


Chapter 6

Mindfulness for Health and Well Being:

An Innovative Physical Education Course in the University of the Philippines Diliman

Francis Carlos B. Diaz


 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3001-4020>

University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines

Iris Trinidad

University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines

Mary Janneke Agustin


 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5766-9199>

University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines

Teresita P. Panganiban

University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines

Manuel B. Garcia

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2615-422X>

University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines

ABSTRACT

The University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman College of Human Kinetics offers a Physical Education (PE) class called Mindfulness for Health and Well-being (MHW), aimed at teaching mental health skills and promoting pro-social behavior among college students through mindfulness practices and cognitive behavioral

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therapy exercises. The Centre for Mindfulness Studies Toronto and FriendlyCare Foundation, Inc. developed the curriculum and tested it in a randomized controlled trial funded by the Templeton World Charity Foundation. This course seeks to enhance Filipino traits such as empathy, compassion, and altruism by strengthening mental health skills, including attention control, emotional regulation, and self-awareness. Following the trial, UP Diliman continued to offer MHW as a PE elective, taking initial steps to address long-standing gaps in mental health education, skill-building, help-seeking behaviors, and destigmatization.

INTRODUCTION

As much as it is desirable to have one official definition of what Physical Education (PE) is and to neatly place a mindfulness-based curriculum within it, the literature on the subject offers a breadth of definitions and directions. PE is, at its core, physical activity, but its scope extends far beyond mere movement. It encompasses the holistic concept of total well-being, merging physical fitness with mental and emotional health. For some, it focuses on structured sports and competition, cultivating discipline and teamwork. For others, it includes recreation, play, and exercise, offering a more relaxed and inclusive approach to engaging the body. In its performance-driven aspect, PE encourages striving for excellence, achievement, and physical prowess. Yet, it does not solely focus on external results; it also needs to address the cognitive processes and emotional states that accompany physical engagement. For example, activities may be aimed at fostering emotional regulation, attention control, or stress management, especially in mindfulness-based practices, where the mind-body connection is emphasized. Furthermore, PE is ever-evolving. It responds to societal trends, scientific advancements, and changing educational priorities. What was once a rigid focus on physical development has expanded to incorporate mental well-being, social development, and the cultivation of personal values such as resilience and empathy. This fluid nature makes PE an adaptable subject, continuously redefining itself to meet the needs of students in an increasingly complex world. In short, PE resists simple classification because it is a multifaceted field that reflects the dynamic interaction between the physical, mental, and social aspects of human development.

This shift in focus is further emphasized by global health concerns, including the obesity epidemic and declining physical fitness among school children, driven largely by increasingly sedentary lifestyles. These issues led to the 2013 UNESCO Global Survey (UNESCO, 2013), which highlighted the urgent need for educational institutions to address not only physical inactivity but also the broader implications of unhealthy habits among young people. The survey underscored the urgent need for

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