

'Sit Down, Breathe, and Feel What?' Bringing a Contemplative Intervention into a Public Urban Middle School

Authors : Lunthita M. Duthely, John T. Avella, John Ganapati Coleman

Abstract : For as many as one in three adolescents living in the United States, the adolescent years is a period of low well-being and mental health challenges—from depressive symptoms to mild to moderate psychological diagnoses. Longitudinal population health studies demonstrated that these challenges persist in young adulthood, and beyond. The positive psychology (PS) approach is a more preventative approach to well-being, which contrasts the traditional, deficits approach to curing mental illness. The research among adult populations formed the basis for PS studies among adolescents. The empirical evidence for the effectiveness of PS interventions exists for both adult and youth populations. Positive Psychology interventions target individuals' strengths, such as hope and optimism, and positive emotions, such as gratitude. Positive psychology interventions such as increasing gratitude, proved effective in many outcomes among youth, including psychological, social, and academically-related outcomes. Although gratitude-inducing studies have been conducted for the past decade in the United States, few studies have been conducted among samples of urban youth, particularly youth of diverse cultural backgrounds. For nearly two decades, the secular practice of meditation has been tested among adults and more recently among youth, focused mostly among clinical samples. The field of Contemplative Sciences explores practices such as Hatha Yoga, Tai Chi, and Meditation, as preventative practices among children and adolescents. A more recent initiative is to explore Contemplative Practices in the school environment. Contemplative Practices yield a variety of positive outcomes, including academic, social, psychological, physiological, and neurological changes among children and adolescents. Again, few studies were conducted among adolescents of diverse cultural backgrounds. The purpose of this doctoral dissertation research study was to test a gratitude-meditation intervention among middle school students attending a public charter school, located in an urban region of Metropolitan Miami. The objective of this presentation is to summarize the challenges and success of bringing a positive psychology and meditation intervention into an urban middle school. Also, the most recent findings on positive psychology and meditation interventions conducted in school environments will be presented as well.

Keywords : adolescents, contemplative intervention, gratitude, secular meditation, positive psychology, school engagement, Sri Chinmoy

Conference Title : ICPPMH 2016 : International Conference on Positive Psychology and Mental Health

Conference Location : Tokyo, Japan

Conference Dates : May 26-27, 2016