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Embedding Mindfulness Practice in Entry-Level Occupational Therapy Education Program: Experiences and Outcomes

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Objective
To embed mindfulness practice into an entry-level occupational therapy curriculum and assess outcomes to reduce student stress and promote well-being.

Evidence-base
- **Healthy People 2020**: Promote quality of life, healthy development and healthy behaviors across all life stages
- **Mindfulness training** in higher education (Gura, 2010)
  - enhances cognitive and academic performance
  - supports mental health/psychological well-being
  - provides coping tools to OT students
- **Recent research** (Reid, 2013; Stew, 2011)
  - improved therapeutic interactions in clinical setting, "fully present for clients"
  - Increase ability to cope with challenging situations
  - Increased self-awareness, reduced stress and greater feelings of well-being

References

See attachment for complete reference list

Implementation
**Summer reading**: Mindfulness: An attentional approach to engaged professionalism (Mueller)

**First class (fall)**:
- Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (pre measure)
- introduced mindfulness (11-minute videotape) and led students through one mindfulness practice
- pairs/small group discussion
- opportunity to share in large group discussion

**Weekly in lab (fall and spring semesters)**:
- 5-6 minute mindfulness practice (video led)
- lab instructors encourage use of mindfulness while practicing skills (listening during Interpersonal module activities, breathing, visualizing before patient transfer)

**Backboard resources**:
- All videotapes archived for student use
- Published peer-reviewed evidence on mindfulness programs and outcomes (multiple populations)
- Mindfulness apps
- YouTube videos - relationship of social-emotional environment to mental and physical health

**Course assignment (spring semester)**:
- Integrated selected mindfulness practice/activity at start of group-led intervention session

**Evaluation**:
- Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (post measure in fall)
- after each of 3 modules, student feedback in anonymous online evaluation (qualitative and quantitative)

**Integration into other courses**:
- Mindfulness moment before tests in other courses – led by course instructors

Outcomes
**Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) results**
- Inconclusive after first semester
- Students more observant of own degree of awareness?
- Is FFMQ sensitive to recognize short-term change?

**Students**
- “…mindfulness definitely helps to calm me down before fieldwork, exams or anything else that causes me stress and anxiety."
- “It allows me to recognize my feelings and/or worries when I am in class, but then focus on the task at hand. I acknowledge them, let them go, or make a mental note to think about it.”
- “…mindfulness helps me to improve my well-being outside of class and be more positive in general.”
- “I don’t at this moment really believe mindfulness is something the benefits me. Perhaps I will feel differently in the future.”

**Faculty**
- “… used … prior to the first A & K exam. Students participated, most really got into it with closed eyes and breathing along with my voice. It was a good addition. I plan to do it again next week.”

**Course outcomes**

Next steps
- End of year data collection/evaluation (Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, student feedback)
- Plan for second year implementation and first year revision with student input; reconsider FFMQ
- Online training plus in-person session option
- Volunteer participation
- Create separate mindfulness module
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References


