

# Mindful Interventions in Special Education

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The book “Mindful Interventions in Special Education” focuses on solving challenges faced by children with reading disability, conduct disorder, alexia and hypoactivity by illustrating various detailed case studies that adopt mindful interventions and strength-based strategies. These interventions aim to help all kinds of readers gain skills to address a variety of common scenarios and improve children’s social-emotional abilities. The book provides operational, obtainable, and learnable samples, making it highly practical.

The author, Julia A. H. Keller, holds a Ph.D. in cognitive psychology and serves as the Executive Director of the Mindful Youth Institute and Adjunct Professor at the University of New Mexico. With over 20 years of experience as a practitioner and researcher intervening with children with learning disabilities using mindfulness, Keller’s work reflects her practical experience and theoretical expertise.

As of April 30, 2023, a search of the CNKI and Wanfang databases indicates that there is currently no literature focusing on mindfulness in China for children with learning disabilities. Therefore, this book presents a unique contribution by using mindfulness interventions for learning disabilities.

The book progresses from the abstract to the concrete. On page 16, the author provides the definition of mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Mindfulness involves adopting an openhearted, warm, and friendly attitude towards experiencing the present moment with a specific goal in mind. The book then presents an experimental study to verify the effectiveness of mindfulness-based approaches in improving the abilities of children with specific learning disabilities. For instance, the study involved 18 students in grades second through fifth, randomly assigned to either a treatment group receiving phonics training, direct instruction in decoding and comprehension strategies, and mindfulness training, or a control group that only received phonics training during a five-week intervention. The results showed that mindfulness training significantly increased response times during decoding and lowered heart rate significantly in pre- and post-tests. Additionally, the results presented improvements in motivation, self-expression, self-confidence, focus, positive affect, and use of reading strategies from the qualitative analysis (cf. Keller, Ruthruff, & Keller, 2019). The study suggests that the mindfulness-based approach positively impacts children’s thinking patterns and overall capacities, but continuous practice and mastery may be needed for further development.

The book consists of ten chapters. Chapter 1 introduces mindfulness and dyslexia, their causes, remediation, and provides an overview of the text. Chapter 10 offers a specific approach and cautionary notes for teaching mindfulness, characterized by a summary and theoretical property. Chapters 2 to 9 follow a consistent layout, including three major parts: case study, literature review, and extended thinking.

The case study section presents detailed profiles of individual children, including their needs, challenges in behaviors, cognition, and academics, as well as their strengths. It then discusses the remediation strategies used, which involve strength-based approaches, mindfulness, academic strategies, and heart-based biofeedback. Each chapter concludes by summarizing the child’s improvements resulting from the intervention.

The literature review part delves into the neuroscience and psychology behind each child’s major challenges, closely aligning with the sample’s key ideas and strategies. It presents outcomes of relevant research studies and implications for remediation, playing a critical role in bridging practice and theory.

The extended thinking part offers proposals for practice, reflections on mindfulness, questions for discussion and further inquiry, and teaching applications.

Throughout the presentation of various case studies, the basic and essential procedure involves discovering a child’s interests and integrating them into activities using mindfulness-based approaches. This approach provides a starting point for intervening in areas that need improvement, such as strength awareness, emotion awareness, self-expression, self-esteem, reading comprehension, compassion, and more. By doing

so, the book aims to evoke inner drive, increase engagement, and ultimately improve various aspects of a child's life. As the book emphasizes, it is worthwhile to take the time to observe and understand each child's information fully.

Mindfulness plays a primary role in shifting thinking patterns from a negative viewpoint, which brings more challenges, to a more positive perspective that fosters strengths. The book suggests that this shift can lead to more acceptable outcomes, such as higher levels of mindfulness and academic self-efficacy (Keye & Pidgeon, 2013). Meanwhile, other related studies have also confirmed the effectiveness of mindfulness in cultivating acceptable social behavior. For instance, Gabriely, Tarrasch, Velicki & Ovadia-Blechman (2020) conducted a controlled experiment with 73 individuals with learning disabilities and found that engaging in mindfulness practice resulted in increased awareness of the present moment and a reduction in hyperactivity and inattention. Similarly, Cook, Noone & Thomson (2019) discovered that practicing mindfulness has the potential to alter ingrained response patterns, promote personal resilience, and improve mental well-being. According to the content of the book, it can reasonably be inferred that mindfulness-based approaches are useful in facilitating the development of children with specific learning disabilities. However, it raises the question of whether the results could be even better with a longer intervention time beyond the five weeks used in the summer school. With the limitation of time, resources, and energies, the five-week intervention might be considered short. Nonetheless, many hope that mindfulness can be like a seed in a child's heart, helping them break out of their limitations and grow to their full potential, even after withdrawing the mindfulness intervention.

Combining practice and theory is a challenging task, but the book successfully attracts countless scholars and front-line practitioners, inspiring tireless efforts to achieve this balance. For front-line practitioners in special education, the book provides relevant theories, leading to cognitive sublimation. It seamlessly integrates their own teaching experiences with the teaching process in the book and the theoretical knowledge extended from it, thus offering internalized theoretical guidance. This, in turn, aids in applying the obtained guidance to practice and achieving the goal of theory guiding practice. On the other hand, for researchers in special education, the book's detailed case intervention introductions apply theoretical research results to practical operations, enriching their understanding and enhancing the theory's applicability. The book effectively tests and receives feedback on the theory in practice, leading to continuous improvement and refinement.

While the book is a valuable resource, there are some areas that require improvement in describing how to obtain ability improvement. For example, presenting entirely one sample's original relative materials, especially initial test results like the "Six Traits Writing Rubric" (a widely used writing assessment in schools) in the appendix section (p. 28), would enhance its practicality. Furthermore, incorporating videos demonstrating how mindfulness is integrated into ordinary teaching activities and daily life would further enhance readers' comprehension and application.

In conclusion, “Mindful Interventions in Special Education” skillfully combines theory and practice to provide valuable insights into the use of mindfulness-based approaches in supporting children with learning disabilities. The book stands out by focusing on mindfulness interventions for learning disabilities, presenting detailed case studies, and offering theoretical and research-based rationale in each chapter. The inclusion of reflection questions and teaching applications further enriches the reader’s experience, making this book a valuable resource for educators and researchers in special education.

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