

A Contemplative-Based Intervention for School Counselors Working with Adolescents

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Integrating contemplative practices into school counseling program delivery continues to grow in attention and scope. Loving-kindness meditation (LKM) is a contemplative practice that shows promise for fostering intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes. In this conceptual article, the author describes a loving-kindness meditation-based contemplative intervention titled Supporting Personal Awareness, Compassion, and Engagement (SPACE) Project for use in schools with adolescents. The SPACE Project focuses on helping adolescents utilize contemplative strategies to cope with stress and daily challenges. The article reviews the literature on contemplative practice, details the SPACE Project, describes its application as a school counseling approach, and provides future research directions.

Keywords: school counseling, contemplative practice, loving-kindness, adolescents

Contemplative practices are activities rooted in the core tenets of awareness, connection, and community (Contemplative Mind in Society, 2021). Various branches of contemplative practice exist, including stillness, movement, activism, generative practices, creativity, relational experiences, and rituals (Contemplative Mind in Society, 2021). As research has grown, contemplative practices have been identified as practical approaches to promote student wellness in adolescence and young adulthood (Dahl & Davidson, 2019; Dorais & Gutierrez, 2021a; Dorais & Gutierrez, 2021b; Farb et al., 2015; Felver et al., 2015; Goralnik & Marcus, 2020). Subsequently, authors have offered programs and conceptual frameworks for the integration of contemplation in school settings (Davidson et al., 2012; Gutierrez et al., 2019; Kielty et al., 2017a; Morgan, 2015; Napora, 2017; Shapiro et al., 2015). An organization titled Mindful Schools aims to prepare teachers with the necessary skills and training for fostering students' mindfulness within school settings (mindfulschools, n.d.). Humanity Education, originating from communities in Rwanda, incorporates contemplation with community healing to promote forgiveness and reduce conflict (Gutierrez et al., 2019). Additionally, there is support for integrating yoga practices in schools, with positive outcomes for students' and school counselors' wellness (Taylor et al., 2019).

Although research has expanded in the last few decades alone, contemplative practices have existed for thousands of years. Contemplative practices encompass rituals grounded in spirituality, connection, awareness, and community (Contemplative Mind in Society, 2021; Zajonc, 2013). Meditation, centering, mindfulness-based approaches, prayer, yoga, and breathwork are only some of the many ancient practices scholars have examined in recent years (Dorais & Gutierrez, 2021a; Farb et al., 2015). Based on the findings, scholars suggest that contemplative practice-based interventions may combat stress and mental health symptoms while building inner resources (Felver et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2022). Contemplative practice has been associated with reduced stress (Miller et al., 2022), reduced anger (Felver et al., 2015), and reduced mental health

concerns (Hofmann et al., 2011). Researchers have found that contemplative practice is associated with favorable neurological development (Shapiro et al., 2015), increased health (Farb et al., 2015), and increased connection to others (Goleman & Davidson, 2017). Scholars in counseling and education have proposed the integration of contemplative practices into educational and school counseling curricula to facilitate positive change for individual students and school communities (Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Kielty et al., 2017a, 2017b; Morgan, 2015; Napora, 2017; Shapiro et al., 2015).

Scholars suggest that contemplative practices bolster adolescents' inner resources and strengthen resilience, even in severe adversity (Waechter & Wekerle, 2014). School-based contemplative practices may also contribute to the school community and culture by reducing incidents of violence at school (Greenberg & Harris, 2012) and cultivating resilience (Kielty et al., 2017a). Overall, the literature suggests that school-based contemplative interventions may foster beneficial outcomes for students (e.g., enhanced resilience and inner resources) and subsequently have positive impacts for school communities (e.g., reduced incidents of violence). Contemplative practices that emphasize compassion for self and others may lead to additional intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes for students. However, a limited number of programs and interventions for school counselors exist that utilize contemplative practices, and those that exist may demand too many resources (i.e., cost, time) for practitioners to use within a school setting. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to (a) review the literature on contemplative approaches and loving-kindness; (b) describe the Supporting Personal Awareness, Compassion, and Engagement (SPACE) Project; and (c) illustrate the potential application of this intervention for school counselors.

Loving-Kindness Meditation

Loving-kindness meditation (LKM) is a compassion-based contemplative practice from Buddhist traditions. In Buddhism, the spiritual path toward liberation includes four optimal qualities of consciousness, known in Pali (the language of the Buddha) as the *brahma-viharas* or heavenly homes. The four brahma-viharas include *metta* (loving-kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkha* (equanimity; Salzberg, 1995). Metta, often translated as loving-kindness, exudes the qualities of friendship or unconditional positive regard and is the foundational *brahma-vihara* from which the other states arise. Although LKM is originally from Buddhist traditions, the exercise can be practiced without attachment to a particular religion. In LKM, practitioners engage in contemplation by extending thoughts of compassion inwardly toward themselves and outwardly in widening circles toward others (Fredrickson et al., 2017; Hutcherson et al., 2008; Salzberg, 1995, 2019).

In metta practice, the meditator begins by extending thoughts of compassion toward the self. Extending compassionate thoughts may be practiced through a general felt sense of compassion or the ritual of phrases, such as, may I be safe, may I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be at ease (Salzberg, 1995, 2019). After directing compassion toward oneself, the meditator begins to reach compassion outwardly toward a benefactor (one whom the meditator respects), then toward a close friend. The practice continues to include a neutral person, one toward whom the meditator feels neither like nor dislike, then toward a challenging person, then toward groups of beings. Ultimately, the practice includes compassion toward all beings everywhere (Salzberg, 1995).

In extant literature, LKM interventions have been shown to positively influence intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes in adult samples. For example, in terms of interpersonal benefits, Hutcherson and colleagues (2008) found that participants' sense of social connection increased after brief LKM practice. Stell and Farsides (2016) found that as few as seven minutes of LKM practice reduced participants' racial bias toward others. Leppma and Young (2016) found that a weekly LKM intervention with counseling students resulted in increased empathy, particularly in the subscales of perspective-taking and empathic concern. Existing literature on LKM highlights many relational and prosocial outcomes (Hutcherson et al., 2008; Stell & Farsides, 2016; Tellhed et al., 2022).

Additionally, there is support for intrapersonal benefits from LKM practice (Kearney et al., 2014; Masters-Waage et al., 2022; Telke et al., 2022; Totzeck et al., 2020). Scholars have noted increased emotional regulation as an outcome of engagement in LKM (Fredrickson et al., 2008; Leung et al., 2013). Neurologically, LKM practice may increase gray matter volume in parts of the brain associated with emotional regulation as well as parts of the brain associated with empathy for others (Leung et al., 2013). Müller-Engelmann et al. (2019) examined the impact of an LKM intervention on individuals diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder following interpersonal violence. Their findings suggested that participants demonstrated statistically significant symptom reductions throughout the intervention (Müller-Engelmann et al., 2019). Similarly, Totzeck and colleagues (2020) examined the impact of LKM intervention on university students' (aged 19-30 years) mental health symptoms and found significant reductions in anxiety, depression, and stress levels from baseline to follow-up assessment six months post-intervention (Totzeck et al., 2020). The growing literature suggests that LKM may effectively reduce symptoms and bolster critical psychosocial factors. When implemented with youth, such intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes could have wide-reaching benefits, positively impacting not only individual students, but also students' school communities and families. Therefore, LKM may be useful as an approach to fostering students' social-emotional learning.

Over the last two decades, social-emotional learning interventions have become increasingly popular in school counseling research and practice. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2022) defines social-emotional learning (SEL) as:

“the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (para. 1).

Programming designed to promote students' social-emotional learning (SEL) includes the competencies of (a) *self-awareness*, (b) *self-management*, (c) *social awareness*, (d) *responsible decision-making*, and (e) *relationship skills* (CASEL, 2022). SEL interventions intend to promote students' protective factors on the individual and environmental levels (Durlak et al., 2011). SEL interventions also promise a positive impact on student development, including academic achievement, wellbeing, and improved behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). As a result of growing support in the literature, SEL-based programs have become a primary value of school counseling and school-based interventions.

LKM can be considered an SEL intervention because both prioritize the development of intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Fredrickson et al., 2008; Fredrickson et al., 2017; Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2021). LKM-based interventions may promote individuals' emotion management (Fredrickson et al., 2008), connection to others (Hutcherson et

al., 2008), empathic perspective taking (Leppma & Young, 2016), and prosocial orientation (Hafenbreck et al., 2022). Such outcomes closely mirror the SEL competencies outlined by CASEL (2022). Therefore, LKM-based practices may be a natural complement to schools' SEL curricula and may help to promote optimal SEL-related student outcomes. The SPACE Project was developed with this in mind.

Supporting Personal Awareness, Compassion, and Engagement (SPACE) Project

The SPACE Project intervention, derived from LKM, was designed for adolescents aged 12 to 19, and emphasizes extending compassion toward self and others to increase positive affect and inner

Table 1. SPACE Project components

<i>Concentration</i>	Students focus their awareness on a single point (i.e., an object in their line of sight or the sensation of their feet on the floor). The purpose of concentration is to ground the student in the present moment. This step occurs for approximately 30 seconds.
<i>Breath awareness</i>	Students shift their attention onto their breath to increase present-moment awareness. The purpose of breath awareness is to ground the student to the present moment further. This step occurs for approximately 30 seconds.
<i>Mindfulness</i>	Students begin to observe any thoughts, sensations, emotions, or sounds that arise and do so without judgment. The purpose of mindfulness is to begin engaging students in nonjudgmental awareness; therefore, this step occurs for approximately 30 seconds.
<i>Guided imagery</i>	Students think of someone who evokes a positive emotion (e.g., self, friend, family member, a person they respect, a person they know or do not know, and a pet or animal) and then focus their attention on the individual. This begins the lovingkindness portion of the practice; therefore, students will be prompted to consider someone and then will continue to focus their attention on the individual for the remainder of the 10-minute practice (approximately eight minutes and 30 seconds). Guided imagery occurs in tandem with the following step, <i>self-talk affirmations</i> .
<i>Self-talk affirmations</i>	Students mentally repeat statements of positive affirmation, extending well wishes toward self, others, and communities. When directed toward self, the phrases are: May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be at ease. When directed toward others, the phrases are May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be at ease. The affirmations anchor the practice; therefore, students will continue to mentally repeat the phrases as they focus on an individual for the remainder of the 10-minute practice (approximately eight minutes and 30 seconds). Guided imagery and self-

resources. As an emerging intervention, the SPACE Project has shown promising outcomes with adolescents, particularly with improved intrapersonal factors (Niles et al., 2024). Often, LKM incorporates the elements of concentration, mindful awareness, and loving-kindness (Salzberg, 1995,

2019). In the SPACE Project, these elements are delineated as five components, (a) concentration, (b) breath awareness, (c) mindful awareness, (d) guided imagery, and (e) self-talk affirmations (Niles et al., 2024), and occur progressively within the 10-minute practice (see Table 1). Students are encouraged to consistently practice the five components of the SPACE Project for each daily practice over a four-week intervention. Daily practices occur through an LKM-based 10-minute recording with guided meditation videos available through YouTube or embedded into a school's virtual learning platform. The recordings include LKM-based scripts adapted from Salzberg (1995,2019), and guide students through the elements of LKM. The four-week process is designed to help meditators learn the general steps of the LKM practice first, then extend lovingkindness toward specific others and eventually all beings everywhere (Salzberg, 1995). A diagram of the practice sequence is provided (see Figure 1).

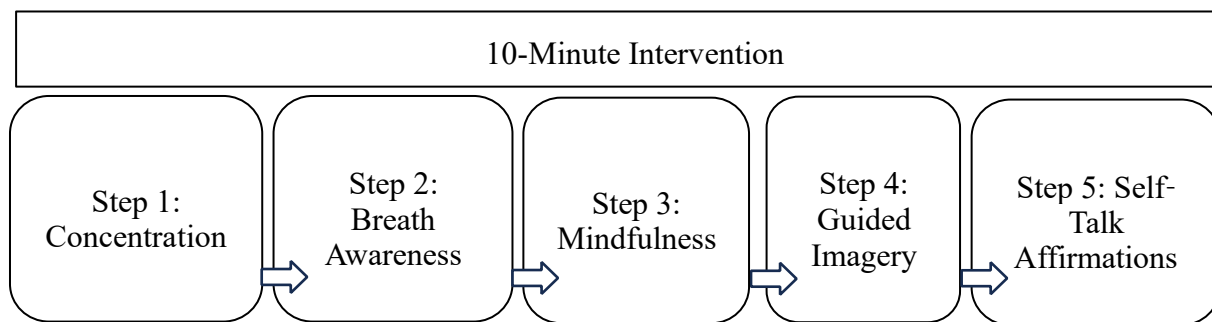


Figure 1. *SPACE Project practice sequence.*

Application of the SPACE Project

When implementing the SPACE Project, school counselors are encouraged to consider ways in which the intervention can be integrated into existing school counseling models and evidence-based approaches. For example, commonly used frameworks that school counselors may employ include the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, the International School Counselor Association Student Standards, and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. The SPACE Project has various applications for comprehensive school counseling program delivery in alignment with each of the identified models, as evidenced herein.

The ASCA National Model

School counselors may find that the SPACE Project can be integrated into the ASCA National Model (2019) in a number of ways. The ASCA National Model (2019) includes the four components of define, manage, deliver, and assess, in which school counselors (a) align their programming with ASCA standards, (b) design their service delivery around program focus (e.g., beliefs, vision, and mission statements) and school data, (c) implement developmentally appropriate services to students, and (d) evaluate school counseling program outcomes. For example, a school counselor may first consider the ASCA student standards to be addressed,

review their school's vision and mission statements, and consider ways the SPACE Project may be a relevant practice for their student population. Then, informed by school data (e.g., needs assessments, behavioral data), the school counselor can implement the SPACE Project and evaluate its outcomes.

The SPACE Project addresses multiple standards of ASCA's *Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success* (2021), and a school counselor may use these standards to support their decision for implementing the SPACE Project in their school. Relevant *Mindsets & Behavior* standards may include learning strategies (LS), self-management skills (SMS) and social skills (SS). In particular, the SPACE Project aligns with the Mindset Standard (M2): *Sense of acceptance, respect, support and inclusion for self and others in the school environment*, and Behavior Standards including (B-SMS 7) *Effective coping skills*; (B-SS 2) *Positive, respectful, and supportive relationships with students who are similar to and different from them*; (B-SS 3) *Positive relationships with adults to support success*; and (B-SS 4) *Empathy*. When communicating to stakeholders (e.g., administrators, caregivers, district leaders) about the implementation of the SPACE Project with students, school counselors can explain its alignment with the ASCA National Model and ASCA's *Mindsets & Behaviors*.

International School Counselor Association

School counselors around the globe may find parallels between the SPACE Project's alignment with the ASCA National Model and its relevance to international models of school counseling. For instance, the International School Counselor Association (ISCA) has developed the ISCA Student Standards that address life skills related to (a) social-emotional, (b) academic, (c) career, and (d) global perspective and identity development domains (ISCA, 2022). The SPACE Project may align with specific skills within each of the ISCA Student Standards domains, such as *relationships and social and self-awareness* within the social-emotional domain; *school-to-life experiences* in the academic domain; *self-exploration* within the career domain; and *cultural knowledge and awareness* of the global perspective and identity development domain (ISCA, 2022). School counselors may find additional ways in which the SPACE Project complements school counseling models implemented in their location.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

School counselors can integrate the SPACE Project using the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework. The MTSS framework is a three-tiered approach designed to support students across varying levels of need (Alvarez et al., 2022; Sugai et al., 2019; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Through the MTSS framework, school counselors and staff use data to determine students' area (e.g., academic, behavioral, social-emotional) and degree of need to guide the implementation of evidence-based practices to support students' growth (Harlacher et al., 2014). At Tier 1, interventions are considered universal, whereby all students in a school experience them. Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are designed to assist students who exhibit elevated needs. Tier 3 interventions include more individualized and intensive approaches (e.g., individual counseling) than Tier 2 (e.g., small group counseling; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). School counselors can implement the SPACE Project across MTSS through classroom lessons, group counseling, and individual counseling. At each level, school counselors can adapt the intervention to support students' personal and academic success.

To implement an intervention at Tier 1, it is common to use school-wide events or classroom lessons. According to Davidson (2012), school-wide contemplative interventions can have a positive impact on students' well-being as well as a school's overall climate. The SPACE Project can be implemented as a school-wide initiative that students practice regularly in their classrooms. School counselors could elect to visit classrooms to guide students through the practice directly. Alternatively, school counselors could provide teachers with the materials needed to facilitate the SPACE Project with students and could support teachers as they facilitate the practice with their students. Prior to and following the intervention, school counselors could collect data from students and teachers regarding students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional progress. Further, school counselors could survey students, teachers, staff, and administrators regarding their sense of the school climate and use the data to improve the intervention for future implementation.

For Tiers 2 and 3, school counselors collaborate with student support teams to identify students who require increased levels of support, discuss interventions, and determine measures of students' progress (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). When working with small groups as a Tier 2 intervention, a school counselor can use the SPACE Project as an introductory meditation to ground the group session. After the group meditation, the school counselor can spend time processing the experience with the students, address any challenges the students might have encountered during the practice, or reflect on any benefits the students noticed. At Tier 3, students exhibit a level of need that require individualized interventions. Therefore, a school counselor working with an individual student on strategies for anger management might incorporate the SPACE Project to complement their counseling services. In this case, the school counselor may find it helpful to guide the student through the SPACE Project meditation practice to foster self-compassion and teach self-awareness and appropriate coping skills. School counselors can blend their knowledge of MTSS with the ASCA National Model to implement the SPACE Project as an element of their comprehensive school counseling program in collaboration with teachers and administrators, as demonstrated in the following case illustration.

Case Illustration

Sophie, a high school counselor, has been asked to support teachers with implementing a classroom-based intervention to reduce interpersonal conflict and support relational skill development. The high school where Sophie works is in a large metropolitan area in the United States; the student population is racially diverse and 60% of students come from low-income households. Sophie's students face high levels of stress and anxiety, symptoms of depression, suicidal ideation, and substance use. Sophie's administration team has asked her to find a Tier 1 intervention to help all students improve their coping skills and social skill development. Additionally, they would like the intervention to reflect the school's values of building relationships, empathy, and community connections. Sophie consulted the ASCA *Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success* to identify relevant standards to guide the selection of her intervention.

Sophie reviewed the beliefs, vision, and mission statements of her school and school counseling program and gathered baseline data, including teacher report and behavioral data. Sophie then conducted a needs assessment with teachers for input into what interventions might be helpful. On the needs assessment, teachers reported that they would like a brief intervention of fifteen minutes or less to be incorporated daily into their homeroom periods following morning

announcements. To reduce classroom interruptions, teachers reported a preference for facilitating the intervention themselves with supervision and consultation from the school counselor. Sophie decided to implement the SPACE Project at the start of the spring semester. She created an online learning management classroom with links to the guided SPACE Practice meditation videos and copies of the meditation scripts. She provided access to the online learning management classroom to teachers, and at the next faculty meeting, she delivered training to teachers on how to effectively facilitate the SPACE Project. Sophie provided consent forms for teachers to send home to parents and included details about the SPACE Project and the benefits of LKM-based practices. Once teachers were trained, they began implementing the SPACE project in their homerooms at the start of the day. The teachers played the guided meditation for the whole classroom and provided an alternative activity for students who opted out of the intervention.

During the first week of implementing the intervention, Sophie visited classrooms to support the teachers and observe students' behaviors, using a trauma-informed approach to watch carefully for any noticeable discomfort from the students while practicing (e.g., excessive fidgeting, emotional reactions, or leaving the room). After some initial hesitation from students, she noticed that students began to ease into the practice, some with eyes closed and others gazing toward the floor. Students appeared focused and calm. After the meditation, students were invited to reopen their eyes, look around the classroom, adjust their seats, and reorient themselves to the classroom space. Sophie noticed the students were calmer than when they began the practice. The teacher transitioned the students to the next educational activity. Teachers continued to practice the SPACE Project with their classes for the remainder of the four weeks. On the final day of the intervention, Sophie conducted a postintervention survey of students and teachers to gather perception data about their impressions of the SPACE Project. Sophie used the student and teacher feedback to inform future implementation of the SPACE Project and shared the findings with school administrators.

Discussion

The SPACE Project offers students a pathway for practicing key social-emotional strategies, including concentration, social and personal awareness, emotion regulation, and compassion toward self and others. In past studies, compassion-oriented contemplative interventions have shown promise for improving adolescents' wellbeing, particularly for those who practiced frequently (Pace et al., 2013; Reddy et al., 2013). In the literature, implementation of the SPACE Project has indicated positive results with adolescents, demonstrating improved levels of hope and emotional intelligence with daily practice (Niles et al., 2024). As such, contemplative practices based on compassion for self and others, such as LKM and the SPACE Project, may benefit adolescents' mental health symptoms and behavioral outcomes. The case illustration was provided to demonstrate the potential use of the SPACE Project in school counseling programs. The SPACE Project addresses social-emotional learning needs while aligning with school counseling responsibilities (i.e., the ASCA National Model), promoting student standards and life-skills development (i.e., ISCA), and can be implemented as an element of MTSS. As illustrated, school counselors could implement the SPACE Project as an approach for delivering direct services as noted in the ASCA National Model (2019). Within the MTSS framework, school counselors can adapt the SPACE Project at each tier as a standalone approach or complementary to existing programs. The case illustration also demonstrated how the school counselor could integrate data and assessment strategies into evaluating the use of the SPACE Project. Building upon the case

illustration, international school counselors may also implement the SPACE Project as an approach that promotes ISCA Student Standards such as social and self-awareness (ISCA, 2022).

The SPACE Project has both shared and distinct elements as compared to existing school-based contemplative interventions. For example, the SPACE Project includes elements of mindfulness, and school-based contemplative interventions often incorporate mindfulness-based practices (Bleasdale, et al., 2020; Bluth et al., 2015, 2018). Kielty and colleagues (2017b) collaborated with school counselors to implement mindfulness interventions at a middle school, which included guided listening and breathing activities and showed positive results related to students' behavior management and stress reduction for students and teachers (Kielty et al., 2017b). Similar outcomes have been reflected elsewhere in various studies of mindfulness-based interventions (Phan et al., 2022), within the United States and internationally (e.g., United Kingdom; Montero-Marin et al., 2022). However, the SPACE Project is distinct in its inclusion of LKM practice, such as the repetition of phrases and the focus on compassion. Few scholars have examined school counseling interventions that include more types of contemplative practice, particularly LKM practices. Expanding intervention research in school counseling literature is necessary to capture the full range of potentially beneficial interventions available to school counselors and students, especially with regard to contemplative practice.

Implications for School-Based Counseling Policy

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) has reported that approximately 14% of adolescents worldwide experience mental health concerns, including symptoms of depression and anxiety. Given the global trends of adolescents experiencing mental health concerns, WHO has argued for the implementation of programs that can promote youth's well-being and emotional regulation (WHO, 2021). Because school-based contemplative interventions, including the SPACE Project (Niles et al., 2024), have demonstrated potentially beneficial personal-social outcomes for adolescents, educators and policymakers should consider the value of contemplative approaches for addressing adolescents' mental health needs. A core tenet of contemplative approaches is that intrapersonal change can lead to larger community transformation. Thus, legislators and policymakers should explore the growing field of school-based contemplative intervention research for evidence of the benefits of contemplative approaches for youth and school communities. School counselors and administrators can continue to gather data regarding the impact of interventions like the SPACE Project on student outcomes (e.g., well-being, emotional intelligence, academic performance) and school climate (e.g., school safety, behavioral trends, schoolwide performance data). School counselors and administrators can use the data collected to advocate to school district leaders, school boards, and state departments of education for schoolwide trainings on contemplative practices, professional development around SEL and contemplative approaches, or changes in policies that inhibit the implementation of SEL and contemplative interventions.

Limitations

Despite growing support for the benefits of contemplative practices for students, challenges and potential barriers exist. Barriers may include socio-political factors, limitations in training and delivery, and school counselors' task and role challenges. Because contemplative practices originate from spirituality, there may also be internal and external resistance to implementation in

the school setting. Sink (2004) noted that school counselors tend to deflect conversations related to spirituality, often out of concern for violating school policies, fear of legal ramifications, or an abundance of caution around ethical codes. Policies and legislation in recent years have increasingly impacted school counselors' service delivery and method of intervention, particularly around SEL services. Compounded with current socio-political climates and resistance to SEL, implementing an intervention that integrates spirituality and SEL may be challenging. Such concerns may result in hesitation from school counselors or other school staff to engage students in spiritually related or SEL-focused practices, limiting the SPACE Project's applicability as an intervention.

Another important consideration is the potential impact of school-based contemplative interventions, particularly for historically marginalized students and students of color (Holcomb-McCoy, 2022). Holcomb-McCoy (2022) cautioned that mindfulness and resilience-building practices might unintentionally teach students ways to tolerate a racist and oppressive society. With this in mind, it would be critical for school counselors to closely examine their use of contemplative practices. School counselors should always approach the SPACE Project from an invitational lens, emphasizing student's agency and choice with engaging in the practice. When used effectively, contemplative-based practices can promote racial healing and advocacy (Hilert & Tirado, 2018; Magee, 2019). School counselors should also consider culturally affirming and sustaining contemplative practices, and can include students' existing practices, rituals, and traditions (Niles & Gutierrez, 2024b). School counselors should continue to address and remove systemic barriers for students in tandem with the implementation of contemplative practices for student wellness (Lemberger-Truelove & Bowers, 2019). For example, school counselors can advocate for an equitable school environment in which a student's identity is affirmed and access to resources is shared. The implementation of a contemplative approach should not be used in place of advocacy, but rather seen as complementary to a school counselor's ongoing advocacy efforts.

Students' level of engagement in the SPACE Project may also be considered a limitation. School counselors should be prepared to encounter students' hesitation to engage in the SPACE Project practice. While increased engagement in contemplative practice tends to result in improved outcomes (Niles et al., 2024), there may be unforeseen barriers for students to fully engage on a consistent basis. For example, for students who face significant barriers (e.g., trauma, severe mental health concerns, barriers to basic needs, or other societal barriers), motivation to engage in contemplation may be reduced, and the intervention may be less beneficial (Montero-Marin et al., 2022). Approaching students from a trauma-informed lens, particularly in the context of contemplative practice, is critical for ensuring the prevention of harm to students. For example, using invitational language and allowing students to opt out of the activity at any time can help to ensure that students have a sense of agency throughout the practice. Further, it may be important to consider ways to personalize a contemplative-based intervention within a school setting to address students' individualized strengths and needs.

School counselors or other school staff interested in contemplative interventions could seek student input and perspectives when designing a school-based contemplative practice. Students may have existing contemplative, spiritual, or religious practices based on their traditions and cultural identities that support their sense of wellbeing. Contemplative practices are vast and encompass activities and rituals from traditions worldwide; LKM is only one of many existing contemplative practices, and the SPACE Project is only one approach to practicing LKM. Contemplation in other forms may resonate more deeply with individual students. School

counselors should consider the unique cultural identities of their students; the cultural histories, traditions, and contexts of the countries in which they reside; the socio-political landscape of the nation in which they work; and the way these considerations intersect to impact each student's experience. A school-based contemplative curriculum may be more effective when it includes various contemplative approaches or involves direct input from students about types of contemplation that resonate with them. School counselors and school administrators could synthesize evidence-based practices supported in the literature with personal knowledge of the students and families in their school communities to tailor contemplative approaches with efficacy.

Future Research

Future research should explore the impact of the SPACE Project on intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes with youth. A randomized controlled trial or non-equivalent control group design would examine and evaluate the potential outcomes for students participating in the SPACE Project intervention compared to students assigned to a control group. Approaches that require smaller samples could also be used, such as single case design, qualitative case design, or qualitative outcome research. Thus far, the SPACE Project has been designed for and implemented with students in the United States; it would benefit the literature to examine ways to expand the SPACE Project to fit the needs of international schools and students. Researchers could then explore outcomes of the SPACE Project within international schools implemented by school counselors for students globally. Further, it would benefit the literature to examine the SPACE Project in varying educational settings, such as alternative education, traditional K-12 school settings, public schools, private schools, or parochial schools. The SPACE Project is designed for adolescents; therefore, future research could continue to examine its effectiveness with adolescents ranging from 12 to 19 years old (e.g., 6th to 12th grades) or focus more closely on specific grade levels (e.g., solely middle school or high school).

Conclusion

As the world shifts and changes, exploring opportunities to support adolescents in school counseling settings is valuable. The research-informed SPACE Project intervention was designed to be a school-based, SEL-oriented, contemplative intervention for adolescents. Further examination of the SPACE Project would contribute to the literature on contemplative practices related to school counseling service delivery. Incorporating contemplative strategies for SEL development into school counseling practice and research may promote student wellness, support relational skills, and bolster key protective factors during adolescent development.

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