

Mastering Mindfulness North Shore Education Consortium

Annie Gillis
Healthcare Studies

Introduction

The North Shore Education Consortium SOAR & EMBARK programs offer a unique post-secondary education transitional program for young adults with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 22. The organization is located at the Enterprise Center on the campus of Salem State University. Students get the opportunity to learn and grow in an atmosphere that fosters connectivity to their peers (*North Shore Education Consortium, 2022, "History & Mission"*).

- The SOAR Program: offered to young adults with mild disabilities that interfere with certain abilities, like being able to work and function independently. The program places students in internships, teaches students how to navigate transportation, and gives them daily skills needed to be able to be independent. (*North Shore Education Consortium, 2023, "SOAR Program"*).

- The EMBARK Program: offered to students with moderate disabilities who require further education after high school. Students finish the program with their high school diploma. Some even go on to work jobs and live and function independently (*North Shore Education Consortium, 2023, "EMBARK Program"*)

- Mv Role: As a peer mentor and intern, I am responsible for



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Internship Project Objective

To implement mindfulness strategies in an attempt to aid students with emotional regulation to better manage challenges associated with their disabilities. To successfully conduct a way to measure the effectiveness of mindfulness activities on students that participate.

Related Literature

- "Individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disability (IDD) can learn mindfulness practices to self-manage their aggressive and destructive behaviors. Individual practices and group-based programs continue to show that mindfulness approaches are effective for this population" (Nirbhay N. and Hwang, March 2020, p. 2).

- According to, the State of Massachusetts, the special education services given to individuals ages 3 to 22 must provide students with preparedness skills, some of which include: "other needs resulting from the child's disability that impact progress in the general curriculum, including social and emotional development" (Mass.Gov, 2024, "School Aged Youth and Special Education" p. 1)

- Also supported by the study, "Different things at different times: Wellbeing strategies and processes identified by parents of children who have an intellectual disability or who are autistic, or both". The study explores how different students are impacted uniquely in terms of their mental health, and how there is not a perfect approach to aiding with and evaluating mindfulness of this population of students (Griffin and Gore, March 2023, pp. 825)


Materials & Methods

- Students were informed on the meaning of mindfulness and why it is important through a group class lesson and discussion. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions before the activity began.
- Pre and post assessments were created as a way of collecting qualitative and quantitative data. Nine students were asked to complete the pre-assessment before completing the activity.
- Calming music was played and students were asked to remain quiet and work independently throughout the activity.
- Students were given the choice of listening to music, meditating/deep breathing, going on a walk, drawing, or journaling.
- A timer was set for 10 minutes.
- Students were asked to fill out a post-assessment where they reported how

Mindfulness Pre-Assessment

Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. These questions should be answered before beginning the mindfulness exercise.

- Please put a check mark next to the face that best describes how you are feeling today.



- Have you ever practiced mindfulness activities on your own time when you are feeling uneasy?

YES NO

- Please circle a picture to represent your favorite mindfulness activity listed here.



Mindfulness Post-Assessment

Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. These questions should be answered after completing the mindfulness exercise.

- Please put a check mark next to the face that describes the way you are feeling now.



- Please circle the mindfulness activity you chose to complete.



- Please circle "YES" if you will complete an exercise like this in the future if you ever find yourself feeling uneasy?

YES NO

The pre and post assessments displayed above were created for this project based on the results on prior activity where assessments were difficult for students to understand.

Results

Observations:

- Many students who showed visible changes in their general mood did not understand how to attribute that to the mindfulness activity.
- Many students had to ask staff for help answering the questions, indicating that they may have needed assistance in understanding how to fill out the assessments.
- The assessments that contained the visual pictures had a higher comprehension rate than the assessments the prior week.
- Students were visibly more focused on their mindfulness activity in a larger group than in a smaller group.

Table 1

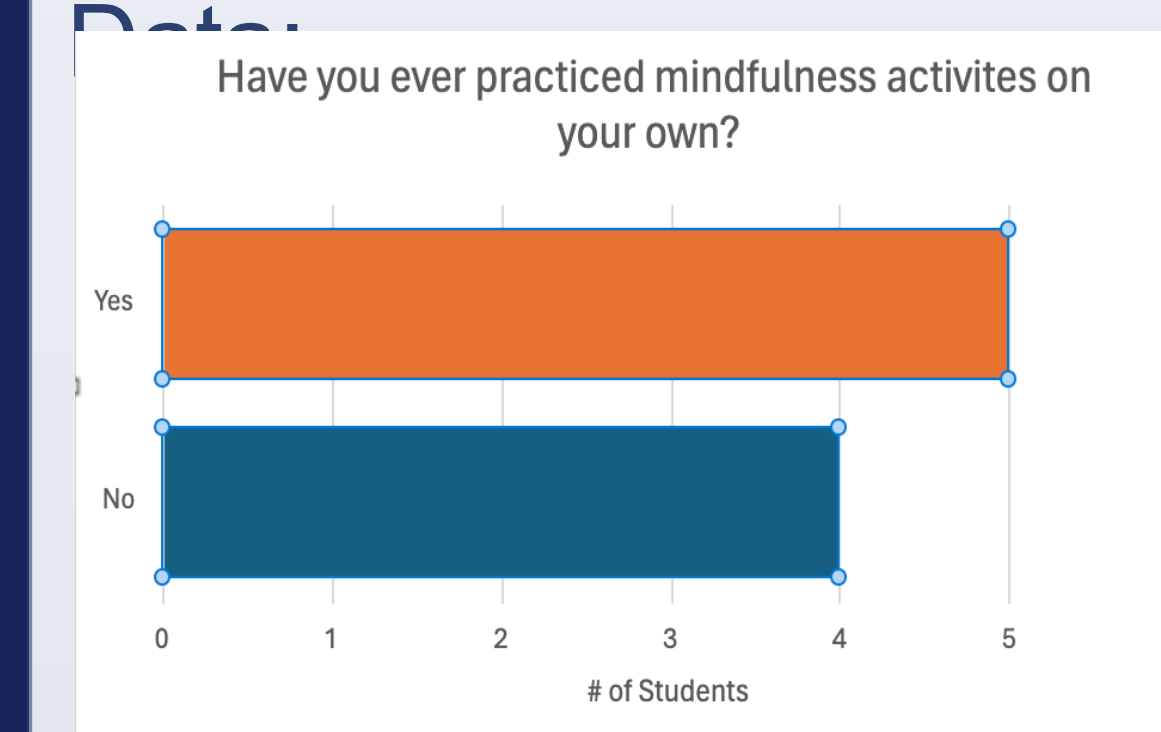


Table 2

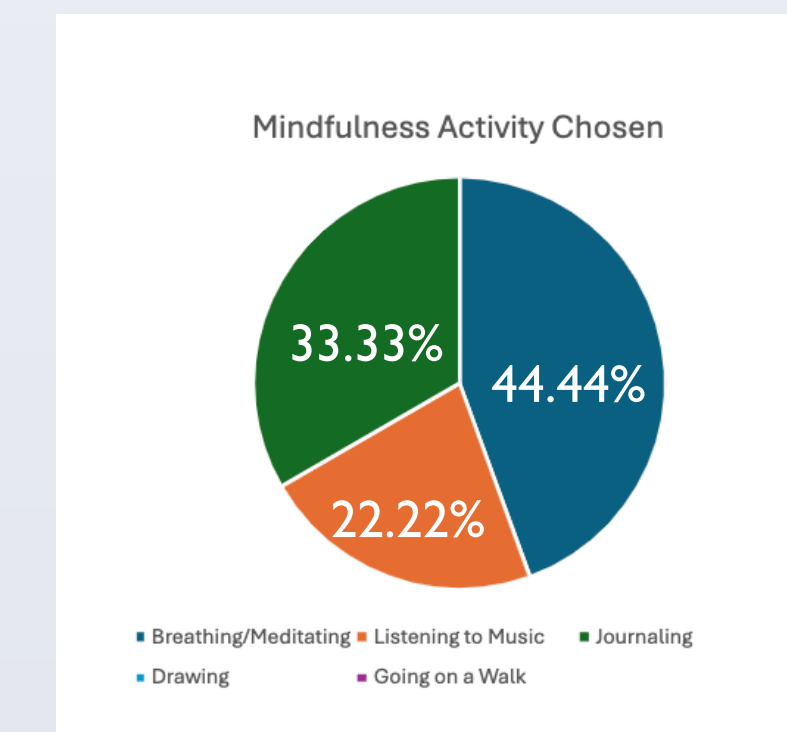


Table 3

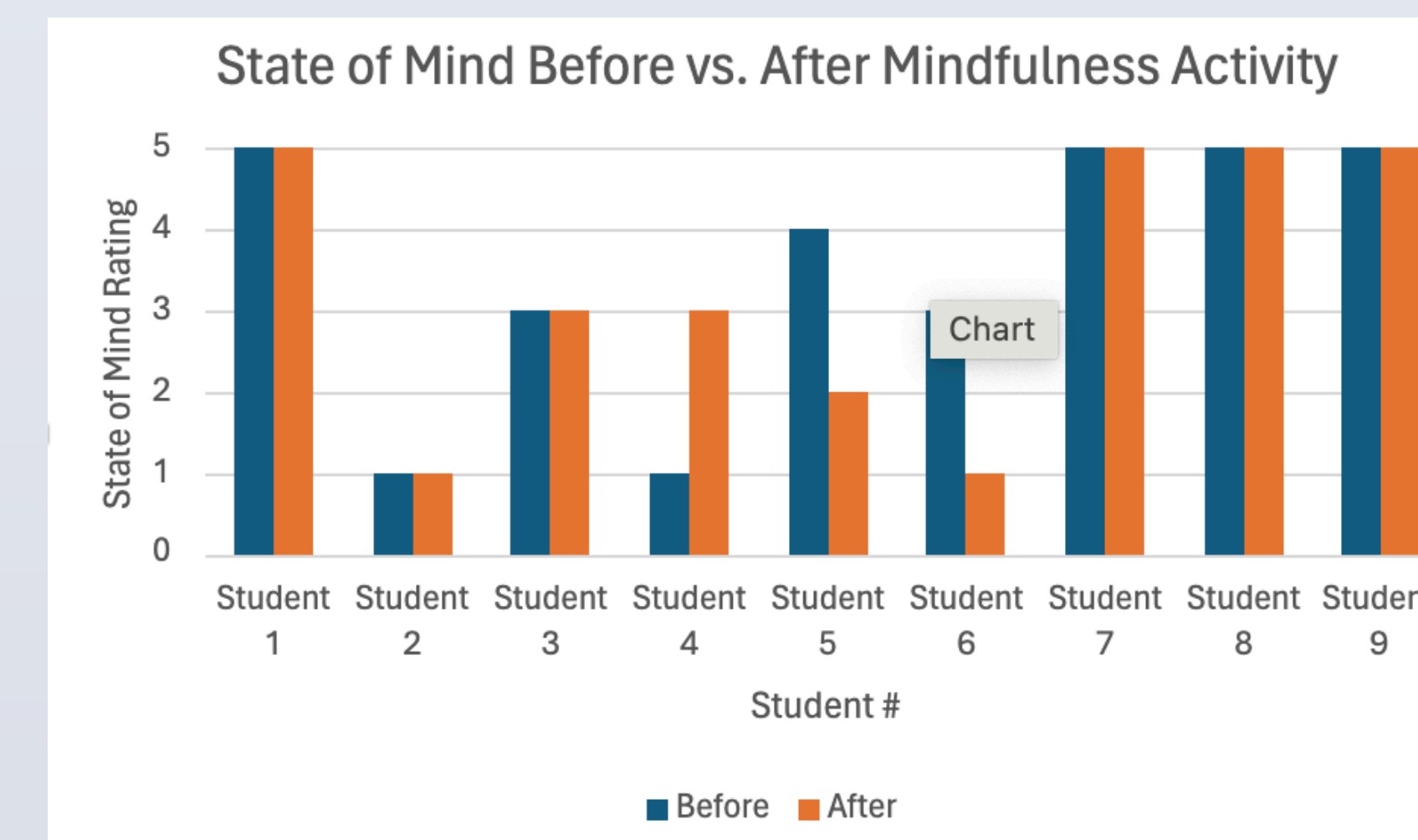
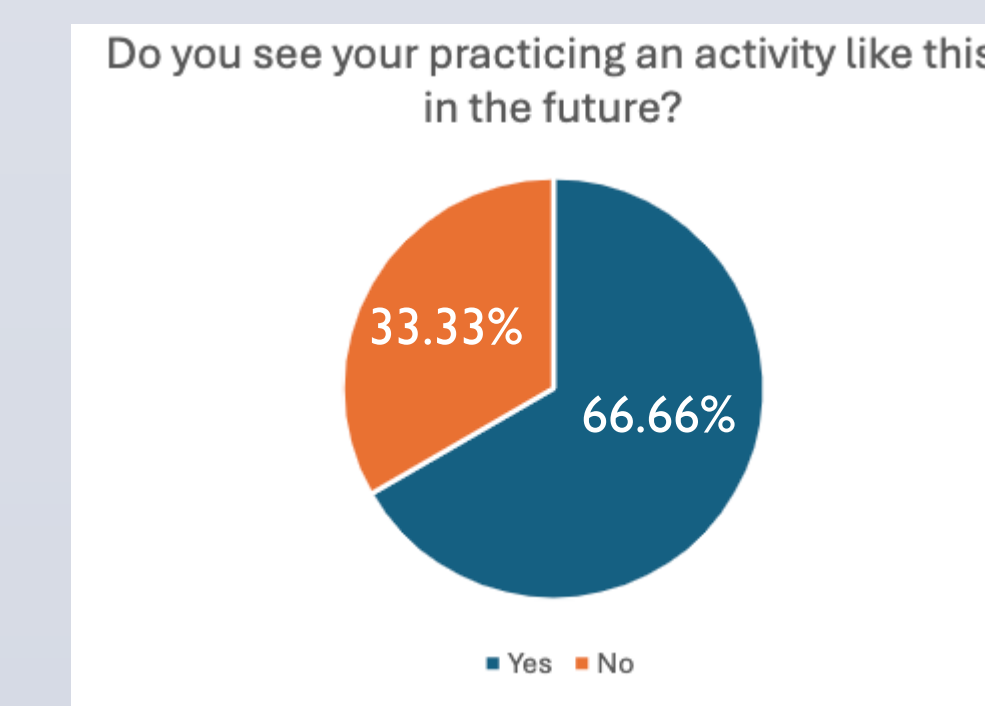


Table 4



Data Analysis:

- 44.4% of students reported having never completed a mindfulness activity prior to this one. (Table 1)
- 44.44% chose breathing/meditating, 33.33% chose journaling, 22.22% chose listening to music, and no students chose going for a walk or drawing. (Table 2)
- 66.66% of students reported no change in their state of mind having completed the activity. 22.22% reported feeling worse. 11.11% reported feeling better. (Table 3)
- 66.66% students reported being likely to complete an activity like this on their own in the future if they're every feeling uneasy. (Table 4)

Conclusions

- The population of students who participated were all in the EMBARK program.
- Overall, it is uncertain whether the mindfulness activity benefited students. While the qualitative data (observations) portrays that students were calmer and more relaxed after the activity, the quantitative results support that many students did not feel better afterward. Some indicated that they were unlikely to complete an activity like this in the future. There is research to support how students with intellectual abilities often have difficulty in expressing their emotion and regulating their state of mind.
- Research does support the benefits of mindfulness despite the students' ability to express that. One study notes that, "Mindfulness-based programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) emerged about 20 years ago," and, "Specific mindfulness-based programs can be linked to each of the three tiers to improve the quality of life of people with IDD" (Nirbhay N. and Hwang, March 2020, Abstract, p.1).
- "Graduates use the skills learned throughout their PSE (post-secondary education) experiences, such as self-determination, self-advocacy, independence, and social skills to negotiate life and employment and express these skills at different levels through their choices and behaviors" (Patricia et. al., 2021, 4.4 Conclusion, p. 267). This goes to show the importance of this critical time that students are spending in their programs.
- Perhaps a future study would be to find a more effective way to analyze the benefits of mindfulness other than paper assessments.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the incredible support I received from Ellen Heald, the principle of the North Shore Education Consortium SOAR/EMBARK Program. She displayed an incredible amount of support throughout my time there, and even gave me the opportunity to continue working there for the summer. I would also like to thank Dan Fraser, the special education teacher who modified his class schedule so that I could complete my internship project. He also helped me to adjust my assessments in a way that his students would be better able to understand. He offered lots of insight as to why the results came out the way they did, and supported me in this overall process. Last, but not least, I would like to thank the Mass General Brigham Behavioral Health Workforce Initiative for awarding me a \$2,000 stipend for completing my fieldwork in a behavioral health field. I am so

appreciative of this award.