-identity
- Encourage social connections/ friendships

### Week 3: Locomotion/ Movement

- Increase focus and calming presence
- Encourage mind-body connection
- Build self-esteem and confidence
- Build creativity and Self-Identity
- Encourage social connections/ friendships

### Week 4: Meditation/ Calming, Self-soothing

- Increase focus and calming presence
- Encourage self-soothing techniques
- Build Confidence and self-identity

### Goals

- Encourage social connections/ friendships
- Build self-esteem
- Increase focus and calming presence

### Warm-up

- Stand feet shoulder width apart, Eyes closed or looking downward. Hold the pose.
- Slowly tense all your muscles in your body, your face, shoulders, arms, legs, fingers, toes, etc. Squeeze as tightly as you can (approximately 10 seconds) and release. Repeat 2 times.

### Check-In

Facilitator joins the group in sitting and engages in a brief check-in about how they are feeling, how the day is going so far, etc. Facilitator takes time to explain the process for the next four weeks and/or to lead a discussion about the previous weeks’ sessions.

### Story Time

Facilitator invites the children to find a place to sit and finds a seat on the floor with them. An array of books were chosen based on the lesson and information they shared and/or the storybook aligned with the message for children to connect in their own ways. Facilitator reads the book, pauses throughout to lead and encourage enactment of ideas being introduced.

### Mirror Me

**Activity:**
- Facilitator invites participants to stand or sit and face the leader. They begin to mirror the leader's movement.
- Participants copy this and then given the freedom to choose their arms giving examples, both hands on hips, one arm up, or crossed over front, etc.
- Each participant chooses their own style or motto that best fits them.
- Go around the circle one at a time, each child stands in their pose and says their word (motto) out loud with strong confident voice. Remind group of examples from last kind, good listener, I can do it, It’s ok to ask for help, I am strong, I am confident, I am artistic, etc.
- Once everyone has gone facilitator leads group in 2 deep breaths.

### What’s Your Superpower?

**Activity:**
- Facilitator introduces the idea that research has shown that the power stance increases confidence and lowers anxiety. Let’s give it a try.
- Materials needed: Markers and an unlined white board.
- Group brainstorm positive and motivating words or phrases. Strength that makes them who they are and feel good about themselves.
- Facilitator invites participants to stand in a circle and model the basic important elements of the pose: Feet shoulder width apart, shoulders back, head up, eyes open.
- Participants copy this and then given the freedom to choose their arms giving examples, both hands on hips, one arm up, or crossed over front, etc.
- Each participant chooses their own style or motto that best fits them.
- Go around the circle one at a time, each child stands in their pose and says their word (motto) out loud with strong confident voice. Remind group of examples from last kind, good listener, I can do it, It’s ok to ask for help, I am strong, I am confident, I am artistic, etc.
- Once everyone has gone facilitator leads group in 2 deep breaths. Build Superpower Statue:
  - Facilitator leads the group in building a group superpower statue.
  - One at a time enter the center of the circle.
  - Freeze in your superpower stance and say your word out loud clearly.
  - Once everyone has joined the facilitator leads the group in saying their motto all together. Then hold and a big deep breath.
  - Relax

### Kids by Nature

**Activity:**
- Facilitator will lead the group in sound and movement.
- Materials needed: Markers and an unlined white board.
- Group brainstorm a list of animals and objects in the book, in the forest and from nature (e.g., specific animals, trees, storms, wind, rainbows, waves, etc.).
- Facilitator invites participants to spread out around the room to give themselves space to move.
- Facilitator calls out words from the list in any order.
- Participants move their bodies to portray that word while standing in place.
- Facilitator encourages participants to add sound to their movement.
- Facilitator invites the children to add sound to their movement.
- Ends activity by slowing movement and quietly ends the movement.

### Melt and Grow

**Activity:**
- Facilitator invites participants to spread out around the room to give themselves space to move.
- Quietly think to themselves one positive thing from the day and put it in their pocket for safe keeping.
- Turn and face outward with eyes closed or soft gaze. Focus on yourself, your body and all your senses.
- Stretch high making yourself as big as possible.
- Starting at your fingers. Very slowly begin to shrink down through each part of the body, every limb, muscle. Down to the floor (or into a chair if they prefer).
- Once everyone is down, take 2 deep breaths together.
- When ready, feel that positive memory from today taking root into the floor. Begin to grow, one to your feet, standing straight bringing your mind back to the present, or being in the classroom.
- Turn and face each other, make eye contact, quietly come back to the circle.
- Group takes 2 deep breaths.

### Table 1: Intervention Implementation Plan (Appendix 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1: Constant Contact/ Being Present</th>
<th>Week 2: Affirmation/ Building Self Esteem</th>
<th>Week 3: Locomotion/ Movement</th>
<th>Week 4: Meditation/ Calming, Self-soothing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase focus and calming presence</td>
<td>Increase focus and calming presence</td>
<td>Increase focus and calming presence</td>
<td>Increase focus and calming presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build self-esteem</td>
<td>Build self-esteem</td>
<td>Encourage mind-body connection</td>
<td>Encourage self-soothing techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage social connections/ friendships</td>
<td>Build Confidence and self-identity</td>
<td>Build self-esteem and confidence</td>
<td>Build Confidence and self-identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage social connections/ friendships</td>
<td>Build creativity and Self-Identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Story Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Does It Mean to Be Present?</th>
<th>I Will Be Strong</th>
<th>Giraffes Can’t Dance</th>
<th>What Do You Do with an Idea?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>by Rana DiOrio</td>
<td>by Mandy Afton</td>
<td>by Giles Andreae</td>
<td>by Kobi Yamada</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mirror Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator will lead the group in movement in a group circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator starts a movement and encourages the group to follow along as closely as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement is slow and small not meant to trick the group. To be like a mirror.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once the group has the movement the facilitator passes it on to the person beside who becomes the leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing the movement continues around the circle to allow all participants the opportunity to lead, until it gets back to the facilitator who quietly ends the movement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What’s Your Superpower?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator introduces the idea that research has shown that the power stance increases confidence and lowers anxiety. Let’s give it a try.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials needed: Markers and an unlined white board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group brainstorm positive and motivating words or phrases. Strength that makes them who they are and feel good about themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator invites participants to stand in a circle and model the basic important elements of the pose: Feet shoulder width apart, shoulders back, head up, eyes open.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants copy this and then given the freedom to choose their arms giving examples, both hands on hips, one arm up, or crossed over front, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each participant chooses their own style or motto that best fits them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go around the circle one at a time, each child stands in their pose and says their word (motto) out loud with strong confident voice. Remind group of examples from last kind, good listener, I can do it, It’s ok to ask for help, I am strong, I am confident, I am artistic, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once everyone has gone facilitator leads group in 2 deep breaths.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kids by Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator will lead the group in sound and movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials needed: Markers and an unlined white board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group brainstorm a list of animals and objects in the book, in the forest and from nature (e.g., specific animals, trees, storms, wind, rainbows, waves, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator invites participants to spread out around the room to give themselves space to move.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator calls out words from the list in any order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants move their bodies to portray that word while standing in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator encourages participants to add sound to their movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ends activity by slowing movement and quietly ends the movement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melt and Grow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator invites participants to spread out around the room to give themselves space to move.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quietly think to themselves one positive thing from the day and put it in their pocket for safe keeping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn and face outward with eyes closed or soft gaze. Focus on yourself, your body and all your senses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretch high making yourself as big as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting at your fingers. Very slowly begin to shrink down through each part of the body, every limb, muscle. Down to the floor (or into a chair if they prefer).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once everyone is down, take 2 deep breaths together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When ready, feel that positive memory from today taking root into the floor. Begin to grow, one to your feet, standing straight bringing your mind back to the present, or being in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn and face each other, make eye contact, quietly come back to the circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group takes 2 deep breaths.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reflection

Facilitator leads group in reflection process. Prompt questions: How was it? What was hard? What was easy? Fun? Did you laugh? Did you get distracted by others? How did you refocus?

### Closing Ritual

- Facilitator invites participants back into a circle and asks them to think of one positive thing that they can remember from the activity. Whisper it into their hand and put it somewhere on them to keep with them throughout the day. Maybe in their pocket, in their hair, in their heart. (Give examples: putting kindness in my heart, sense in my hair to remind me to notice, movement in my feet, etc.) Encourage students to share their words.
- Facilitator leads group in two hummingbird breaths.
- Group circle high five.
Population

The drama therapy intervention was piloted in three classrooms, two kindergarten and one first grade, with which the drama therapy counselor had already been leading social learning activities and had built a strong, trusting, relationship with both the students and the teachers. The children ranged in ages for five to seven years old. The gender breakdown based on self-report was: 24 female, 34 males and 1 transgender student. Each Kindergarten classroom had a total of 20 children, and the first-grade class include 19 for a total of 59 children or approximately 11% of the school’s population participating in the pilot. Additionally, five students within these three classroom received English Language Learner (ELL) services, one student had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to accommodate for a hearing impairment, and one student was a participant in the METCO program (METCO, n.d.) a voluntary state run initiative that expands educational opportunities for inner city youth.

Tracking Progress

Throughout the implementation process the facilitator engaged in ongoing information gathering and analysis through observation, self-reflection, and collaborative meetings with the guidance department team. The facilitator paid close attention to verbal and nonverbal cues of the students, interactions between and among the children, attention span, level of engagement with the activity, and facial and body language that suggested understanding and connection to the content. The facilitator further observed the responses of teachers and staff in the room and tracked their level of engagement with the activities, as well as their interactions with the children throughout the sessions.
Immediately following each group session, the facilitator engaged in five minutes of free writing “a simple exercise that gets us out of our intellects and into feelings and images” (Rogers, 1993, p. 64). These reflections captured the facilitator’s own individual thoughts and responses to the process in real time, highlighted common words, themes, feelings and experiences and served as the foundation for an arts-based response. Time and attention were also given to logistical notes of each session. The facilitator reflected on questions and ideas around implementation such as: What worked well? What was challenging? Did any students stand out? Did issues arise that required follow-up outside of the classroom? What immediate shifts and changes needed to be made to the curriculum moving forward? Weekly collaborative meetings within the guidance department took place to discuss the successes and challenges experienced and provide supervision and feedback to the facilitator for future planning.

Following completion of the 4-week intervention, the intent of the guidance department was to hold an expanded collaborative team meeting with classroom teachers and staff, to reflect on the process and discuss next steps for the development of a larger implementation plan.

### Results

**Initial Lessons Learned**

The very first session of this intervention was implemented in the first-grade classroom, and essentially served as a pilot project all on its own, with many lessons learned in the brief 25-minute session. As the facilitator entered the room the teacher acknowledged her and instructed the students to quietly take their seats on the rug theater style. At this point, the facilitator stepped in and asked the students instead to remain standing and form a large circle. While not a completely unsuccessful transition, it was slightly awkward and confusing for the children and
the teacher and could have been avoided had there been a brief discussion with the teacher prior to the session.

The first half of the session went as expected with the students actively engaged in the warm-up, check in and story time. The concepts of being present and focused resonated with the children, who talked about the important themes of the book and made observations about what they saw within its pages. From the facilitator’s perspective, the main activity is where the structure of the session weakened, and the children needed to regain focus on the goals of the day.

As originally designed, the main activity began in a group mirroring circle. The facilitator explained the intent of the game was to be like a mirror and use slow, focused movement, with quiet voices and bodies. The majority of the children did very well following instructions and maintaining the flow of the group. A few students, however, took their turn to enact big, loud, quick movements. The facilitator noted how the next student was able to bring the movement back to the pace that had been established with very few reminders or direction given. As the children moved into pairs, this discrepant behavior seemed to spread and became more evident. The group connection was lost in the transition to find partners and the mirroring became a funny game, with many faster movements and silly sounds. This caused a clear disconnect from the focus and presence of the group. The play was redirected by inviting the children back into the group to process and reflect on the experience.

One final learning point to note from this first session, was timing within the school calendar. This session took place a week before a scheduled school vacation. Although it was discussed and agreed upon in advance, more consideration should have given to factors such as group anticipation of the upcoming vacation, student workload for the week, and connectedness
of the series as a whole. As such, upon returning to school, this session was revisited in this classroom with a focus on group mirroring only. This resulted in more coherent associations with the material and stronger connections among the students.

**Lesson One: Week One**

Implementation in the two kindergarten classes began after the school break. Almost immediately within the session, it was clear that time was going to be a significant factor in completing the planned activities. Although 20 - 25 minutes was initially expected for each session, due to tight classroom schedules and transitions, in reality, the time allotted was 5 – 20 minutes. The facilitator came to this realization mid-session the first week and had to adjust the plan in the moment. From that point on, each weekly session was divided into two. The story time became the main activity for the first week of each session and the drama therapy exercise was the focus the following week. This doubled the number of sessions and overall length of the intervention and provided more time for flexibility and discussion on each topic while maintaining the same structure and format from week-to-week.

The first week, the book, *What Does It Mean to Be Present?* by Rana DiOrio, introduced the students to mindfulness and being present in simple ways each day. The facilitator sat on the floor in the circle with students throughout the session and paused frequently to make space for wondering, questions, call and response activities, and acting out ideas from the book. The students engaged in conversation, discussed what they observed in the book, made correlations to experiences in school and at home and took a moment to independently reflect on an important take away from the day.

**Week Two**
The second week reintroduced the idea of being present through a movement and mirroring activity. While seated on the floor with the children, the facilitator began to make slow, smooth movements while using a low calm voice to describe the exercise. As they watched, the children naturally began to move their own bodies. Their backs straightened, arms began to move slowly, and they quietly focused on mirroring the movements of the facilitator. Once the group was fully engaged, the movement was passed around the circle giving each student an opportunity to take on the leadership role. The room was quiet and calm as the children paid close attention to each other. A few children quietly shook their heads to indicate that they did not want to lead, and the group intuitively understood. Without much directive, the movement easily passed on to the next child. The stillness and the focus in the room caught the attention of the teachers who, up until that point, were engaged in the activity only tangentially. They paused from their work to watch more closely and began to participate in the movement, smiling and taking a moment for themselves to breathe and be still.

Lesson Two: Week Three

Week three felt both grounded and reliable in some respects and changed and uncertain in others. Upon the facilitator entering the room, the students gathered on the carpet in a standing circle, ready for opening warmups and check-in; a clear distinction from the usual classroom instruction of coming to the rug area and sitting quietly. They were beginning to understand that these sessions were different, the rules were not exactly the same and they had a bit more control and autonomy in the space. As the group transitioned into story time the energy level in the room rose and the facilitator had to increase focus on holding the space while allowing the play to happen organically. All three classes had similar experiences in this session. A familiarity and comfort level with the facilitator and the structure of the group, allowed their excitement and
energy to prevail in the room in a cohesive manner, rising and falling together, playing off each other and gently testing boundaries without fear of consequences.

In one classroom, the facilitator made the purposeful choice to sit in a different spot on the rug to change her perspective and experience. This was met with mixed responses along the spectrum including agreement and easy acceptance, concern for other students who may be displaced and complaints about no longer being able to see what was happening. The facilitator suggested that if everyone just wiggled over a tiny bit it would make room for all the friends. After pausing for a brief moment, the facilitator, held the book up high, and showed everyone the picture, as two boys quietly elbowed each other for a little more room. Something as seemingly innocuous as switching a seat was a big change for some of the children. It was important for the facilitator to be thoughtful and purposeful about the small change and to be aware of the impact it had on even one child. Had there been a bigger reaction to the change the facilitator likely would have spent more time addressing it in the play but as such, everyone quickly settled in, eager to move on.

In another classroom, the facilitator began the group with a question. “Who knows what it means to be confident?” The group sat quietly for a minute. A few hands hesitantly raised as the children struggled with how to express what they wanted to say. The facilitator acknowledged that confidence was a really big word and sometimes it’s hard to find the words to explain something, even though in our heads we know exactly what it means. One student suddenly found the words to describe that it means knowing you can do it. The facilitator agreed, “Yes! Believe in yourself. Can everyone say that together?” and with that, the group was led into story time.
I will be Fierce! by Bea Birdsong, a story based entirely in metaphor, presented many opportunities for active movement and role taking. The children happily engaged in imaginative play, putting on armor, packing the treasure chest, fighting the dragons with bubbles, taking off on an adventure and being “extraordinary.” The high energy and excitement elicited reminders of the classroom rules from both teachers, who stepped in to control the volume in the classroom, and students who reminded each other of the typical expected behavior. At just the right moment, the words on the penultimate page of the story book caught the attention of the group, “And then, I will rest.” It seemed to acknowledge the hard work of being a kid and making it through a day filled with such adventure. This gave the children permission to take a break and rejuvenate themselves as they sank to the floor in sighs of relief.

Week Four

Week four felt the most cohesive in each of the three classrooms, as the students came together with a heightened level of energy, engagement, and connectedness that was sustained throughout the session. In one kindergarten classroom, the children had just returned from outdoor recess and were excited. A few children began jumping around and singing, “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes.” The facilitator recognized the song and acknowledged the group’s need for a transition, “Oh you really want to sing the song! Ok, let’s do it then.” Together they sang and moved to the words. The second time through, they used whispering voices and as the song concluded, all the students quietly moved into their places in the circle, ready for what came next.

Upon mention of the superpowers main activity for the week, the room filled with anticipation and wonder. The children quietly cheered and clapped their hands and looked at each other with excitement. First, the group engaged in a few minutes of brainstorming and
created a long, thoughtful, and deeply personal list of their own strengths. These were not muscle strength necessarily, but rather something that made them who they are; Any words that helped them feel strong on the inside and good about themselves. These ideas served as inspiration for embodying their superpower role.

The facilitator carefully described and modeled the important elements of the superpower stance: feet apart, shoulders back, chin up, deep breaths. The children followed along and were encouraged to choose their own arm positions: perhaps hands on hips, crossed out in front or one arm up in the air. They made it their own, something that felt good and powerful to them. The room filled with confidence and excitement as, one-by-one, each child took their pose with conviction and declared their motto loudly and clearly. The children remained focused and alert and the play easily flowed into the superpower statue exercise. Together the students filled the space with their strong poses, serious yet smiling facing, and confident words. They took a moment to hold that feeling in their bodies as the stood, taking two deep breaths all together and breathing in the superpowers. The teachers were drawn in by the play, supported the children with words of encouragement, watched the group statue come together, and carefully listened to hear what each child had to say.

The energy and connection remained high until the very end as the entire group excitedly huddled around for the closing ritual which was slightly modified to “air high fives,” due to rising health concerns of the spread of coronavirus. This did not hamper the enthusiasm of the children and fit in seamlessly as they said good-bye to the facilitator for the day. This session was special, different. Every child, in all three classrooms participated in the exercise; Some loud and boisterous with strong, tough poses; Others quiet and shy with subtle, soft self-hugs; All openly accepted the challenge and eagerly jumped into their own superpower role.
Pandemic Interference

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, all schools were shut down and group activities were suspended as of March 13, 2020, bringing an abrupt end to the intervention. By that time, only the first two sessions had been successfully completed in all three classrooms. While much information was gathered regarding the implementation of the individual sessions, broader insights into the value and feasibility of the method have not been fully realized. Nevertheless, many profound experiences and valuable lessons came out of this process that will serve as the foundation for future program design and implementation. The remaining two sessions were designed to focus more specifically on movement and the mind/body connection. It would have been useful to see how these sessions played out, and how they effected the participation, energy level, confidence in the room, and the students’ ability to self-regulate throughout the activities. This is one point where the absence of information due to COVID-19 is very apparent.

To some degree, the COVID-19 pandemic is a parallel to the situations and skill building these lessons attempted to replicate in the classroom: How to bring calm to yourself when things feel out of control, self-regulate in the middle of chaos, learn concrete tools that help to manage strong feelings and gain a sense of comfort in the ability to control what can be controlled.

Although not the original intent of this method, the effects of the coronavirus on daily life could have been more thoroughly explored with the students. So many messages were coming at them and changing the small everyday experiences in very real and important ways. The teachers and staff had a clear communication style that was unthreatening and focused on simple ways to follow the rules and keep everyone safe and health: Wash your hands; Do not touch each other; Cover, cover, cover, cover! when you cough or sneeze; Do not share pencils or crayons; Use air high fives. It was all still new at the time the intervention was being
implemented and on the surface the children did not seem dramatically affected by it.

Nonetheless, the facilitator may have been able to explore this further with the class, particularly around being present in an ever-changing environment. Conversations and exercises could have been created around the changes that were happened in the school, as well as how to connect talk about their feelings and ask for help when needed.

**Expected outcomes**

As anticipated, positive influences were observed in several areas including students’ ability to:

- Understand and connect with the themes and topics presented.
- Identify feelings within their own bodies.
- Engage with coping and calming skills.
- Enhanced social relationships with their peers.

Perhaps the most positive impact noted was the students’ level of retention and recall of main ideas, activities, and important details from the previous weeks’ lessons. In all three classrooms the students not only remembered the title of books but were also able to discuss the main themes presented and gave detailed synopses of what happened in each session. Furthermore, the students made connections to their own experiences within the classroom and at home and shared thoughts about how to use the knowledge and skills they had learned, in their everyday lives. This level of involvement and connection to the material far exceeded the expectations of the facilitator and enabled the work to build from week-to-week and session-to-session in a more thoughtful way, which allowed for a deeper, more meaningful experience for all involved.

**Role of the Facilitator**
Each week, the facilitator observed the children’s level of engagement and reactions to the activities throughout the session, taking mental note of both group dynamics and individual personalities that presented themselves. There was the student who could never keep a straight face and quietly giggled every time she released her hummingbird breaths. The boy who, week-after-week, sat when the group stood and stared blankly when invited to stretch. He quietly passed on his turn to lead the group in movement yet could not resist the pull of the superpower pose and the chance to be seen and heard. Then there was the student who would sit back and think for a moment and then share the most thoughtfully crafted, yet still childlike responses, seemingly not afraid to reveal a part of himself in the process. In the group activities the children fell into three categories; the ones who just went along and participated, the students who looked to others before trying something new and the ones who sought attention by testing boundaries and pushing expectations. These observations gave the facilitator important information about the mindset of the individuals within the group and where used to make choices about how to respond and reflect back what was being seen and felt. As such the facilitator contained and guided the play while allowing the children to feel uninhibited yet in control of the process.

Flexibility was an essential aspect of the job as facilitator. With the large group size, shifting schedules and unforeseen happenings, it was crucial to be prepared and focused on the overall goals of the session yet remain open and present in the moment to avoid hampering the ability to play with what was happening in the room. It was important for the children to make meaning for themselves and to connect to the materials. Taking the time together to explore words, ideas and actions that came up created unscripted opportunities that brought depth and value to the process.
There is an inherent power imbalance in a school setting and classroom. The facilitator is seen as a teacher and therefore in charge and someone to whom the children need to listen. It is important to consider ways in which some of this power can be given back to the student while maintaining the educational and personal growth goals set forth in the beginning. The most evident way in which this happened was by giving the children opportunities to take on the leadership role through group-based activities such as the mirroring circle. In these activities the children were each given the opportunity lead their peers through movement and sound and allowed to make decisions on the pace, length and energy level of the activity. Another, slightly subtler way that power imbalance was addressed was by granting the student the autonomy to decide for themselves, how and when to participate in the sessions. The facilitator invited and encouraged each student into the play and proceeded as though it was expected that they would follow. However, the children were never pressured or forced to take part and always given the independence to choose how they wanted to experience the group.

**Artistic Interpretation of the Method**

The facilitator’s free writing process highlighted common themes experienced during the course of the implementation process. Woven throughout all four sessions were words such as listening, giggles, friends, helping, joy, and calm that evoked images of kindness and caring. The writings were also filled with feelings of pride, excitement, uncertainty, eagerness, and a level of thoughtfulness some would think unexpected for such young children.

Different and distinct experiences of movement were gleaned from the writing and illustrated themes of striking contrast. The concept of being present, elicited ideas such as deep breathing and slow movements, soft smiles and closed eyes, floating, flying and quiet exploration. These stood juxtaposed to images of confidence, strength, and bravery, conveyed
by visuals of dragons, puppies and superheroes, bright, bold colors, and children standing tall and strong, with the faces of warriors.

A week into remote learning, a fifth free writing session was incorporated to make space for representation of the facilitator’s thoughts and feelings around the pandemic. The words brought about notions of uncertainly, loss, distance, fear and feeling unfinished. Yet, there were also positive sentiments of connection, resiliency, creativity, time and the opportunity to take a breath.

The facilitator engaged in colorful art making to create a visual representation of mindfulness as a way of reflecting on these thoughts, feelings and images that came to mind. Calmness and connection, represented with swirls of blues and turquoise, pale yellow and gray, were contrasted by the jagged strokes of fiery reds, bold blue, deep purples and eye-catching yellows that symbolized the strength, bravery and superpowers of the children. In the middle, interrupting it all (like the pandemic), were dark black streaks of harsh barriers mingled with soft white puddles of light and openness. While in the process of creating, the artwork slipped from the facilitator’s hands and landed face down on the table. As the facilitator scooped it up, a new and truly relevant message suddenly came to mind: mistakes. “Opportunities to learn” the storybooks called them. This was an important part of the mindfulness strategies introduced to the children throughout the intervention. It is okay to make mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes, even grown-up. When we do, we learn, and grow stronger and get better. The messages now resonated with the facilitator herself. In that moment, this mistake became an unexpected and important learning opportunity and a fitting representation of the entire experience.

*Find the Beauty in Your Mistakes*
Discussion

The intent of this method was twofold: to positively influence the ability for elementary school aged children to reduce stress by implementing self-soothing and calming strategies; and to introduce drama therapy tools and techniques into the classroom that are easy to follow and accessible for teachers and staff to implement. As a pilot program, this intervention focused on the integration of drama therapy methods and techniques that encouraged embodiment and active participation which, increased the children’s internalization of key concepts and enhanced their ability to apply the strategies in their own lives. This method was further intended to inform the development of a calming and mindfulness curriculum for the school and increase understanding of which drama therapy tools and techniques might work well in the classroom setting.

Future Directions

There was such an abundance of information and opportunity packed into these four sessions, that each of these main topics could be developed into an 8+ week curriculum all its own. Each session centered on a specific element and skill within the curriculum and built upon each other to develop a solid foundation of mindfulness within the students. Moving forward, it will be crucial to define the scope of the project and choose an approach that best fits the needs
of the classrooms. If a broader, introductory approach is important, then the intervention as outlined has shown to be successful in achieving that goal and enabling teachers and counselors to introduce the lessons and expand on each skill from year-to-year. If a deeper exploration into one or more of the specific areas is preferred, this intervention will serve as a strong foundation for a larger implementation plan. This would allow more time to be spent on each topic area and provide many more opportunities for practicing and internalization of the important skills being introduced. There are endless suggestions for stories, books, movements, activities, and resources available to take this work in a number of different directions. While a whole school approach would take time, thoughtfulness, and planning, it would provide an opportunity to deliver a program that is adaptive and sustainable through which teachers and staff could engage with the children.

Adaptation for implementing the curriculum with the older grades needs to be considered. While the overall structure and goals of the intervention are appropriate and useful for all ages, particular attention should be paid to aspects such as the choice of storybook, activities, and delivery style. The older children have a higher level of focus and ability to understand more complex concepts and material (Berk, 2018). They are perhaps looking to build alliances and friendships and would appreciate the opportunity to interact with others in small groups. Tone of voice, body language and word choice are also important distinctions to make when considering the different approaches to working with children ages 5 to 12. However, as play is a fundamental concept within this method, focus and attention must be kept on experiential and embodied approaches that model the ability to be playful. The older children particularly, may need to be reminded that it is possible to have fun, be silly and also taking the work seriously.
Further adaptation could focus on the role of the witness, a powerful drama therapy tool and one that was not fully explored in this method. Jones (1996) spoke of how building skills to thoughtfully observe others allows one to see the self more clearly and find their place in the world. Thoughtful integration of this drama therapy tool would be a valuable enhancement to this method as it aligns well with critical mindfulness tenants such as being present in the moment and aware of the needs of those around you. The opportunity to choose the role of observer could be an important distinction for the children. By focusing some of the stories, activities and reflections on observation and experiences felt through watching others, children can take on different perspectives, which increases empathy for others and in turn develops a stronger understanding of themselves.

**Classroom Teacher Involvement**

This method shed light on the importance of the collaborative process between teachers and guidance counselors in supporting the growth and wellbeing of the students. The teachers played a vital role in the successful implementation of this curriculum and should be considered a key partner in the earliest stages of development. The group facilitator and the teacher must work together to create a program that best fits the needs of the students. “It’s the facilitator (teacher, counselor, parent, personnel manager, etc.) who creates the safe environment. The facilitator’s values, attitudes, and way of being establish a safe space for the participant (student, client, child, etc.) to take emotional risks” (Rogers, 1993, p. 12).

The teachers lay the groundwork for classroom rules and expectations from the very first day of school. It is important to understand this and to take the opportunity to discuss how the drama therapy approach may be different from typical lesson plans. Sharing information and perspectives can help to make drama therapy accessible and complementary to the work.
Furthermore, teachers can provide guidance and feedback on developing a consistent language across all classrooms, give insight into challenges that may arise, and share ideas for connecting with the group as a whole. True collaboration will help to build partnerships and trust and alleviate the teachers’ wondering and need to step in to contain the energy as it escalates. When implemented thoughtfully, this approach can be supportive and helpful to the teachers’ overarching goals of the classroom.

Conclusion

The drama therapy method created for this intervention provided a strong foundation for introducing calming and mindfulness activities to school ages children. Concrete tools and techniques employed throughout the sessions allowed the children to practice and learn in a fun and interactive environment that encouraged a mind/body connection and a solution focused mindset. The opportunity to explore how thoughts, feelings and emotions are present within the body, and then being given the chance to practice simple mindfulness strategies, were essential to the success of this experiential learning process. Key factors such as awareness, positive self-talk and embodiment helped to internalize the strategies that enabled the children to feel grounded and calm. This approach to mindfulness enabled the facilitator to address the pressures and challenges that children faced each day, support the development of skills the children needed to navigate even the trickiest of situations, and help them feel confident and successful in all aspects of their lives.
References


Center for Disease Control and Prevention (April 2019), Data and statistic on children’s mental health. retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html


Quieting the Buzz: Drama Therapy and Mindfulness


METCO program. (n.d.) Retrieved from http://www.doe.mass.edu/metco/


Appendices
Appendix 1: *Table 1: Intervention Implementation Plan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1: Constant Contact/ Being Present</th>
<th>Week 2: Affirmation/ Building Self Esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase focus and calming presence</td>
<td>• Increase focus and calming presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Build self-esteem</td>
<td>• Build self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Encourage social connections/ friendships</td>
<td>• Build Confidence and self-identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•</td>
<td>• Encourage social connections/ friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Warm-up</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Muscle tension and relaxation exercise:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stand feet shoulder width apart, Eyes closed or looking down on a spot in front of you. Hands by your side.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Slowly tense all your muscles in your body, your face, shoulders arms, legs, fingers, toes, etc. Squeeze as tightly as you can (approximately 10 seconds) and release. Repeat 2 times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shake off any last feelings of tension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deep breathing exercise:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Place your hand on your belly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hummingbird breaths: Take a deep breath in for 4 seconds, hold for 2 seconds and out for 6 humming loudly like a hummingbird feel the vibration in your body - repeat 3 times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Check-in</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator joins the group in sitting and engages in a brief check-in about how they are feeling, how the day is going so far, etc. Facilitator takes time to explain the process for the next four weeks and/or to lead a discussion about the previous weeks’ sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story Time</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator invites the children to find a place to sit and finds a seat on the floor with them. An array of books were chosen based on the lesson and information they shared and/or the storybook aligned with the message for children to connect in their own lives. Facilitator reads the book, passes throughout to lead and encourage enactment of ideas being introduced. Follow up with a check in about main ideas and children’s favorite part of the story.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mirror Me</strong></td>
<td><strong>What’s Your Superpower?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Facilitator will lead pass the movement in group circle Activity:</em></td>
<td><em>Facilitator introduces the idea that research has shown that the power stance increases confidence and lowers anxiety. Let’s give it a try. Activity:</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitator starts a movement and encourages the group to follow along as closely as possible</td>
<td>• Group brainstorm positive and motivating words or phrases. Strengths that make them who they are and feel good about themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Movement is slow and small not meant to trick the group. To be like a mirror Voices should be off and eyes focused on the leader.</td>
<td>• Facilitate and oversized mirror.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Once the group has the movement the facilitator passes it on to the person beside who becomes the leader.</td>
<td>• Each participant chooses their own world or motto that best fits them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Passing the movement continues around the circle to allow all participants the opportunity to lead, until it gets back to the facilitator who quickly ends the movement</td>
<td>• Go around the circle one at a time, each child stands in their pose and says their word: motto out loud with strong confident voice (reminid group of examples from last kind, good listener, I can do it. It’s ok to ask for help, I am strong, I am confident, I am artistic, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection</strong></td>
<td><strong>What Does it Mean to be Present?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator leads group in reflection process. Prompt questions: How was it? What was hard? What was easy? Fun? Did you laugh? Did you get distracted by others? How did you refocus?</td>
<td>by Rana DiOrio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closing Ritual</strong></td>
<td><strong>I Will be Fierce!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Facilitator invites participants back into a circle ask them to think of one positive thing that they can remember from the activity. Whisper it into their hand and put it somewhere on them to keep with them throughout the day. Maybe in their pocket, in their hair, in their heart. (Give examples: putting kindness in my heart, sense in my hair to remind me to notice, movement in my feet, etc.) Encourage students to share their word.</td>
<td>by Bea Bindseng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Facilitator leads group in two hummingbird breaths</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Group circle high five</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Week 3: Locomotion/Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase focus and calming presence</td>
<td>• Increase focus and calming presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Encourage mind-body connection</td>
<td>• Encourage self-soothing techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Build self-esteem and confidence</td>
<td>• Build Confidence and self-identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Build creativity and Self-Identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Encourage social connections/friendships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Warm-up**

**Muscle tension and relaxation exercise:**
- Stand feet shoulder width apart. Eyes closed or looking down on a spot in front of you. Hands by your side.
- Slowly tense all your muscles in your body, your face, shoulders, arms, legs, fingers, toes, etc. Squeeze as tightly as you can (approximately 10 seconds) and release. Repeat 2 times.
- Shake off any last feelings of tension

**Deep breathing exercise:**
- Place your hand on your belly
- Hummingbird breaths: Take a deep breath in for 4 seconds, hold for 2 seconds and out for 6 humming loudly like a hummingbird feel the vibration in your body - repeat 3 times.

**Check-in**

Facilitator invites the children to find a place to sit and finds a seat on the floor with them. An array of books were chosen based on the lesson and information they shared and/or the storybook aligned with the message for children to connect in there own lives. Facilitator reads the book, pauses throughout to lead and encourage enactment of ideas being introduced. Follow up with a check-in about main ideas and children’s favorite part of the story.

**Story Time**

_Giraffes Can’t Dance_ by Giles Andreae  
_What Do You Do with an Idea?_ by Kobi Yamada

Facilitator leads and experiential exercise to allow the children to put the ideas and feelings into movement and sensations that encourage the mind/body connection. These activities are designed to increase focus and a calming presence, build self-identity, encourage social connections/friendships and introduce self-soothing techniques. There are not many rules other than to listen closely, and keep themselves and their friends safe. The children will move about the space to engage their whole bodies, use their voices and make the experience their own.

**Main Activity**

_Kids by Nature_
Facilitator will lead the group in sound and movement  
Materials Needed: Markers and paper/White board

**Activity:**
- Group brainstorm a list of animals and object in the book, in the forest and from nature (i.e., specific animals, trees, storms, wind, rainbows, waves, etc.).
- Facilitator invites participants to spread out around the room to give themselves space to move
- Facilitator calls out words from the list in any order
- Participants move their bodies to portray that word while standing in place
- Facilitator encourages participants to add sound to their movement
- Facilitator gives direction to change speed, size and volume of movement and sound; Ends activity by slowing movement and gradually making smaller until participants are standing still. Invites group back to the circle

_Melt and Grow_
Facilitator will guide group through a quiet mediation process.

**Activity:**
- Facilitator invites participants to spread out around the room to give themselves space to move
- Quietly think of themselves one positive thing from the day and put it in their pocket for safe keeping.
- Turn and face outward with eyes closed or soft gaze. Focus on yourself, your body and all your sense.
- Stretch high making yourself as big as possible.
- Starting at your fingers. Very slowly begin to melt, down through each part of the body, every limb, muscle. Down to the floor (or into a chair if they prefer)
- Once everyone is down. take 2 Deep breaths together.
- When ready, feel that positive memory from today taking root into the floor. Begin to grow, rise to your feet, standing straight bring your mind back to the present, of being in the classroom.
- Turn and face each other, make eye contact, quietly come back to the circle
  - Group takes 2 deep breaths

**Reflection**

Facilitator leads group in reflection process. Prompt questions: How was it? What was hard? What was easy? Fun? Did you laugh? Did you get distracted by others? How did you refocus?

**Closing Ritual**

- Facilitator invites participants back into a circle ask them to think of one positive thing that they can remember from the activity. Whisper it into their hand and put it somewhere on them to keep with them throughout the day. Maybe in their pocket, in their hair, in their heart. (Give examples: putting kindness in my heart, sense in my hair to remind me to notice, movement in my feet, etc.) Encourage students to share their word.
- Facilitator leads group in two hummingbird breaths
- Group circle high five
THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Lesley University
Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences
Expressive Therapies Division
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Drama Therapy, MA

Student’s Name: ___Karole A. Rose______________________________________________________________

Type of Project: Thesis

Title: ___Quieting the Buzz: Drama Therapy and Mindfulness in the Classroom, An Intervention________

Date of Graduation: ________ May 16, 2020______________________________

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor:_____Laura L. Wood, Ph.D.
5.4.2020 8:09pmEST Electronic Signature