

Peer Review

Review of: "Conceptual Architecture for a Critical Realist Synthesis of a Universal School-based Mindfulness Intervention"

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This paper presents an innovative and comprehensive approach to understanding SBMIs through the lens of Critical Realism. The authors have undertaken an impressive task: integrating the complex layers of ontology, epistemology, and methodology to offer a framework that promises to advance both theoretical insights and practical applications in the field of educational psychology and mental health. The authors effectively argue that SBMIs confer benefits to wellbeing and astutely highlight the rarity of systematic insights into their "underlying mechanisms, contexts, and sustainability" (p. 1). Against this backdrop, the paper addresses the critical need to deepen our understanding of *how* SBMIs enhance wellbeing, with the aim of systematically optimizing these interventions (p. 2–3).

Strengths

1. Theoretical Transparency and Grounding

The paper is explicitly grounded in a metatheoretical stance, which is a truly valuable approach, adding transparency to often ambiguous constructs and providing a comprehensible, yet epistemologically flexible framework. It offers a convincing underpinning for the research endeavor. Being deeply grounded in Critical Realism, the authors expertly leverage Bhaskar's (2008) concept of a multilayered and emergent social reality for a stratified ontology to dissect the multifaceted, situated nature of SBMIs beyond surface-level. This theoretical depth provides a robust foundation for exploring the interactions between underlying structures, observable events, and subjective experiences in SBMIs.

2. Complexity, Depth, Epistemological Sophistication, & Emancipatory Imperative

The authors' ability to navigate and elucidate complex social phenomena using a stratified ontological approach is commendable. This approach not only enhances our understanding of the mechanisms at

play but also addresses the nuanced interdependence of structural, cultural, and agential domains as „context matters“ (p. 4). The paper also demonstrates a good balance between epistemic relativism and ontological realism, capturing diverse perspectives while maintaining a firm grasp on the reality of the phenomena under study. The adoption of a fallibilist stance underscores the evolving nature of knowledge, enriching the synthesis with reflexive depth. This reflexivity enables an emancipatory imperative, potentially paving the way for social change.

4. Interdisciplinary Integration

By drawing on Archer's Morphogenic approach, Pearlin's theory of stress, and Bonell et al.'s theory of the school environment, the authors successfully integrate multidisciplinary perspectives. This synthesis not only broadens the theoretical horizon but also situates SBMI within a holistic framework of school and societal dynamics.

5. Practical Implications

The paper's aim to „generate practical knowledge for policymakers and practitioners“ (p. 2) is very valuable. Indeed, it provides insights into the causal mechanisms and contextual contingencies of SBMIs, offering potential guidance for policymakers and practitioners. The insights into patterns and underlying mechanisms that matter in the context of an SBMI help heighten the likelihood that interventions have positive impacts (p. 4). The emphasis on context-sensitive and sustainable mindfulness programs is particularly relevant in today's diverse educational settings and a crisis-ridden world.

Potential Points for a Minor Revision

While the paper offers a comprehensive synthesis of school-based mindfulness interventions through the framework of Critical Realism, a few potential weaknesses or areas for revision merit consideration:

1. Conceptual Complexity

The paper employs a high level of theoretical and methodological complexity, which may prove challenging for readers not already familiar with Critical Realism or the multiple theoretical frameworks applied. This might be a fallacy with respect to the claim to also provide knowledge for practitioners – many paragraphs remain quite abstract. The table on p. 9 helps clarify the metatheoretical positioning; however, at some points in the paper, the reader may require additional support.

- Revision Suggestion: To enhance accessibility, the authors could include more succinct sections providing simplified explanations or analogies that distill the core concepts for readers less versed in

the referenced theoretical domains (a good exemplification is found on p. 11 or p. 14 when mentioning pupils).

2. Integration of Theories, Approaches, and/ or Tools

While drawing on multiple theories enriches the analysis, there is a risk of conceptual overload or dilution of focus if not seamlessly integrated. There are approaches with various functions for the research that are initially mentioned in the text without further explication, e.g., p. 5–6. All of them are explained later in the text but lack a definition when initially introduced.

- Revision Suggestion: At their first mention, the text could offer short definitions and legitimations of the approaches mentioned above in the context of the authors' Critical Realist program theory (p. 7). A more explicit commentary on how each theoretical tool specifically contributes to the overall synthesis would be helpful for the reader, perhaps including a visual model to demonstrate their interconnections and unique contributions to understanding SBMIs (for instance, terms such as "morphostasis and morphogenesis" (p. 16) could benefit from further elucidation within the text).

3. Structure in Chapter Aims, Objectives, and Research Questions

The chapter discussing aims, objectives, and research questions is generally well-structured and provides a concise overview. However, there is an excessive use of enumerations (p. 5–6). Additionally, the high number of research questions presents a challenge.

- Revision Suggestion: Consider consolidating or visualizing the aims and research questions in a different manner to mitigate the overwhelming use of numbers.

4. Empirical Evidence, Documentation, Illustration

The paper primarily focuses on theoretical synthesis, and while this is essential, the practical grounding in empirical evidence could be stronger to make the outcome more tangible.

- Revision Suggestion: In their *Critical Realist Initial Middle-Range Programme Theory for refinement through a Critical Realist Literature Synthesis*, the authors might consider incorporating selection criteria and/or referencing specific empirical examples that exemplify the identified causal mechanisms and contexts, thereby reinforcing the theoretical assertions with concrete examples. As the paper indicates potential implications for policy and practice, the recommendations could thus be more concretely outlined.

5. Minor Typographical and Formatting Issues

There are some minor typographical issues throughout the paper, such as „Critical Realistanalysis“ (p. 5) or „combines qualitative and qualitative Research“ (p. 8 & table 1 p. 9), additional line/page breaks (p. 8 & p. 27), or „RealistMorphogenetic“ (p. 19) – these and other potential minor errors should be revisited. Furthermore, the formatting of table 4 could be more reader-friendly.

Addressing these issues would not only strengthen the paper but also expand its impact by reaching a broader audience and ensuring the practical applicability of its insights.

Conclusion

In sum, this paper represents a substantial contribution in the context of a highly important field of research. It not only advances the theoretical discourse on SBMIs but also provides actionable insights that can inform policy and practice. The authors' adept use of theoretical, epistemological, and methodological lenses creates a rich tapestry that can undoubtedly serve as a pivotal reference for future research and intervention design. This work sets an important standard for scholarship in the field of complex social interventions, and I confidently recommend it for publication with minor revisions.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.