



LIVERPOOL
HOPE
UNIVERSITY
1844

Mindful Literacy: Fostering Self- Regulation in At-Risk Dyslexia Key Stage 1 Children

Sarah Bannon

Language and Literacy



Introduction

Fostering self-regulation in Key Stage 1 children at risk for dyslexia is essential (Livingston et al., 2018). At-risk dyslexia involves identifying 5 to 7-year-olds exhibiting early signs, such as challenges in phonological awareness, reading, and writing (Colenbrander et al., 2018). Early intervention focuses on targeted strategies to enhance literacy skills, ensuring a positive educational experience (Lovett et al., 2017). However, children in the at-risk dyslexia group often struggle with managing their stress response, particularly the fight or flight reaction (Livingston et al., 2018). The heightened stress response can exacerbate given the cognitive challenges during phonics and literacy learning (Livingston et al., 2018). Furthermore, the intense emotions associated with the stress response can lead to emotional dysregulation, emphasising the role of self-regulation, including attention control and emotional management (Livingston et al., 2018). In Key Stage 1 classrooms, some at-risk dyslexic children aged 5-7 years face challenges managing stress responses during phonics and literacy lessons (Boyes et al., 2020). Therefore, addressing these challenges is crucial, as stress can hinder their ability to absorb and apply essential reading and writing skills (Lindeblad et al., 2019). Livingston et al. (2018) delve into the impact of stress on learning, particularly in the context of children at risk for dyslexia, highlighting the need for a supportive environment during literacy activities.

Kershner (2020) proposes that heightened stress adversely affects the comprehension of learning to read and write. Similarly, it is akin to attempting to read a book when feeling highly anxious, wherein cognitive processes are compromised. Kershner's (2020) theory underscores the significance of creating a comfortable and safe space for effective learning and regulation. For example, it recognises that stress can impede poor self-regulation and hinder reading and literacy skills in at-risk dyslexic children (Lazarevic & Bentz, 2020).

Conversely, implementing mindfulness activities could be crucial, mitigating stress and addressing fight or flight responses (Zenner et al., 2014). A proposed definition of Mindfulness comprises two key components. The first involves self-regulating attention and focusing on immediate experience (Bishop et al., 2004). The second involves adopting a curious, open, and non-judgmental orientation towards present experiences (Bishop et al., 2004). Consequently, it makes learning to read less stressful for at-risk dyslexic children. O'Toole et al. (2017) suggests that Mindfulness and its integration into schools aims to enhance mental health, academic achievement, and overall well-being. Zenner et al. (2014) approach creates a conducive setting for these children to thrive in developing their reading and writing skills. Therefore, by integrating mindfulness practices, educators can enhance self-regulation, reduce stress, and promote a positive learning environment for at-risk dyslexic Key Stage 1 children.

Proposed Solution

In response to the educational challenge of fostering self-regulation in language and literacy among at-risk Key Stage 1 children with dyslexia (Livingston et al., 2018), a suggested approach involves implementing mindfulness activities before phonics lessons (O'Toole et al., 2017). This intervention systematically cultivates self-regulation skills tailored for key stage 1 children at risk for dyslexia (Zenner et al., 2014). The proposed intervention targets the microsystem and mesosystem, as per Bronfenbrenner's ecological system (Tudge & Rosa, 2020).

Mindfulness, a cornerstone of this proposed intervention, is envisioned to enhance concentration and attention skills significantly, crucial elements for phonics and literacy development (Zenner et al., 2014). At the beginning of the intervention, it is imperative to

provide mindfulness training for educators (Emerson et al., 2017). This training equips teachers with the necessary skills to guide students through concise pre-phonics mindfulness exercises.

However, guided meditation techniques, like imagining a safe space or participating in the meditation bubble exercise with a focus on breath, prove effective in a concise 5-minute session for children (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). This method, supported by Hooker & Fodor (2008), contributes to the proposed mindfulness intervention. In addition, integration into the school day, strategically positioned before phonics sessions, establishes a consistent routine that facilitates the children's gradual adaptation to mindfulness practice (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). However, challenges may arise, particularly in collecting teacher acceptance and ensuring the regularity of practice within the constraints of a busy school schedule (Crawford et al., 2020).

Impact and Potential Outcomes

The early signs of dyslexia and phonological challenges present microsystemic risks (Terry et al., 2022). The stress from these challenges during literacy activities directly influences the child's immediate environment (mesosystem) (Iruka et al., 2020). However, the intervention, influenced by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, effectively addresses stress and enhances self-regulation within this mesosystem (Mahn, 1999). Furthermore, involvement from educators and parents introduces an additional layer of support within the child's ecological context (Iruka et al., 2020).

Viewing Mindfulness as a mental preparation before reading, it offers children a calm introduction, fostering focused and composed minds (Zenner et al., 2014). The proposed solution integrates brief, teacher-guided mindfulness sessions into the school day, specifically before phonics activities. This approach, rooted in evidence-based practices, aims to enhance

self-regulation skills, and create an optimal learning environment for at-risk Key Stage 1 children with dyslexia, contributing to improved language and literacy development. The successful implementation of this solution hinges on mindful teacher training, strategic integration into the school routine, and proactive measures to address potential challenges.

Reflection and Conclusion

In examining the challenges faced by at-risk dyslexic Key Stage 1 children, the proposed mindfulness intervention emerges as a transformative strategy. Beyond directly impacting stress reduction and self-regulation, the intervention establishes a foundation for a more positive and engaging learning atmosphere. By integrating Mindfulness into the daily routine, the potential benefits extend beyond the individual learner. Educators undergoing mindfulness training become catalysts for fostering a culture of emotional well-being and concentration.

The ripple effect within the broader educational community is significant. The proposed solution promotes a paradigm shift, recognising the intertwined nature of mental health and academic achievement. The success of this approach hinges on collaboration, with parents and teachers working cohesively to reinforce the positive impact of Mindfulness. Consequently, the proposed intervention offers a solution to immediate challenges and a holistic approach to creating a supportive and mindful educational system for all teachers and students involved.

References

- Bishop, S. R., Lau, M., Shapiro, S., Carlson, L., Anderson, N. D., Carmody, J., Segal, Z. V., Abbey, S., Speca, M., Velting, D., & Devins, G. (2004). Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 11*(3), 230–241. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bph077>
- Boyes, M. E., Leitão, S., Claessen, M., Badcock, N. A., & Nayton, M. (2020). Correlates of externalising and internalising problems in children with dyslexia: An analysis of data from clinical casefiles. *Australian Psychologist, 55*(1), 62–72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ap.12409>
- Colenbrander, D., Ricketts, J., & Breadmore, H. L. (2018). Early identification of dyslexia: Understanding the issues. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 49*(4), 817–828. https://doi.org/10.1044/2018_lshss-dyslc-18-0007
- Crawford, A., Joseph, S., & Sellman, E. (2020). A quiet revolution? reflecting on the potentiality and ethics of mindfulness in a junior school. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 69*(2), 237–255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2020.1791795>
- Emerson, L.-M., Leyland, A., Hudson, K., Rowse, G., Hanley, P., & Hugh-Jones, S. (2017). Teaching mindfulness to teachers: A systematic review and narrative synthesis. *Mindfulness, 8*(5), 1136–1149. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0691-4>
- Hooker, K. E., & Fodor, I. E. (2008). Teaching mindfulness to children. *Gestalt Review, 12*(1), 75–91. <https://doi.org/10.5325/gestaltreview.12.1.0075>
- Iruka, I. U., DeKraai, M., Walther, J., Sheridan, S. M., & Abdel-Monem, T. (2020). Examining how rural ecological contexts influence children’s early learning

- opportunities. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 52, 15–29.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.09.005>
- Kershner, J. R. (2020). Dyslexia as an adaptation to cortico-limbic stress system reactivity. *Neurobiology of Stress*, 12, 100223. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ynstr.2020.100223>
- Lazarevic, B., & Bentz, D. (2020). Student perception of stress in online and face-to-face learning: The exploration of stress determinants. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 35(1), 2–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08923647.2020.1748491>
- Livingston, E. M., Siegel, L. S., & Ribary, U. (2018a). Developmental dyslexia: Emotional impact and consequences. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 23(2), 107–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404158.2018.1479975>
- Livingston, E. M., Siegel, L. S., & Ribary, U. (2018b). Developmental dyslexia: Emotional impact and consequences. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 23(2), 107–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404158.2018.1479975>
- Lovett, M. W., Frijters, J. C., Wolf, M., Steinbach, K. A., Sevcik, R. A., & Morris, R. D. (2017). Early intervention for children at risk for reading disabilities: The impact of grade at intervention and individual differences on intervention outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(7), 889–914. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000181>
- Mahn, H. (1999). Vygotsky's methodological contribution to sociocultural theory. *Remedial and Special Education*, 20(6), 341–350.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/074193259902000607>
- O'Toole, C. A., Furlong, M., McGilloway, S., & Bjørndal, A. (2017). Preschool and school-based mindfulness programmes for improving mental health and cognitive functioning in young people aged 3 to 18 years. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2022(8). <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.cd012518>

- Terry, N. P., Gerido, L. H., Norris, C. U., Johnson, L., & Little, C. (2022). Building a framework to understand and address vulnerability to reading difficulties among children in schools in the United States. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2022(183–184), 9–26. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20473>
- Tudge, J., & Rosa, E. M. (2020). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory. *The Encyclopedia of Child and Adolescent Development*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171492.wecad251>
- Zenner, C., Herrnleben-Kurz, S., & Walach, H. (2014). Mindfulness-based interventions in schools—a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00603>