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Examining Teachers' Experiences With Mindfulness Practices to Promote Positive Relationships and Student Engagement in the Classroom

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Examining Teachers' Experiences With Mindfulness Practices to Promote Positive Relationships and Student Engagement in the Classroom

by
Hiram Ortega

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
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Abstract

Examining Teachers' Experiences With Mindfulness Practices to Promote Positive Relationships and Student Engagement in the Classroom. Hiram Ortega, 2023: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: mindfulness, mental-health, self-compassion, learning, classroom

In recent years mindfulness practices in the classroom have become increasingly relevant to bring awareness to the present moment, the here-and-now. The literature indicates that mindfulness reduces stress/anxiety in the classroom, and promotes self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, self-compassion, and empathy that contributes to positive classroom behavior, communication, and effective instructional practices. The purpose of this qualitative research is to analyze teachers' experiences with mindfulness practices in promoting positive relationships and student engagement in the classroom. A group of teachers from an at-risk school district in the southwestern region of the United States were interviewed. The teachers answered 10 open-ended questions about their awareness and experiences with informal and formal mindfulness practices. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method was used to analyze the respondent's experiences with mindfulness. The data collected was used to analyze and discuss the impact of mindfulness practices based on teachers' experiences. Qualitative data in the form of interviews from 10 teachers indicated that though there was consensus in the positive benefits of informal and formal mindfulness practices in education, access to formal mindfulness-based school programs (MBSP) might be limited and difficult to incorporate in the curriculum. The prevailing themes from the IPA analysis revealed that (1) the end goal and definition of mindfulness is subjective and changes depending on the teachers' socio-economic, socio-cultural, and personal factors, (2) increased self-awareness promotes positive relationships in the classroom, and (3) future mindfulness-based school trainings must be administered and conducted by qualified and trained personnel, mindfulness-based school programs (MBSP) should include resources and lessons that align with the curriculum. The results from this qualitative research study show that mindfulness as an informal and formal practice holds promise as a mental health intervention that can alleviate stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout in the classroom while simultaneously promoting self-care and self-compassion leading to a healthier and effective learning environment.

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Setting of the Study.....	4
Researcher’s Role.....	4
Preliminary Purpose of the Study.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	8
Historical Background for Developing a Theoretical Framework.....	9
Mechanisms of Mindfulness.....	10
Compassionate Communication and Mindful Language.....	17
The Relationship Between Teacher Engagement and Student Learning.....	22
Establishing a Positive Classroom Environment.....	26
Mindfulness Decreases Anxiety, Depression, and Stress among Teachers and Students.....	28
Enhancing Students’ Academic Outcomes.....	32
The Future of Mindfulness-Based Programs.....	34
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	38
Aim of the Study.....	38
Qualitative Research Approach.....	38
Participants.....	40
Data Collection and Instruments.....	41
Procedures.....	43
Data Analysis.....	44
Ethical Considerations.....	46
Trustworthiness.....	47
Potential Research Bias.....	48
Limitations.....	48
Chapter 4: Findings.....	50
Examining Initial Responses.....	51
Theme 1: The Overall Goal and Definition of Mindfulness is Subjective.....	53
Theme 2: Increased Self-Awareness Promotes a Positive and Compassionate Classroom Environment.....	56
Theme 3: The Need for Experienced Personnel and the Integration of Mindfulness Programs in the Curriculum.....	57
Summary.....	59
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	61
Summary of the Study.....	61
Limitations of the Study.....	63
Implications for Future Research.....	64

Conclusion	65
References.....	66

Appendices

A Table of Specifications.....	76
B Interview Protocol.....	78
C Letter to Superintendent.....	81
D Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study.....	83
E Site Approval Letter	87
F Data Analysis Codes.....	89

Tables

1 Participants Pseudonyms and Demographics	52
2 Summary of the Research Questions and Themes.....	63

Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, the concept of mindfulness has become a topic of interest in the psychological and educational communities. Mindfulness consists of bringing attention to one's immediate experience in a nonjudgmental, nonreactive, and accepting manner (Edenfield & Saeed, 2012). The research indicates that mindfulness contributes to improvements of social skills, attention, anxiety and an increase in cognitive, emotional, and social regulation among teachers and students (Napoli et al., 2005; Felver et al., 2016; Zenner, Herrnleben- Kurz, & Walach, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Students (especially adolescents) might experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress leading to an increase in negative and automatic behaviors that can contribute to lower academic grades, behavioral problems, among other factors. Conversely, teachers are also at risk of feeling stress and burnout because the increasing pressure to attend and adapt to problems (e.g. assessments, racial inequities, lack of resources) as a direct result of administrative and curriculum management induced by school board personnel. Consequently, schools have become interested in mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) to decrease negative behavior and improve cognitive and emotional regulation (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). The problem to be addressed in this qualitative study is that teachers and students have become increasingly distracted, inattentive, and unmotivated in the classroom, while simultaneously feeling burnout, anxious, depressed, and stressed because of issues at home, classroom, or psychopathological symptoms (Hart, 2015; Reynolds, 2013; Howels, 2018; Laukkonen et

al., 2019; Laukkonen et al., 2020). Despite many school-based mental health interventions, many teachers and students continue to experience mental health issues and a lack of metacognitive awareness and self-regulation skills in the classroom. Facilitating and implementing mindfulness-based programs in schools is associated with promoting a healthier and stronger teacher-student relationship, greater academic achievement, and student engagement while reducing behavioral and emotional problems (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Klingbeil et al., 2016; Braun et al., 2019).

Background and Justification

There is research that indicates teachers and high school students experience high levels of stress and anxiety leading to a lack of attention, engagement, and metacognitive awareness in the classroom (Keyes et al., 2012; Mrazek et al., 2019; Mrazek et al., 2012). Consequently, teachers and students that struggle with stress and anxiety have a problem with internalizing and externalizing their sensations and emotions as they arise (Hayes et al., 2004; Mennin et al., 2005; Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2017). Previous research by Mrazek et al. (2017) and Renshaw (2017) discuss the mechanisms responsible for MBIs' improving individuals' educational and psychological functioning. These include the intention to engage in a mindful and meditative state, while adapting an attentive and compassionate attitude of the present experience. Schonert-Reichl and Stewart- Lawlor (2010) discussed the importance of a school-based intervention that fosters students' and teachers' strengths and resiliency. Their research supports the use of mindfulness to foster self-regulatory and emotional flexibility among both groups. Suggesting that academic achievement, emotional competence, and mental health are interrelated (Deighton, Humphrey, & Belsky et al., 2018; Wigelsworth, Qualter, & Humphrey, 2017).

Deficiencies in the Evidence

One of the ongoing problems that limits the research and efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions is the absence of participants and schools that seem reluctant to participate and incorporate mindfulness trainings in the curriculum (Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020). Another problem to consider might be the lack of teacher trainings; the literature indicates that there is an absence of mindfulness trainings (Black & Fernando, 2014; Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020). Renshaw and Cook (2017) state that having some training and personal experience with mindfulness is an essential element to effectively implement MBIs in the classroom. Wigelsworth and Quinn (2020) concur that the benefits and process of MBIs should be demonstrated and implemented to all stakeholders to account for appropriate understanding. Teachers need to be better informed and equipped with the tools and resources needed to facilitate the adoption and implementation of MBIs.

Shapiro et al. (2016) conducted a study in which teachers attended mindfulness trainings. The teachers were taught that mindfulness should serve these purposes: psychological self-care, cognitive reflection, and developing a foundation for integrating and delivering mindfulness-based instructions to students. The results after the post-intervention interviews showed that although teachers enjoyed teaching the practice with other colleagues, they suggested that more training in the practice would have been beneficial. The children generally responded with enthusiasm to learning mindfulness, but many teachers felt inadequately equipped to deal with students who didn't take the lessons seriously.

Audience

MBIs are primarily targeted to increase the teachers' and students' psychological, emotional, and social well-being leading to a decrease in symptoms of anxiety and stress, while simultaneously improving their ability to be compassionate, attentive of external and internal stimuli, and conscientious of emotions and thoughts as they arise in the mind. Parents and school administrators might also benefit from MBPs.

Setting of the Study

The research was conducted in five charter high schools in the southwestern region of the United States.

Researcher's Role

The researcher is a high school English teacher seeking to integrate mindfulness practices in the school's curriculum.

Preliminary Purpose of the Study

In the last decade Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) and Mindfulness-Informed Interventions (MIIs) have acquired substantial attention among school psychologists, teachers, and parents. According to Renshaw (2016) MBIs are defined "as any technique or procedure that activates mindfulness or trains mindfulness skills for the purpose of bringing about a therapeutic outcome" (p. 117). On the other hand, MIIs consist of developing a framework for mindfulness as a practice based on prior scientific and sacred approaches without explicitly including meditative or breathing practices (Shapiro & Carlson, 2017). Examples of MIIs include Acceptance and Commitment Therapy of the present moment without judgement; Compassionate Communication; and Dialectical Behavior Therapy that integrates the acceptance of negative, emotional, and

physical changes that occur throughout life. Renshaw and Cook (2017) discuss that MBIs and MIIs are increasingly becoming an effective method for school psychologists and teachers to integrate in the classroom and as part of their school-based mental health programs. Kabat Zinn is the pioneer of the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program. He introduced this program as part of a clinical treatment to reduce stress and induce cognitive well-being. His approach to mindfulness encourages people to focus on their present state of mind, intentionally, with an open mind and nonjudgmentally (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

According to Renshaw (2020) the purpose of MBIs is to increase awareness and focus on the present moment, while simultaneously including psychoeducational and experiential components. MBI trainings consist of meditative practices to increase awareness of physical and mental events (focus on the breath, self-awareness, body scan) (Burke, 2010). Schonert-Reichl and Roeser (2016) state that most researchers and educators agree that mindfulness improves students' academic, behavioral, emotional, and social functioning. Subsequently, MBIs hold promise as a school-based intervention for internalizing (e.g., anxiety, depression, stress, burnout) and externalizing (e.g., inattention, disruptive behavior) problems (Axelrod & Santagata, 2021; Renshaw, et al., 2017; Renshaw, 2020; Roeser, 2016). The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' experiences with mindfulness practices for promoting qualities of self-compassion and empathy that enhance positive relationships and student engagement in the classroom.

Definition of Terms

Mindfulness as defined by Bishop et al. (2004) is the self-regulation of attention that is maintained in the here-and-now, allowing for increased recognition of mental

events in the present moment. The second element involves adopting a particular orientation toward one's experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance.

Mindfulness-Informed Interventions (MIIs) includes the framework that integrates the knowledge and teachings of mindfulness for therapeutic and holistic purposes, without the need to explicitly teach them meditative practices (Shapiro & Carlson, 2017).

Meditation as defined by Goleman (1976) is a continuous attempt to reach a specific attention or peaceful position, while simultaneously sustaining attention directly to a single object, point or focus, thereby, maintaining a specific cognitive perception of objects and content as they arise in the field of awareness.

Compassionate Communication fosters empathy and builds on language connection to promote active listening and awareness of the significance of words (Rosenberg, 2003).

Mindful Language is the ability to non-judgmentally observe and describe one's internal experience of the present moment when engaging in a conversation, by drawing attention to one's own habits and thoughts as they arise in the field of awareness that might impede effective and mindful communication (Mozzon-Mcpherson, 2017).

Loving-Kindness Meditation is one's attitude to meditate in a compassionate and loving way, promoting equability and kindness of the self and all sentient beings (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Salzberg, 1995).

Focused Attention Meditation is the practice of focusing the attention on an object (e.g. the breath, different parts of the body) and noticing when the mind wanders away

from the object, remembering to return to the object with a friendly and accepting attitude (Lutz et al., 2008).

Open-Awareness Meditation is to purposely observe and become attentive of internal and external factors as they arise without interpretation or elaboration (Lutz et al., 2008).

Body-Scan Meditation connects the different body and mind sensations (physical and psychological) into one experience. The user focuses and contemplates the different body parts, observing and being attentive of each sensation and feeling as they arise, refraining from elaborating or judging the sensation; it is helpful for the user to have a compassionate attitude while practicing body scan meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2003).

Decentering involves the cognitive ability to observe thoughts or feelings as objective events as they arise in the field of awareness rather than identifying with them, thus, maintaining psychological distance of stimuli (Safran & Segal, 1990).

Positive Reappraisal The adaptive process through which stressful events are re-construed as benign, beneficial, and/or meaningful (Garland, et al. 2011, 2015).

Savoring involves attending to the most perceptually salient features of an object or event, while becoming aware of its more subtle features and emotional impacts, broadening the diversity and range of sensations and feelings to be derived from the experience (Bryant, Chadwick, & Kluwe, 2011).

Equanimity can be described as an even-minded mental state or dispositional tendency toward all experiences or objects, regardless of their affective valence (pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) or source (Desbordes et al. 2015).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the last 20 years the topic of mindfulness has been introduced in many scholarly published educational and psychology journals. The concept of mindfulness as defined by Kabat-Zinn (1994) is to pay attention in a particular way, on purpose in the present moment, and non-judgementally. Although this definition is the most recognized in contemporary psychology, there are other definitions that have been established by experts in the field. For example, Renshaw and Cook (2017) suggest that “mindfulness is an active behavioral process” (p. 5) that is intentional and purposeful, conversely, some meditative traditions define mindfulness as the ability to sustain non-distraction, implying that there is no clear definition of mindfulness. Bishop et al. (2004) proposed an operational definition of mindfulness that is commonly used in secular psychology. First is the self-regulation of attention that is maintained on the here-and-now, allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. The second element involves adopting a particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance (Bishop, et al., 2004).

Addressing the holistic needs of students and other classroom related problems, contributes to the increasingly demanding emotional nature of the teaching profession (Johnson, et al. 2015). Because of the challenges that teachers face to maintain an optimal and positive classroom environment, school-based programs that adopt mindfulness in their curriculum are needed. Increasing numbers of students face behavioral and emotional problems that put them at risk for maladaptive classroom behavior and academic failure (Gilliam, 2005; Braun, et al. 2020). Consequently, teachers must cope

and manage with their own emotional reactivity in response to student behaviors and academic problems causing them to struggle with their cognitive functioning, self-efficacy, and classroom engagement (Carson, et al. 2010; Braun, et al. 2018).

Mindfulness increases emotional regulation and flexibility among teachers' psychological health, personal well-being, classroom practices, and personal traits that influence their relationship and engagement with students (Jennings, 2015; Renshaw & Cook, 2017).

Positive emotional supportive teachers' is associated with students' emotional well-being, academic values, interest, classroom engagement, self-efficacy, and prosocial behaviors (Wentzel, 2016; Renshaw, 2020). Luckner and Pianta (2011) state that students benefit from emotionally supportive and proactive teachers, who display attitudinal instances of warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness to student needs and perspectives.

Historical Background for Developing a Theoretical Framework

The practice of mindfulness can be traced back to Eastern traditions. The Buddha's first reference to mindfulness was during his speech about the Wheel of Dharma in Motion (Bodhi, 2000), that is believed to represent the first teaching he gave after attaining deep awareness. The Buddhist teachings suggest that to move beyond embedded habits of the mind and to become free of some of the distortions and confusions to which we are subject, we need to train ourselves to attend very carefully and deliberately to the process by which we construct past and future experiences in the present moment (Hamilton, 2000). In this sense mindfulness was developed as a holistic approach to relieve human suffering and increase compassion, loving-kindness, and nonreactivity among its practitioners. This traditional belief of mindfulness sparked interest in the psychological community, and thus psychologists have turned their

attention to defining and providing a theoretical model for mindfulness to create a framework for further inquiry (Albrecht, et al. 2012).

Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework for this study is Shapiro et al. (2006) theoretical model of the mechanisms that activate mindfulness and the traditional Buddhist theory of mindfulness. Shapiro et al. (2006) discusses the three axioms that are based on Kabat-Zinn's (1994) definition of paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. The IAA model describes how mindfulness is activated. In this model by bringing the elements of intention (why), attention (what), and attitude (how), the user becomes aware of their internal and external experiences. This model was used to understand teachers' knowledge and acceptance of mindfulness practices. These axioms are all interwoven process of a single simultaneous cyclic occurrence, in which the user adopts a compassionate, friendly, kind, and nonreactive attitude towards the present experience.

Mechanisms of Mindfulness

Decentering

The ability to disengage from occurring or re-occurring thoughts is an essential trait of mindfulness. For instance, seeing thoughts or feelings as objective events rather than identifying with them (Safran & Segal, 1990) is the process of decentering. As opposed to an individual's natural reaction, in which they attempt to control their thoughts, and consequently dive into an anxious cycle, which is the method referred as experiential avoidance (Hayes, et al. 1996). Bishop, et al. (2004) discusses the relationship between mindfulness and the objective view of thoughts. Mindfulness

approaches teach the user to become aware of thoughts and feelings and to relate to them in a wider, decentered perspective as transient mental events rather than as reflections of the self or as necessarily accurate reflections on reality. Thereby, if self-evaluative, hopeless thoughts are recognized simply as thoughts, the student will be better able to disengage from them since no action will be required (i.e., since the thoughts are not “real,” there is no goal to obtain and thus no need to ruminate to find a solution” (Bishop, et al. 2004 p. 236). This process is associated with mindfulness because when combined both bring awareness to the present moment without necessarily identifying and becoming disengaged by the thoughts.

Mindfulness Meditation and Equanimity

Equanimity has become of interest in contemplative studies as an outcome of mindfulness practices (Desbordes et al. 2015). Equanimity or non-reaction is an important trait in understanding the benefits of mindfulness for attaining a balanced, compassionate, and nonreactive state of mind which promotes psychological well-being. Mindfulness as a practice trains the mind to observe and decenter from emotions rather than teaching how to control emotions. Mindfulness practices and meditation contributes to the development of metacognitive awareness leading to insight and realization of different mental states. Without this deeper understanding of the changing events and habits of the mind, thoughts and emotions can be interpreted as personal rather than as the product of the mind. Mindfulness meditation and metacognitive awareness work in concert contributing to a state of non-reaction towards a negative or positive valence. In Buddhism this is referred to attaining the state of equanimity, described as “an even-

mindful mental state or dispositional tendency toward all experiences or objects, regardless of their affective valence (pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) or source” (Desbordes et al. 2015, p.17).

Positive Reappraisal

Positive Reappraisal is the adaptive process through which stressful events are re-constructed as benign, beneficial, and/or meaningful (Garland, et al. 2011, 2015). To re-construct a stressful situation, one must first disengage and withdraw from the negative stressor and thoughts, and adopt a mindful attitude that activates metacognitive thinking, thus, reevaluating the degree of the stress and integrating a positive outlook of the situation. When a given positive event is appraised as a threat that exceeds one’s capabilities, an individual may initiate an adaptive response by decentering from this stress appraisal via a process of mindfulness, which leads to a state of mindful awareness.

Savoring

Kiken, et al. (2017) suggests that savoring each moment interacts with mindfulness to enhance positive emotions. The term savoring in mindfulness context is analogous to when one indulges in their favorite meal or dessert. Savoring is about enjoying each of life’s moment as they arise organically and in the field of consciousness. Characterized by contentment, satisfaction, and gratitude of the present experience. The addition of savoring provides a complementary mechanism in which this practice increases the person’s attention towards positive-valenced stimuli, leading to pleasant feelings and the development of eudaimonic well-being (Garland, et al. 2015; Kiken &

Shook, 2011). Savoring might also increase the ability to self-regulate during stressful and negative experiences by connecting with the positive qualities of life, rather than ruminating on negative and distorted thoughts.

Presence and Mindfulness

Anderson et al. (2018) focus on the ability to produce quality and potent outcomes based on four unique and interconnected elements. The authors discuss and argue that to achieve success, life satisfaction, and become fully committed to a task (difficult or easy) teachers should attain a degree of presence or consciousness of their present experience. By being mindfully present one's purpose is augmented by realization of his/her capacity to be good, which aids to develop an interest and passion for their teaching and enhances the teacher-student interaction, thereby, increasing their relevance to teaching and to effectively communicate with their students. To achieve "presence," the Buddhists discuss that we must be fully awakened and conscious of our thoughts and emotions. According to Buddhism, the most practical and simplest form of attaining a sense of presence is by meditation and detachment from our own fixed ideas and beliefs of ourselves and others. Meditation might be an important element to become fully present and conscious on any given task, as Craven (1989) states that meditation involves five important components: relaxation, concentration, altered state of consciousness, 'logic relaxation' and self-observation attitude...".

Mindful Intention and Attention

Presence and attention are closely associated with the concept of mindfulness. Thus, they are interrelated and are enhanced by adopting a state of mindful awareness of the present moment. Kabat-Zinn (1990) states that it is our intentions and presence with

what currently is happening that set the stage for future positive outcomes. The axiom of intention corresponds with open-ended goals that practitioners set for themselves, including self-regulation and stress management (Reid, 2010). This idea of intention may then become a sense of self-exploration and self-liberation, which is closely correlated to attaining a state of deep awareness in Buddhism. Similarly, attention training is a key predictor of mindfulness qualities. Attention is related to mindfulness because it involves observing the moment-to-moment process, and the experiences that are occurring internally and externally, shaped by our ability to sustain attention. (Shapiro et al., 2006). Because attention can sometimes induce a cognitively judgmental quality, it is helpful to have an attitude of self-compassion, friendliness, and open heartedness of present moment experience.

Canedo, Trifan, and Neves (2018) examine the effects of students' attention in the classroom by using a computer program that captures the eye movements and facial expressions of students. They discuss that student's attention depends on several factors, these include a positive teacher-student relationship, and the teachers' ability to regulate their emotions, which promotes and preserves student engagement and awareness. The purpose of their study was to monitor students' attention using computer vision, the students were recorded using computers that captured their posture and eye movements during a live lesson. The authors seek to find ways in how teachers' presence and engagement with students can contribute to greater attention span and academic achievement among students. The article indirectly includes two models of instruction connected to the personal needs of students, and the negative effects of certain distracting behaviors on learning. The goal was to identify the learners' needs and introduce

instructional methods that might decrease distracting and inattentive behaviors. The preliminary results showed that students' head and body pose, combined with subtle eye movements can predict students' engagement in the classroom. The main outcome of the study was to provide teachers with guidance and feedback of their teaching habits and increase awareness of patterns and behaviors among teachers and students that might aid to improve their teaching and learning.

Mindful Meditations

Meditation is a way of deepening the relationship with our perspectives and experiences, by gaining insight of the nature of being human, which leads to self-inquiry and curiosity. Mindfulness is complemented by meditation, because meditation enhances ones' ability to sustain attention for an extended time. Goleman and Schwartz's (1976) study suggest that there are many positive effects of meditation among humans. For example, Yogis, Zen monks, and experienced meditators share a predominant positive trait that include slowing the breath and heart rate, decrease in oxygen consumption, lowering or stabilization of blood pressure, decrease in skin conductance, among other beneficial factors, this might be due to the inhibition of the sympathetic nervous system, which is linked to an increase in negative and automatic responses. Experienced practitioners mostly practice three types of mindful meditations. These distinct approaches of meditative practices have been shown to reduce symptoms of stress and anxiety by bringing awareness to the present moment (Evans, et al., 2018). Focused attention meditation (FAM), asks that the practitioner focuses the attention on a chosen object and sustains this focus, thereby, increasing the capacity to sustain attention and

gradually more able to control distractions and redirect the focus to the chosen object (Lutz et al., 2008). Open-awareness meditation (OAM) consists of attaining a state of “reflexive awareness” of each experience by recognizing the nature of emotional and cognitive patterns. The third type of meditation practice involves the cultivation of positive and compassionate qualities. The aim of loving-kindness meditation (LKM) is to acknowledge the state of universal love and compassion, promoting equability and kindness of the self and all sentient beings (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Salzberg, 1995). Therefore, integrating these meditative practices along with an attitude of self-compassion, would facilitate and promote mindfulness in the classroom and outside the classroom.

Mindfulness Stimulates Eudaimonic Well-Being

Multiple studies indicate that mindfulness increases self-regulation and emotional well-being (Mrazek, et al. 2012; Renshaw, 2020; Taylor, Roberts, M., & Zarrett, 2021). The research shows that meditative states of awareness and consciousness have been associated with prolonged instances of deep focus and concentration, which correspond with an increase in cognition and working memory capacity (WMC). Garland et al. (2015) conducted a study that depicts the mechanisms of mindfulness to promote a higher quality of life and an increase in attentional function or control. Mackenzie and Harris (2017) define attentional function as an ability to control their attention. This consists of sustaining complete focus on a task by incorporating executive function abilities, the capacity to resolve cognitive conflict (Bush, Luu, & Posner, 2000), and the ability to be fully present and direct attention to stimuli. Similarly, Garland et al. (2015) discusses that mindfulness contributes to ones’ ability to increase, control, and sustain attention,

thereby, aiding to promote a sense of purpose and meaning of life. The authors suggest that eudaimonic well-being (life satisfaction) leads to greater instances of positive well-being and happiness. Subsequently, mindfulness facilitates the concept of positive reappraisal. This entails acquiring a new perspective of stressful events, typically involving re-evaluating emotions and thoughts of the event, while promoting personal growth and well-being. Positive reappraisal might promote positive behavior modification among teachers and students. Positive behavior is especially important in the classroom because students retain the most information when they are in an environment that helps them remain focused and engaged.

Compassionate Communication and Mindful Language

Compassionate Communication facilitates compassion and kindness in the classroom. This approach seeks to foster and enable human interaction and authenticity by heightening one's awareness of their attitudes and actions that contribute to strengthening interpersonal relationships (Museux, 2016). Rosenberg (1983) states that:

We learn early to cut ourselves off from what's going on within ourselves. Life alienating communication both stems from and supports hierarchical societies the functioning of which depends upon large numbers of docile, subservient citizens. When we are in contact with our feelings and needs, we humans no longer make good slaves and underlings (p. 23).

When teachers become aware of the way they speak and listen to their students, they can relate and connect with them in a natural and humane way. Integrating mindful language and communication in the classroom facilitates attention and promotes insight of how

humans are meant to communicate, rather than speaking instinctively, we learn to listen to one another. Words become conscious and firm responses that are guided by our ability to be aware of what we perceive, feel, and want (Rosenberg, 2015). The compassionate communication process as developed by Marshall Rosenberg (2003) involves focusing on four major components in the field of consciousness, first, is observing the situation, without interpretation, evaluation, or judgement of stimuli. Next, observation of feelings, includes being present with the emotion whether is hurt, scared, joyous, jealous, etc. Thirdly, identifying personal needs, values, desires to the feelings that have been identified, and finally, request input from one another through mindful communication and expressions in an effort to enrich and fulfill ones' lives, establishing this flow of attentive communication and appreciation for words, helps manifests a compassionate and kind attitude towards each experience.

Kelchtermans (2009) discusses the importance of a language for teachers that allows them to talk, share, and reflect on their emotional-relational experiences and struggles, and recognizes these as fundamental to the experience of teaching and learning. The idea of mindful language consists of combining mindfulness-informed and mindfulness practices to foster metacognitive awareness of the way teachers make use of language and interact with their students. Mindful language in this context is the ability to non-judgmentally observe and describe what is happening in the present moment when engaging in a conversation, by drawing attention to habits and thoughts as they arise in the field of awareness that might impede effective and mindful communication between the teacher and student. Mindful language involves acting and speaking with complete awareness of the present moment. Through this process one realizes that communication

is a complex and delicate act in which the teacher and student co-construct and develop their ideas by listening effectively and without judgment (Mozzon-McPherson, 2017). Choosing to speak in a kind and understanding way, while engaging in active listening and paying attention to the tone of voice is an important element of cultivating compassion and mindfulness in the classroom. Words are a powerful tool to show empathy and appreciation for one another; and learning to integrate mindfulness and compassionate language qualities in the classroom can make the difference in how the students react and engage during instructional time. Becoming conscious of the structure and influence that language has on student learning and social interactions increases teachers' and students' desire to participate and share innovative ideas.

Self-Compassion and Empathy

Self-compassion is a particular way of relating to oneself when faced with suffering, characterized by an accepting and kind awareness of one's negative feelings (Neff, 2003a, 2003b). Neff (2003) conceptualizes self-compassion within three possible dimensions: self-kindness, common humanity, referring to the ability to recognize difficult and negative experiences as part of the human experience, and mindfulness. When adopting a compassionate attitude of the self while simultaneously integrating mindfulness qualities, one becomes metacognitively conscious of negative and deceiving thoughts that impact the cognitive and attentional functioning domains; thereby, promoting the ability to regulate and reduce emotions and stressors induced by a negative response. In a study by Hollis-Walker and Colosimo (2011) trait mindfulness and self-compassion have been moderately to strongly correlated in a clinical and non-clinical

student population. The authors discuss evidence for an indirect effect of self-compassion on the relationship between mindfulness and eudaimonic well-being. Other studies account for mindfulness and self-compassion as having effects on measuring instances of psychological well-being (Woodruff et al., 2014; McKay & Walker, R. 2020), quality of life (Van Dam et al., 2011), and negative affect (Lopez et al., 2016). Despite the similarities in factors contributing to a state of mindful awareness and self-compassion, there are some subtle differences in how these factors operate via alternate mechanisms (Fox et al., 2016). Desbordes et al. (2012) found evidence of different changes in the brain associated to emotional stimuli after 8-weeks of mindfulness and compassionate trainings. The mindfulness group had shown a decrease in amygdala activation, suggesting a reduction in emotional response, when viewing images (negative, positive, neutral). By comparison, the compassion group exhibited a slight increase in negatively valence images. In another study, compassion and mindfulness trainings resulted in a significant change of early stages of the attentional processing of emotional stimuli (Roca & Vazquez, 2020a). Although there are not many studies that have purposely compared the effects of mindfulness and self-compassion, there is enough of a consensus to indicate that both programs enhance psychological well-being, mindfulness, and compassion skills (Brito-Pons et al., 2018; Wilson, M., Weiss, Shook, J., 2020).

Building Confidence and Self-Awareness in the Classroom

Because school-aged children spend many of their hours at school, the classroom is an important social context for promoting their social, emotional, and academic development (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000). Taxer and Frenzel (2015) highlight the

importance of emotional regulation and vulnerability among teachers. Teachers are often forced to display a positive attitude towards all experiences and monitor their actions in the context of conflictual relationships with students, making teachers feel emotionally depleted and overwhelmed. This image is detrimental to promoting confidence and self-awareness in the classroom, mindfulness encourages the observation and regulation of present positive and negative experiences, the practice is about being fully conscious and accepting of the human condition.

Research suggests that practicing daily mindfulness in the classroom promotes and preserves teachers' and students' confidence and increases their self-esteem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Eccles & Roeser, 2016; Zollars et al., 2019). Additionally, the authors indicate the importance of teachers' need for emotional regulation, vulnerability, acceptance, and self-awareness aiding to build a positive relationship with students to support their personal growth. Mindfulness activates the qualities of compassion, kindness, and friendliness of the self and others; it also increases emotional control of unwanted thoughts and feelings, leading to superior self-regulation that aids to build confidence and insight (Mckay & Walker, 2021). Opelt and Schwinger (2020) examined the effects of integrating mindfulness to build awareness of experienced cognitions and emotions after experimenting with a mindfulness group and a control group. The results led to the mindful participants demonstrating higher confidence levels and an increase in self-regulated learning. Panadero (2017) indicates that the various purposes of self-awareness and self-regulated learning enhances ones' capacity to avoid threat and harm induced by stress and anxiety and ensures an increase in emotional regulation and self-awareness, promoting confidence and self-esteem among teachers and students in the

classroom. Self-awareness of automatic habits and conversations in the classroom are especially important in attaining a compassionate and mindful discussion between the teacher and student. Suggesting, that mindfulness is a key predictor of increasing self-esteem and self-awareness while teaching and learning. Hosogi et al. (2012) defines self-esteem as the awareness of the absolute value of a person's personality or dignity. High self-esteem in the classroom is associated with increased happiness and purpose to teaching among teachers, which aids to enhance the teacher-student relationship and supports a positive, balanced, and friendly learning environment for students.

The Relationship Between Teacher Engagement and Student Learning

Mindful teachers can generate awareness and insight in the classroom. Studies indicate that the impact of a positive teacher-student relationship influences the student's social and cognitive development (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020). This relationship effectively contributes to the regulation of emotional awareness, academic, and behavioral skills, suggesting that teacher support lowers symptoms of stress among students. Whitehead (2011) suggests that to effectively cultivate a mindful classroom, teachers need to understand and adhere to the practice with purpose and intention. The practice enables the individual to have awareness of emotions and actions rather than engaging in automatic behavior (Whitehead, 2011). It also allows the teacher to pick up on non-verbal expressions and subtle changes in the tone of voice of students and thus allows a deeper level of connection and enhanced engagement in the learning process, bringing a new dimension to student-centered teaching (Kernochnan et al., 2007). In another study, Canedo et al. (2018) discussed that student's attention

depends on several factors. These factors include a positive teacher-student relationship, and the teachers' ability to regulate their emotions, which promotes and preserves student engagement and awareness. Some studies support the notion that mindfulness training is promising for improving attention and self-regulation abilities in youth, which has implications for a non-disruptive classroom environment. The majority of studies have recruited small samples of youth (60 % of available literature has samples fewer than 50 participants), and results have yet to be replicated in larger samples of ethnically-and socioeconomically diverse children in real-world public-school settings (Black & Fernando, 2015). Although there is a need for further exploration in the field of mindfulness and its effects on a larger population, the literature indicates that through mindfulness teachers and students have a better outcome of being present and aware in the classroom, while simultaneously finding a purpose to teaching and learning.

Mind-Wandering and Student Learning

Mind-wandering as defined by Smallwood and Schooler (2006) is characterized as the interruption of task-focus by task-unrelated thoughts (TUT). In their research, Mrazek, et al. (2017) investigated and discussed the feasibility of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) to decrease the frequency of mind-wandering in the classroom. The goal was to determine whether mindfulness reduces levels of negative affect and/or changes the students' mindsets about their ability to control their attention. The results show that following a few weeks of mindfulness trainings, the students' responses reflect that there was a reduction in the frequency in which their mind wandered. If mindfulness and mind-wandering are opposite constructs (Smallwood, et

al. 2003; Reichle, et al. 2010), it can be concluded that mindfulness interventions might reduce instances of mind-wandering (Mrazek, et al. 2012; Smallwood, 2011).

Van de Weijer-Bergsma et al. (2011) and Gabriely et al. (2020) indicate that mindfulness practices is directly correlated to improving attention and instances of mind-wandering among youth. Students with Attentional Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder showed reduced symptomatology after receiving mindfulness training. Further research suggest that mindfulness can elicit improvements in student learning performance and general classroom behavior (Shonin et al., 2012; Renshaw, 2020). Conversely, mindfulness can be integrated into any classroom environment as a means of settling teachers and students moving from one lesson to another by increasing self-awareness and using mindful communication (e.g. provide examples and become conscious of words) to ease the instructional transition. The breath is one such tool. Reminding students to return to their breath and connect with their body's movement through the breath immediately relaxes the body via the parasympathetic nervous system (McCown et al., 2011). This growing research on mindfulness and student learning performance and behavior is becoming more evident with time. Although, the research is mainly focused on elementary students, however, regardless of the age group, young or old, there is a clear correlation between mindfulness practices and the improvement of regulating teaching and learning patterns among teachers and students.

Mrazek et al. (2020) discussed that students seem to spend an unnecessary amount of time on their phones, scrolling through their social media posts, texting, sending emails, etc. Because learning depends heavily on attention, research indicates that frequent interruptions of student attention is occurring while learning, these

distractions can be internal (thoughts, feelings) or external (electronic devices). Consequently, students engage in mind-wandering (e.g. unrelated thoughts to the lesson/learning) and digital multitasking during their classwork and homework time. A solution to this problem was proposed by the authors, they discuss the advantages and disadvantages of technology in the classroom, especially considering external stimuli. The research was to study the efficacy and productivity of a mindful based app “finding focus,” The findings indicate that although students spend time on their electronic devices, there are key advantages to using technology in the classroom. These advantages are enhanced by combining instruction with mindfulness-based technology programs, such as the app “finding focus” to increase attention in the classroom.

Mrazek et al. (2020) mentions that one of the goals was to empirically differentiate between the internal distraction of mind-wandering and the external distraction of multitasking with digital media. Their research was driven by several questions that measured the extent of mind-wandering and multitasking in the classroom and during homework time. The course “finding focus,” was used as a form of intervention to train students to focus their attention during class time and at home. Conversely, the app also serves as a means of integrating mindfulness practices in the curriculum.

The course was completed by most students and the results revealed a significant increase in classroom engagement and self-awareness from pre-to post-test, following the various instruments of measurement. For example, the Fidelity of implementation (FOI), in which the results were recorded after the students completed each lesson in the digital learning platform, the Mind-Wandering Questionnaire (MWQ), the Emotion Regulation

Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (ERQ-CA). Overall, the students showed increased in levels of emotion regulation, classroom engagement, and positive communication habits from pre-to post-test.

Establishing a Positive Classroom Environment

Mindfulness practices aids teachers in responding more effectively to work-related stress and negative affect, while promoting a positive environment that is conducive for teaching and learning. Furthermore, a positive relationship between the teacher and student is associated with many outcomes, including children's competent behavior in the classroom with their peers and future teachers, academic growth, a reduction in anxiety and stress, school adjustment, and eases the transition among students and teachers during the start of a new grade (Katrien-Koenen et al., 2022).

Teaching mindfulness in the classroom requires teachers to adopt a state of embodiment for effective implementation of mindfulness to establish a positive classroom environment (Broderick et al., 2019; R. S. Crane, Ganguli et al., 2020). Brandsma (2017) refers to embodiment as the teacher's "way of being present" or acquiring a fundamental attitude of non-reaction, non-judgmental, and non-evaluative of the present experience, these attitudes are critical for successful implementation of mindfulness practices in the classroom. There are multiple methods that teachers can use for integrating mindfulness practices in their classrooms and for their personal well-being. A practical method is integrating technology to promote mindfulness practices. Mrazek et al. (2020) developed the app "finding focus," this app was designed for teachers to practice mindfulness with their students before and after class instruction. The

app includes various elements to achieve a conscious state, by anchoring, focusing, and releasing, the learners become mindful of distracting thoughts and difficult emotions. The purpose was to feel calm and thus maintain focus and attention during class time. The findings suggest that the app led to significant improvements in a growth mindset, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation. The results indicate that students experienced a reduction in mind-wandering during class time and throughout their daily life.

Additionally, mindfulness exercises incorporate breathing techniques (inhale-exhale, deep belly breathing) at the beginning of class, and mindfulness-based cards. These cards promote Rest and Balance, Curiosity and Joy, Insight and Awareness, and Kindness, students can self-reflect and discuss in their notebooks and with their peers; each card is meant to induce meaning, empathy, and consciousness in the classroom.

Gross (1998) refers to the emotion regulation strategy as the re-evaluation of emotional events to change emotional responses. Mindfulness practices have been shown to promote the regulation of emotions among teachers. Braun et al. (2020) conducted a study in which the focus was to test the naturally occurring associations between teachers' emotion regulation skills, occupational burnout, life satisfaction, and student well-being. Self-rated surveys measured the effect and importance of teachers' emotional regulation skills, occupational burnout, and life-satisfaction on the development of student well-being across the school year. The results demonstrated that teachers' emotional regulation levels were associated with students' end of school year change in positive outlook, emotional distress, and prosocial behavior. Additionally, students reported less emotional distress when teachers used positive and cognitive reappraisal techniques to regulate emotional responses. In contrast, teachers' that reported expressive

suppression of their emotions, had a negative impact on students' positive outlook and prosocial behavior in the classroom.

Mindfulness Decreases Anxiety, Depression, and Stress among Teachers and Students

According to Bishop et al. (2004) one of the most beneficial and studied mindfulness trait is the ability to reduce anxiety, depression, and stress. Mindfulness interventions direct the learner to bring awareness to feelings and sensations with an open, non-reactive, non-judgmental attitude, thus improving cognitive regulation to reduce symptoms of anxiety and stress (Eberth & Sedlmeier, 2012; Eberth, Sedlmeier & Schafer, 2019). Gallego, et al. (2014) investigated the feasibility of a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) program among university students struggling with anxiety, depression, and stress. After an 8-week intervention with a control and experimental group, there was a significant reduction in stress, anxiety, and depression among the mindfulness group in comparison to the control group (Gallego, et al., 2014).

Research on adolescents depict the factors contributing to mental illness include (but are not limited) to low socioeconomic status, social isolation, exposure to violence and lack of peer or family support (WHO 2012). The benefits of daily mindfulness practices for adolescents can promote learning and reduce anxiety symptoms typically evoked by these internal or external factors. Mindfulness in contemporary psychology has been adopted “as an approach for increasing awareness and responding skillfully to

mental processes that contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behavior” (Bishop, et al., 2004 p. 230).

Some studies have examined and discussed the effects of short and long-term benefits of mindfulness interventions among teachers. In one study, stress reduction with mindfulness showed reduced burnout and perceived stress, using an uncontrolled design in a corporate setting (Kersemaekers et al., 2018) and in a controlled pilot study with teachers (Flook et al., 2013). In another study, Schonert-Reichl and Roeser (2016) analyzed data from a randomized controlled trial of teachers involving a control and experimental group, the results depict that the mindfulness group showed a decrease in stress, depression, and burnout as well occupation-related rumination while at home after three months of mindfulness intervention and training. Further data indicates that intervention-related development of the skill of mindfulness is causally related to improvement in psychological outcomes that are known to influence teaching quality (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Mindfulness Relieves Burnout Among Teacher Activists

Gorski (2015) conducts qualitative research on the effects of mindfulness on teacher activist burnout. Several scholars identify the need for a cognitive behavioral strategy that regulates activists stress and burnout induced by emotional vulnerability because of fighting for social justice and racist issues in the classroom (Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001). Social justice organizations exclude information on the importance of attending to one’s mental health. Consequently, Gorski seeks to analyze the potential benefits that mindfulness might have on activist burnout and stress, by promoting self-care and

personal well-being. In his study, 14 participants who specialized in social justice education were chosen to participate. The results indicate that following a series of interview questions that asked participants about the nature of their mindfulness practices and the degree of their experience with activist burnout. These results are promising for teacher activists that might be feeling stressed or burnout from constant backlash and issues related to activism. The study showed that mindfulness practices mitigated the threat of feeling burnout and aided with their recovery from burnout. Participants confirmed that mindfulness helped them overcome pressures from within their movements and organizations, and associated mindfulness practices with self-care and feelings of internal tranquility.

Effects of Mindfulness Practices on Teachers

Mindfulness practices have generally shown positive and efficacious results among teachers, most demonstrate great potential in effectively alleviating teacher stress and promoting a positive relationship with the students but have only yielded small-to-moderate reductions in teachers' self-reported stress (Taylor et al., 2021). Mindfulness practices in teachers is associated with employing regulatory resources to remain calm and composed while maintaining a state of emotional equanimity, even when presented with challenging classroom behaviors. Rather than feeling overwhelmed and defensive towards present life experiences, mindful teachers are likely to soak in and savor experiences as they arise in the field of awareness (Howard & Johnson, 2004). This is especially important when coping and managing students' negative classroom behavior (Spilt et al., 2011; Braun et al., 2019).

Past studies by (Al-Fudail & Mellar, 2008; Dunham & Varma, 1998; Kyriacou, 2001; Braun, Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2020) indicate teachers face an overwhelming amount of stressors in the school and classroom, that each coincide with separate appraisal and coping responses (both physiological and psychological) that need to be attended to meet the demands of the situation. Teachers are stressed and burnout as a result of being exposed to a variety of social and school stressors (e.g., dealing with colleagues, administrators, and parents), time and curriculum pressure (e.g., preparing lesson plans, grading, and adhering to delivering and proctoring standardized testing), and other occupational demands specific to teaching and managing students (e.g., teaching pupils who lack motivation and maintaining discipline in the classroom; Kyriacou, 2001).

Implementing mindfulness practices as part of the teachers' daily school routine promises to alleviate and correct some of these ongoing problems, while promoting compassion, empathy, and patience to deal with these social and school induced stressors. Taylor et al. (2021) studied the effects of burnout and stress among a group of (n=12) teachers after a 16 week-mindfulness program. The intervention consisted of 90-min sessions per month integrating mindfulness based-practices of present moment awareness and a mindfulness activity in which teachers modeled, operationalized and practiced a compassionate attitude of their present experience. Participants recorded their responses in their journal entry, then discussed their experiences during a group discussion facilitated by open-ended questions. The results indicate that post-intervention the MBI reduced teachers' stress, burnout, and depression, reducing stress related to time management in the classroom, enhanced professional investment during class lectures

and interaction with their students, and improved instances of workload fatigue. These elements of the mindfulness-based intervention indicate that group-based intervention, active cultivation of mindfulness with active reflection and guided activities aids to increasing teachers' well-being while reducing stress and burnout, thus, promoting a positive classroom culture.

Enhancing Students' Academic Outcomes

Research has demonstrated that becoming mindful of an internal state or physiological function, such as breathing, can promote focus, increase working memory capacity, and acceptance (Garland et al., 2015). Because of the evidence suggesting that mindfulness activates the social, emotional, and cognitive part of the brain, students can regulate internal and external experiences with awareness; promoting increased attention and working memory which leads to higher academic performance. Working memory can be quantified by the working memory capacity, which indicates how well an individual is able to control their attention to maintain more information as active (Engle, 2002). Given that mindfulness and meditation direct attention to a specific stimulus, they increase working memory capacity leading to higher performance in simple and complex tasks, such as understanding difficult reading texts, assessments, engaging in class discussions, etc. (Jha, et al., 2019). Mindfulness facilitates mindful communication between the teacher and student, thereby, inducing a healthier and positive relationship that aids to support student-led discussions and engagement in the classroom, leading to better academic outcomes. Clinton, et al. (2018) conducted a study in which undergraduate students engaged in a 15-min mindful breathing exercise, the results show

that the mindful group performed better on a reading comprehension task than their counterparts who were assigned to a mind-wandering exercise. A study by Rahl et al. (2017) demonstrates the benefits of a brief mindfulness meditation training, suggesting that 8-mins of mindful breathing exercise increases metacognitive awareness, in comparison to students in a relaxation and reading control group. Axelrod and Santagata (2021) investigated the effects of an MBI based on academic engagement of elementary students of tier 1 and 2 interventions. The question of the study was whether MBIs can improve students' academic engagement. MBIs are a key factor in understanding and addressing problems with academic engagement and attention. The research shows that mindfulness and attention regulation are conceptually related constructs (Felver et al., 2017). Axelrod and Santagata's (2021) research suggest that following the MBI, the students had improved in academic performance, however, the authors insist in the need for more research.

Kroshus et al. (2021) research on psychosocial support, emotional flexibility, and self-compassion during the transition to college predicted higher academics, lower levels of stress, and an increase in life satisfaction. The research examined emotional patterns and stressors that generate anxiety and depression during the transitional period to college. The results suggest that self-compassion and social support was positively associated with higher academic performance and an increase in GPA. The authors suggest the need for more research to explore elements of self-compassion, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindful awareness to promote better academic performance and increase the students' self-esteem during their early years in college.

Braun et al. (2019) indicates that classroom organization is also important for establishing a positive teacher-student relationship and increasing students' academics. When teachers set clear expectations for classroom behavior, develop behavioral strategies to manage negative behavior, and employ effective instructional strategies to engage students; students are more likely to respond effectively and cognitively, leading to higher academic achievement at the end of the school year (Allen et al., 2013).

The Future of Mindfulness-Based Programs

Educational leaders need more student and teacher feedback to consider the many aspects and pitfalls of implementing MBPs in schools that current research often neglects: the location and environment of the school. Modifications of standard MBPs are required to improve acceptability and feasibility in schools, which often creates confusion among school stakeholders concerning the integrity and fidelity of MBPs. In McKeering and Hwang's (2019) study, the students reported that difficulties with class engagement were associated with the wandering mind and underlying physical and emotional experiences. There currently remains a gap in reconciling these important factors for implementation of MBPs in schools (Emerson et al., 2019). The present literature on MBPs for teachers is also somewhat limited, there is a relatively small sample of teachers that have been examined for mindfulness-based programs (Braun et al., 2018). There is a possibility that this small sample does not represent teachers' willingness to practice mindfulness and the general knowledge of mindfulness among teachers. Grossman (2008) states that mindfulness is a difficult concept to define, he indicates that individuals must have a clear understanding of mindfulness as it originally was contextualized within

the Buddhist culture, requiring an experiential relationship and foundation based on meditation practice and introspective insight. He indicates that without this foundation, defining and operationalizing mindfulness relies on constructs established by cognitive psychology. Grossman (2008) also argues that it is important for future researchers to note the potential significant differences in self-rating questionnaires that might measure self-perceived versus actual states of mindfulness among individuals.

Jennings (2015) and Braun et al. (2018) also found that teachers' mindfulness skills and levels of occupational health and well-being changed based on the different challenges presented by students and the school's climate, findings indicate that when students exhibit behavioral or academic problems in the classroom, teachers are more likely to activate mindfulness to cope with these challenges. A recent study by Montero-Marín et al. (2022) found that a School-Based Mindfulness Training (SBMT) measuring the role of the school's environment and differential characteristics of the schools, teachers, and students in 84 secondary schools in the United Kingdom versus teaching as usual (TAU) resulted in a worsening of symptoms of depression and lower overall scores of well-being in students at risk of mental health problems both at post intervention and 1-year follow-up. These findings, although indicate that the program was not effective for all students, the research did demonstrate that schoolteachers and administrators did benefit from the training. Suggesting that integrating mindfulness practices to promote the teacher's well-being can potentially benefit students through significant improvement in teachers' instructional design, classroom engagement, and the environment of the classroom and school.

McCaw (2019) addresses two distinctive uses of mindfulness in educational research to examine how it is contextualized and posited in a variety of ways. The author refers to ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ uses of mindfulness to show the difference between mindfulness as a cognitive behavioral technique and mindfulness grounded in Buddhist practices within educational research, policy, and practice. McCaw refers to ‘thin’ mindfulness as an inherent and stable human trait, measuring cognitive skills, or as a temporary mental state. ‘Thick’ mindfulness is mostly embedded in its Buddhist past and traditional views (McCaw, 2019). The author argues of the importance of including ‘thick’ mindfulness in contemporary mindfulness-based educational programs, because of the importance of including an ethical perspective of mindfulness as a sacred and traditional practice. Although, according to Kabat-Zinn (2017) integrating the sacred component of mindfulness might create confusion among the scientific community and non-religious practitioners due to the need for a scientific-based operationalized definition and the popularization of mindfulness as a cognitive behavior strategy. ‘Thin’ mindfulness, implies the role of personal psychological wellbeing in supporting productivity, student achievement and teacher effectiveness. ‘Thick’ mindfulness symbolizes internal wisdom and insight, while responding to deep aspects of human suffering (e.g. death, physical pain, negative emotions), involving the transformational part of the human experience (Crossman, 2003; Habermas, 2008). Thereby, in McCaw’s (2019) analysis combining the notions of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ mindfulness might bring about a more prominent futuristic therapeutic mindfulness-based school program that integrates the qualities of the heart (self-compassion, and compassion for others) while

simultaneously developing the inherent ability to focus and remain conscious of moment-by-moment events.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the teachers' experience with mindfulness practices in education to correct many of the internal (depression, anxiety, stress, burnout) and external (disruptive behavior, inattention) problems among teachers and students. Another aim was to explore the teachers' awareness and relationship with mindfulness practices. The question to be explored was how teachers' personal experiences with mindfulness practices might aid to promote compassionate and positive communication for establishing healthier relationships, higher academic achievement, teacher well-being and contentment in the classroom. The research added to the growing field of mindfulness studies that support the practice of mindfulness and meditation to improve psychological and physical well-being. The implementation of mindfulness in education is still in its early stages, and it is important to understand teachers' perspectives, experiences, and the use of mindfulness practices in their personal and professional lives. This study examined educators' perceptions and experiences of the practice, thereby, contributing to new ways of developing and implementing mindfulness training, resources, and exercises that enhance and promote mindfulness-based school practices and programs.

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is defined as the study of a phenomenon that involves observing and interpreting the qualities, different manifestations, and the context in which they appear or the different perspectives that are perceived by the participants

(Moser & Korstjens, 2018). According to Creswell (2018), a phenomenological study sample includes individuals who have experience with the phenomenon. Neubauer et al. (2019) indicate that the goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of the experience in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced.

The researcher recruited participants that had some personal or professional experience with mindfulness as a formal or informal practice. Renshaw and Cook (2017) agree that having some training and personal experience with mindfulness is an essential element to effectively implementing mindfulness-based programs in the classroom.

In qualitative research the aim is to interpret and document people's experiences, and understandings, to formulate a model of the world they live; to inform and draw conclusions while making connections between participants and the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These conclusions are attained via descriptive and observable data that help researchers analyze and formulate the meaning of the phenomena. The researcher used the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method to analyze the data. IPA elucidates and emphasizes the phenomenon as it is witnessed by the individual, the main idea is to understand the lived experiences from a socio-historical and cultural perspective. The lived experiences provide insight to what matters to the individual and how their lives are impacted by the phenomenon. IPA helps qualitative researchers formulate the meaning by understanding and capturing particular experiences from specific people (Smith et al., 2009).

In this phenomenological study, the researcher conducted one-to-one interviews of teachers, which Ryan et al. (2009) indicate the process of gaining insight and awareness of participants' perceptions, understandings, and experiences of a given

phenomenon that can contribute to in-depth data collection. Data was collected based on the observations from the one-to-one interviews from the video conferencing platform (zoom) and the interview transcripts that records and transcribes participants' answers to the interview questions.

Participants

The participants were a group of 10 high school educators located in a school district that focuses on at risk-students in the state of Arizona. The researcher generated an email with a detailed description of the purpose of the study to the superintendent asking for permission to conduct the study. The site approval letter was necessary to conduct research at the school district, see appendix E. The superintendent was responsible for sending the emails to the participants. The participants were emailed by the districts' superintendent, a short description of the study, with the purpose statement and a request to voluntarily participate in the study, for more information see appendix C and D. The participants had 72 hours to respond to the researcher, in which they either expressed interest or decline to be part of the study, there was not the need for a follow-up with the participants.

The school district serves a small population of at-risk students. According to Garard (1995) at-riskness student populations are characterized by students who are or are considered with an increased probability of dropping out of school, these students demonstrate a need for additional support because they face circumstances that inhibit their learning due to external or internal factors. Teachers that work with at-risk students might have an increased risk of feeling symptoms of burnout, stress, and anxiety (De Cordova et al., 2019). Eight of the participants teach 9th-12th graders in the general

education classes, specifically, Math and English. Three of the participants teach Special Education classes that encompasses all subjects (Math, English, Social Studies, Science) to a group of 9th through 12th graders. The participants demographics include about 80% White European, 15% Hispanic, and 5% Native American, 2% Asian/Pacific Islanders. The 10 participants were selected using sample of convenience during the third and fourth quarter of the 2022-2023 school year, the participants were chosen based on their prior experiences with formal or informal mindfulness practices. A convenience sample was used to select the participants.

According to Andrade (2021), the purpose of convenience sampling is to intentionally draw from a source that is conveniently accessible to the researcher, the sample, may not be an accurate representation of the entire population. One of the criteria for emailing the participants was based on the teacher's characteristics for a purpose that is relevant to the study and aligns with the researchers' specific interest in the study. The researcher works in the same school district as the chosen participants. The researcher is a high school English teacher that seeks to implement mindfulness-based practices in the high school curriculum.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data collection method used was a semi-structured interview. The participants were interviewed individually via a video conferencing platform, the interviewees had the flexibility to formulate their own perceptions of the phenomenon while answering 10 interview questions aimed at answering the research questions. Barrett and Twycross (2018) discuss that the main elements of a semi-structured interview include ensuring that data is captured in key areas while allowing the opportunity for participants to discuss

their perspectives and incorporate their personality traits in the interview. These instruments were used to collect the data.

The Table of Specifications (ToS), see appendix A

The Interview Protocol, see Appendix B

The Interview Transcripts

Notar et al. (2004) designed the Table of Specifications (ToS) for the purpose of helping to align the interview questions with the research question(s) because it is the alignment that enhances the validity, authenticity, fairness, and reliability of the research. Interview protocols should include the interview questions, and these should be aligned to the research questions, additionally, the interview protocol should have questions that are open-ended and with the appropriate probes, and have the flexibility to allow for natural communication between the researcher and participant (Jimenez & Orozco, 2021), the interview protocol was developed based on the ToS, and includes a description of the interview process. The interview protocol according to Johnson and Weller (2001) should include several interview questions that facilitate and enhance the interviewing process. Such as, including questions that are meaningful and answer the research questions; build categories based on the respondents' answers; offer a view of the respondent's belief on a topic; outline an individual's network and its composition; responses to visual stimuli; and the juxtaposition of categories and individuals. Permission from the authors to use the ToS was not necessary because they have been adopted by researchers for the purposes of conducting and validating qualitative research.

To test the effectiveness and validity of these instruments, the researcher consulted with a mindfulness expert and my mentor, Dr. Castellanos, and my Chair, Dr. Miller to

validate the instruments and ensure that the interview questions are aligned with the research questions. During this time, the researcher meticulously reviewed the research questions and make any necessary adjustments to the interview questions. After carefully revising the interview protocol and making the necessary changes, the researcher rehearsed the interview with Dr. Castellanos. Upon meeting with Dr. Castellanos and Dr. Miller there should be consensus that the interview questions are effective in answering the RQs, the ethics and morality of the interview questions, and the interview protocol depict an accurate representation of the study.

Procedures

IRB approval was needed before conducting the interviews. Before the interview, the interviewees sign a consent form in which they agree to be recorded, see Appendix D. The researcher emphasized that their information was confidential and was stored safely in a folder in the researcher's personal computer, solely intended for research purposes. Prior to the video/audio recording, in the first few minutes the goal is to establish rapport with the participants.

During the first few minutes of the interview, it is important for the researcher to build a connection with the participants based on their experiences with informal/formal mindfulness practices. During the video recording interview, the researcher asked questions related to the interviewees current experience with informal or formal mindfulness techniques, and their personal definition or interpretation of mindfulness and mindfulness-based school programs. The researcher commenced with a brief explanation of the purpose of the study (without discussing the mindfulness literature and providing a

definition), the participants were asked to interpret mindfulness and define it as they please.

Then, following the participant's definition of mindfulness, the researcher proceeded to ask the participants some questions pertaining to their current school, grade, and subject level of teaching. After, the interviewer asked each interviewee a total of 10 interview question. As the interviewees answer the questions, the interviewer provided time for the interviewees to synthesize and provide a clear statement and description of their distinctive experiences and opinions. The interviews were semi-structured via Zoom, each interview should last for approximately 15-20 minutes. Throughout the interview process, participants had the flexibility of discussing their personal perceptions and relationship with mindfulness as an informal and/or formal practice and mindfulness as a school-based program. After the interview questions, the interviewees are encouraged to provide any other feedback or comments that they feel needs to be shared related to the research, this was more of an informal conversation between the researcher and the participants.

Data Analysis

The data collection process was done via observation and journaling during the semi-structured individual interviews via Zoom, which lasted approximately 15-20 minutes, and the interview transcripts. The video recordings and transcripts were used to examine the participants' personal perceptions of mindfulness and mindfulness-based school programs. The researcher also made the decision that it would be best to not use a conceptualized definition of mindfulness because it might skew the final data that address the research problem. This conceptual definition by Bishop et al. (2004) is the self-

regulation of attention that is maintained in the here-and-now, allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. The second element involves adopting a particular orientation toward one's experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance. Instead of sharing this definition with participants, the researcher allowed the participants to interpret and define mindfulness as they desire.

The researcher used the IPA method to analyze the interview transcript. The first step of IPA is to try to understand the content and complexity of the words rather than the frequency of the events, the interviewer should make an effort to connect on a personal and emotional level with the respondents' words. The second step is to reread the transcript to become familiar with the account, commenting and summarizing any associations and connections with the text and identifying preliminary interpretations, by identifying descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual accounts. The third step is to identify emerging themes. The themes require a slightly higher level of abstraction and invoke a more precise terminology than the overall patterns, themes should be read like the title of a chapter or the title of a book. The fourth step involves analytical and theoretical ordering. The researcher finds connections between different themes that emerge from the transcripts/data. The final step involves providing a write-up and translating the themes into a narrative.

During the analysis of the collected data, the researcher examined and contemplated the participants' transcribed answers meticulously, identifying themes, patterns, similarities, and differences among the responses. Creswell and Poth (2018)

indicate that highlighting significant statements, sentences, or quotes provides greater insight into participants' experiences and relationships with the phenomenon.

The transcription of the interview was adopted from the Zoom videoconferencing platform, and was done by choosing the transcription option on Zoom and then copying the transcribed interview into a word doc. Creswell and Poth (2018) discuss that there are several components to consider when evaluating and analyzing a good qualitative project, these include data collection and analysis, the use of a qualitative research approach, a single focus, a persuasive account, the reflection of the researcher's own history, culture, personal experiences, politics, and ethical practices. The importance of these elements determines the validity of the research.

Ethical Considerations

To conduct an ethical qualitative research study, the researcher must adhere to the four values established by Guba (1981) that test the trustworthiness or rigor of the research. Including providing a description of the researcher's interpretation of the study with the participants and a collection of data over an extended period. This a study that is completely voluntary, participants can choose to be withdrawn from the study if they choose, and they can also choose to not answer a question if they feel triggered or uneasy. Additionally, the researcher must be aware of three issues when appraising a research study, including if the results are valid, what the results are, and will the results help locally. The interview protocol, interview transcripts, and the recorded interviews were be stored in a safe file within the researchers' personal computer, this file was kept hidden from the public, and all efforts were made to ensure that the participants' identities are hidden and confidential.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research as defined by Guba (1981) requires the researcher to identify the truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality as the four core criteria for assessing the rigor of the research. Krefting (1999) discusses the criteria used to measure qualitative research depending on its credibility, such as using peer examination, and prolonged and varied field experiences, among others. These include the transferability, integration of nominated sample and dense description, dependability which is applying a dense description of research methods, and peer examinations of the consistency of the research. Member checking was used to validate the participant's collaboration with the research study, and it was used to examine the credibility and efficacy of the final data for integrating the best resources for teachers to incorporate mindfulness practices in their classrooms. Member checking refers to the practice of checking back with participants after the interview to see if their original answers need clarification and/or adjustment, aligning with their views and the research (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Once the data has been agglomerated, methodological triangulation derived from the participants' answers to the interview questions, interpretation and analysis of the recurring patterns/themes in the transcripts, and any relevant observations noted during the interview was used to check for the validity and credibility of the research. These methods enhance the credibility and efficacy of the research findings. It also provides a deeper understanding of the context and nature of the phenomena, which contributes to the trustworthiness of the research. Finally, the researcher used journaling and bracketing while analyzing the data to check for confirmability and reflexivity of the researchers' biases and its influence on the collection and analysis of the data.

Potential Research Bias

Potential research biases include the researchers' opinions of mindfulness practices in a classroom setting and the researchers' personal attitude towards integrating mindfulness-based programs in the classroom (Dunning et al., 2022). The researcher must remain aware of personal biases that might threaten to obscure and contaminate the data. The research strategy included the amount of information and communication between the researcher and the participant, which means that the seven interview questions were asked without much interruption from the researcher to allow for the participants to share their personal anecdotes and perceptions. The researcher's main priority is to ask the interview questions carefully and eloquently and only expand on the question if the participant lacks words. The researcher kept a personal journal throughout the collection and analysis of the data. The purpose of this is to ensure that the researcher is careful not to impose any biases or speculate during the entirety of the interview and the data collection process, while simultaneously listening attentively and compassionately as participants formulate and articulate their responses. Journaling aided with connecting to respondents' words and experiences with mindfulness, understanding recurring patterns and colloquialism, developing and organizing recurring patterns/categories into themes, and interpreting the data.

Limitations

The current research on mindfulness in education is still emerging, past research is critical to understand how educators can apply these practices and promote a mindful classroom. Limitations to the study include a small sample population in which teachers' personal responses might not be an indication of issues that affect all classroom

interactions and mindfulness practices in the classroom. Participants' responses might be limited to a specific setting and region. Another potential limitation is that this population sample is not an accurate representation of all high school English teachers because it was done at a small school district with a low population of teachers that primarily work with students that meet at-risk criteria.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, the results from the qualitative based methods are presented and discussed based on data derived from the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) method. IPA was used to analyze respondents' answers to the interview questions. The interview transcripts were examined in accordance with Smith et al. (2009) IPA guidelines. Smith et al. (2009) discusses that the goal of IPA is to learn something about the respondent's psychological world. The meaning making of these constructs and beliefs may manifest itself from the participant's story, identity, and from colloquial language. According to Smith et al (2009) the first step of IPA is to try to understand the content and complexity of the words rather than the frequency of the events, this means that the interviewer should engage in an interpretive relationship with the transcript. The second step is to reread the transcript to become familiar with the account, commenting and summarizing any associations and connections with the text and identifying preliminary interpretations, by identifying descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual accounts. The third step is to identify emerging themes, the themes require a slightly higher level of abstraction and invoke more precise terminology. The fourth step involves analytical and theoretical ordering, the researcher finds connections between different themes that emerge from the transcripts/data.

The goal of the research project was to examine teachers' experiences with informal and formal mindfulness-based classroom practices. In understanding the teachers' perspective of mindfulness practices in schools, further interventions and training programs can emerge from these perspectives. The following research questions were used to achieve this goal:

RQ 1: What is the teacher's background knowledge of mindfulness and/or mindfulness programs?

RQ 2: What is the teacher's experience with using self-compassion and mindfulness techniques that might promote a positive relationship with students and class engagement?

RQ 3: What might teachers want to learn more about that will facilitate practicing and integrating mindfulness in the classroom?

Examining Initial Responses

During the interviewing process, the participants expressed a general positive attitude towards the practice of mindfulness in schools. Through a comprehensive and extensive analysis of the interview transcripts, the data revealed that participants agreed on the importance of self-awareness and maintaining an intimate relationship with nature to promote well-being and reduce symptoms of anxiety, stress, and burnout in the classroom. According to the literature, subjective self-awareness is a state of consciousness and attention where the focus lies on events external to the person, and objective self-awareness, focuses exclusively on the self (S. Duval & Wicklund, 1972). The importance of developing and maintaining deep self-awareness is crucial in understanding the human mind and overcoming difficult situations that might otherwise lead to mental health problems, which involves ruminating on negative thoughts, anxiety, depression, and burnout (Winterman, 2013). The literature indicates that attaining self-awareness involves reflection that leads to self-consciousness, mindfulness might promote and amplify self-awareness which helps with overcoming negative experiences, and it is route to teaching and learning. Through examining the data, all 10 interview

transcripts were analyzed to determine the central themes and commonalities. Data from the video recordings and observations were documented in the researchers' journal. Initially, before the video recordings, participants were asked to choose a city of their choice, city names were given as pseudonyms to represent each participant. Table 1 indicates participants' pseudonyms, demographics, and years of experience as an educator.

Table 1

Participants Pseudonyms, Gender, Age, and Years of Experience

Participant's Pseudonyms		
(City names)	Gender and Age	Years of Experience
Seattle	Female (29)	6 years working as an English teacher
Phoenix	Male (33)	7 years working as a Math Teacher
Asheville	Female (35)	2 years working as a Science Teacher
Montenegro	Female (36)	8 years working as an English Teacher
Denver	Male (58)	15 years working as a Math Teacher
Sydney	Male (48)	20 years working as a Math and Social Studies Teacher
Albuquerque	Male (58)	25 years working as a Social Studies Teacher
Los Angeles	Female (31)	5 years working as a Math teacher
Orlando	Female (51)	5 years working as an English Teacher 15 years working as an elementary teacher
Raleigh	Female (33)	7 years working as an English teacher

During the analysis of the data, the researcher was fully engaged and invested in understanding the meaning of the interviewees lived experiences with informal and formal mindfulness practices. In the first step, the researcher attempted to identify with the participants words, by remaining aware of words, phrases, and colloquial language that might signify a personal connection and relationship with the participants words and feelings. In the second step of the analysis, descriptive annotations were used to describe the content of the data. During this process the researcher seeks to determine key phrases, explanations, descriptions, and emotional responses (Smith et al., 2009). Next, linguistic annotations are noted to better understand the meaning behind participant's words. Thirdly, by using conceptual annotations, the researcher developed questions about meaning and symbolic concepts that are emerging or might emerge from the data.

Finally, the researcher identified three significant themes based on the participant's words and the researcher's interpretations of these words by means of observations and distinctive patterns. These themes emerged from analyzing exemplar quotes directly from the participants for the purposes of identifying the prevalent themes. All three research questions were addressed, and three themes emerged from participants' responses. See appendix F for the data-analysis codes.

Theme 1: The Overall Goal and Definition of Mindfulness is Subjective

Each participant stated a different and unique approach to the concept and practice of what mindfulness means to them. The practice of mindfulness was seen more as a state of being or the emergence of conscious awareness in order to change one's attitude of the present moment. For example, Seattle described it as

I mean to me. It's just being in the present acknowledging. Are your mind and your body, and where you're at, and so like identifying. Oh, my heart speeding really fast! What's going on? Why am I stressed out right? Am I stressed? Is it fear? What's going on? And then, once you check in on yourself, tell yourself that it will all kind of just be okay.

Phoenix described mindfulness as,

Having I guess like a personal ethos about the way you conduct yourself and like bring inner peace to yourself. And following like a certain I don't know about how you keep yourself, grounded. And getting through life with all the people you have to interact and the challenges that you have to face.

Asheville defines it as a more traditional definition of the practice, whereas, Phoenix shares a more intimate connection with the practice.

I would say mindfulness for me is to be focused in the moment and not worrying about future. Not thinking about the past, but being purely in the moment. Get my head where it is, or where it should be in time.

While a more traditional and secular definition of mindfulness was suggested by some participants, Denver, describes mindfulness as a state that promotes cognitive awareness that helps manipulate one's attitude and perspective of moment-by-moment experiences. Denver identifies with being aware and connected to everyday life experiences, then, evaluating one's feelings and adjusting to the moment or situation as needed.

Just being aware of. What's going on in your life and professionally, personally health wise. Just being generally aware of what's happening and being. Ready to make adjustments as needed.

Albuquerque, defines mindfulness as being aware of one's feelings and others feelings to avoid confrontation and potentially hurt or offend someone physically or emotionally.

Mindfulness, is being aware of just about anything. Everybody's feelings and thoughts around you. And how you can, use that to not offend anybody whether it just defensive, emotionally, physically or mentally, any of that. So mindfulness is just being. Being aware, I always consider it, I guess being aware of your Zen or being aware of your thoughts.

Raleigh defines mindfulness as, "when I hear the word mindfulness, it is being in tune with yourself. It means being aware of your surroundings, and it also involves being in a calm sort of state and doing different exercises and we need to make sure that you remain that way." Whereas Orlando and Los Angeles, describe mindfulness as a state of being connected internally and externally and blocking any outside noise to feel a sense of internal peace and tranquility.

I think it means slowing down and really processing like your thoughts and your patterns and your breathing, and really just sort of like releasing all the noise, the outside noise. So acknowledging the space that I'm entering if it's a public space. More internal, be mindful of how I'm feeling.

So maybe my head space also physically how I'm feeling. So it really just depends if I'm focusing on externally, again, what kind of space I'm entering or if I'm kind of doing something solo, what are my thoughts?

Theme 2: Increased Self-Awareness Promotes a Positive and Compassionate Classroom Environment

Various participants described the value and importance of remaining self-aware when interacting with students. For example, in Phoenix's case, by being self-aware he can maintain a positive outlook which helps to motivate students throughout the day.

Yeah, it's extremely important. I mean, I need to be self-aware of who I am.

And am I having a good day? Is this going to negatively affect people, or is this going to negatively affect the students? Ability to learn if I'm not in a good mood if I'm in a great mood, they're going to be more motivated. They're going to be more interested in what I'm teaching.

Montenegro emphasizes how vital it is for her to remain aware of personal issues before interacting with students:

Yes, and that is one of the things I think where employers say, like, okay, private life and everything you do with, you know, family and privately, you believe that in front of the door. Once, when you enter the building, bring the smile and positive energy and stuff like that, you know, like we, we don't want to pass that kind of negative energy, and I believe in that on your students. So it is very important to be aware of who you are at every single moment in, you know the environment, I know it is hard sometimes we cannot neglect and leave alone. Our, you know, personal issues and things. But we need to try, like our best educators, especially, we have. We have an important role in the lives of these kids. And it's easily that adds and attitude is easily transmitted to them. And they see it, and they reflect it. So, being aware that in what mood you are, and if you don't feel

well, good, then just, you know, go ahead and say it, and just like any other human like at today, you know, I'm not all there, I need a little bit of time today. Sydney identifies more subtle ways to model self-compassion and empathy in the classroom. For example, by showing acts of kindness, empathy, and self-compassion in the classroom, the teacher empowers students to build on those same empathetic and compassionate skills.

Absolutely. I think it's critical for kids to, be aware of what they're thinking. They need to develop certain ideas about compassion and empathy for their fellow human beings. And I think by reflecting on any anything. By being able to focus on their mind or what they're thinking, it gives them a better idea of how, how to control certain thoughts. And, I think it's, I think it's great. I think it's important. Denver, discusses the mechanisms involved with self-awareness as a tool to enhance the effectiveness of lesson planning and instructional time.

From all aspects of teaching, you know, life in general. When you're. Even coming down to lesson planning, you have to be aware of, the time involved in a lesson, your thought processes, the background of your students and how to incorporate it in the lesson. I mean, there's no end to the aspects of self-awareness.

Theme 3: The Need for Experienced Personnel and the Integration of Mindfulness Programs in the Curriculum

Participants expressed the importance of integrating experienced and trained personnel in the development and implementation of mindfulness-based trainings. Their concern for appropriate trained personnel aligns with Montero-Marin, et al. (2023) perspective that the goal of school-based mindfulness trainings should be well-designed

and implemented by trained personnel. Direct responses from the participants depict the need for well-trained and resourceful personnel when conducting on-site or online trainings. Montenegro stated that,

One of them was about having Yoga class. One was like about, you know, just you know, reflecting on life and important things like training.” That was my first time. It was a little bit hectic and I didn't have time to go through materials in advance. We've had a brief training, and then here is your book, and this is what you're supposed to do. So I can tell you that my students did not like it.

Montenegro's response reflects the need for structure and adequate time to review the instructional materials before delivering information during mindfulness trainings, otherwise the students will not receive the maximum benefits from the trainings.

Another significant element of mindfulness trainings involves the trainers' connection and relationship with the teachers', this promotes a sense of trust and intimacy that influences the teacher's perspective of mindfulness practices. Phoenix described the importance of building a mindfulness program that resonates and connects with the teachers and students.

We have a resilient health, there's art therapy. We do have like an art therapy program that we've used in the past and, that's definitely a proven type of program where the students are able to, I don't know, draw their feelings. It never worked for me I'm not an art therapy guy I don't. I can't even draw a straight line. So I don't draw. But I know that a lot of people do. And it's a really good way to release stress, but it's definitely effective. There's some music. Therapy that we

had come around. before COVID we had a music therapy program where musician person came in and the students all gathered in and they wrote a song together. They did this like whole thing and you know, it's a little positive, for some of them it's a little silly, but it's, you know, it's a way to get a little silly, it's also a way to get students talking and thinking about those issues.

Seattle expressed the need to find alternative ways to incorporate mindfulness-based programs in the curriculum.

Yeah, I guess finding ways to implement it as an English teacher, I guess through literature, where it's not me telling them about mindfulness right? But maybe they're learning it through someone else's experience, through literature, where it's not as aggressively brought to them like this is mindfulness. You're going to be mindful of this. But yeah, the behind more subtle opportunities to create more settled opportunities within curriculum that allows students to acknowledge and learn those coping skills without it being so aggressive.

Summary

Overall, these findings revealed a deeper level of insight and perspective from various educators for the need of research based and cost-effective mindfulness interventions that promote self-awareness and positive relationships in the classroom. Most educators rated their experience with mindfulness and social emotional learning (SEL) programs positively, emphasizing the need for a focus on self-compassion and nonviolent communication trainings integrated in these programs. However, participants expressed their concern for the need of a mindfulness-based curriculum that incorporates

the elements of structure and time. For example, teachers will be more willing to implement mindfulness strategies and practices in their classroom if it were easily integrated in their instructional time, efficient in the classroom, and with a focus on more simple, practical ways for teachers to teach mindfulness in their classroom; that includes appropriate resources, and time efficient methods that do not negatively affect teachers personal time (time outside the classroom).

Chapter 5: Discussion

The results of this study suggest the benefits of incorporating informal and formal mindfulness practices in the curriculum. The study addressed the need for mindfulness programs to alleviate some of the challenges that educators encounter in the workplace. These challenges are amplified by the constant demands of the teaching profession, including but not limited to classroom management, promoting an inclusive and pedagogical relevant classroom environment, managing social emotional learning outcomes, disciplining students with disruptive behavior, overseeing changes in student's academics, and adapting to changing policies and administrative protocols that invoke stress and confusion among teachers (Kamal et al., 2021; Agyapong et al., 2022; Mendez et al., 2020). The outcome of this study provides insight directly from teachers that might benefit the emergence and development of new mindfulness-based programs. The consensus is for a mindfulness program that has qualities of formal and informal mindfulness practices; for teachers to maximize their classroom interactions, these programs must be time efficient, and they must be intertwined with the curriculum.

Summary of the Study

The study examined teachers' experiences with informal and formal mindfulness-based practices. The results of the study revealed that greater awareness and positive engagement in the classroom might be attributed to formal mindfulness practices, such as, yoga and other meditative techniques. The data also suggests that the amount of time and years of experience practicing formal mindfulness might contribute to increased presence and awareness in the classroom, whereas informal mindfulness, such as,

walking and eating consciously, might contribute to higher levels of trait mindfulness, however, this varies depending on several individual factors (e.g. emotional awareness, metacognitive awareness, and social awareness). The results of the study revealed three themes. Theme one was that the overall goal and definition of mindfulness is subjective, theme two was that increased self-awareness promotes a positive and compassionate classroom environment, and theme three highlights the need for experienced personnel and the integration of mindfulness programs in the curriculum. The final theme was surprising, because in contrast to popular belief, teachers want formal mindfulness training from a trained mindfulness expert before implementing mindfulness techniques in their classroom. A few teachers suggested that these trainings should be interactive and structured. The training could be part of their yearly professional development requirement, this will ensure that it does not interfere with instructional or personal time. The study examined teachers' experiences with informal and formal mindfulness practice. The research questions addressed teachers' personal definition of mindfulness, their experience with mindfulness to promote compassion and engagement in the classroom, and teachers' opinions of current mindfulness intervention programs, with the purpose of developing alternative mindfulness-based school programs (MBSP) that meet teachers' expectations and needs. To improve future mindfulness programs, qualitative data in the form of personal interviews is essential to the development, structure, and integration of a mindfulness program in the curriculum. Moreover, the study revealed that the application of mindfulness-based practices in specific core subject areas is critical for teaching mindfulness in the classroom. The researcher concluded that for teachers to incorporate mindfulness practices in the curriculum, they need to understand and have a

personal relationship with the practice. Furthermore, to facilitate the application of mindfulness in the specific subject area and the school's curriculum, it is crucial for teachers to be experts in their subject area. Table 2 provides a summary of the research questions and themes.

Table 2

Summary of the Research Questions and Themes

Research Questions	Themes
RQ1: What is the teacher's background knowledge of mindfulness and/or mindfulness programs?	Theme 1: The Overall Goal and definition of Mindfulness is Subjective
RQ 2: What is the teacher's experience with using self-compassion and mindfulness techniques that might promote a positive relationship with students and class engagement?	Theme 2: Increased Self-Awareness Promotes a Positive and Compassionate Classroom Environment
RQ 3: What might teachers want to learn more about that will facilitate practicing and integrating mindfulness in the classroom?	Theme 3: The Need for Experienced Personnel and the Integration of Mindfulness Programs in the Curriculum

Limitations of the Study

This study had important limitations to consider. The small population sample and the setting are not true indicators of other teachers' experiences with mindfulness and compassion. The teachers in this study described their experience and interaction with mindfulness uniquely. They were aware of the meaning and purpose of mindfulness; however, their experiences and interpretation of informal and formal mindfulness were dependent on biological or trait mindfulness, socio cultural, and environmental factors that varies among the individual. These factors are subjective and might change

depending on the aforementioned elements. Moreover, teachers' conscious and emotional state of being might also contribute to changes in their mindfulness level. The population sample acquired from this study were a group of 10 teachers working with at-risk adolescents. These schools provide an alternative method of obtaining a high school diploma; because teacher's that work with at-risk students might be more susceptible to burnout and increased stress, they might need alternative mindfulness-based school trainings that account for dealing with at-risk students. Thereby, this population sample might not reflect the overarching extensiveness that formal and informal mindfulness and compassionate trainings have on teacher's overall well-being.

Implications for Future Research

The general student population at the school district where this study was conducted is considered at-risk. The research indicates that at-risk students are more vulnerable to being exposed to social inequalities (Piera Pi-Sunyer et al., 2022). Social inequalities consist of socio-economic factors (housing, food-security, community services) that are absent or lacking and are significant determinants of mental and physical health (Marmot & Allen, 2020). The research shows that students from more disadvantaged homes are at increased risk of poor mental health (Mansfield et al., 2021) As social disparities among students and teachers continue to grow, there needs to be a focus on developing more diverse programs that account for more vulnerable student populations. Likewise, school-based mindfulness interventions should aim to reduce and condemn social inequalities that exacerbate anxiety, stress, and depression and negatively impact attendance and engagement at schools and during interventions. For schools to implement appropriate school-based mental health interventions that derail from social

stigmas and adopt a more diverse school-based mindfulness program, there needs to be increased awareness of social inequalities and a shift on prioritizing the needs of students that have little to no access to these programs.

Conclusion

This study revealed important factors based on teachers' experience with the practice that mindfulness experts need to account for when developing and implementing a school-based mindfulness program. The question becomes is there enough supporting evidence to suggest that mindfulness works for most of the teachers and students. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to support that mindfulness works for everyone. There are important limiting factors that inhibit mindfulness from being more effective and far reaching in education than it currently is, these include environmental, socio-cultural issues, personal, among others. However, empirical research suggest that mindfulness training holds promise for improving attentional and self-regulation capacity in youth, which has implications for a non-disruptive classroom environment. The central message moving forward is the extent that teachers pledge to integrating mindfulness in their daily lives and their ability to make an impact not just for their students but also the community. Although there is a need for further research in the field of mindfulness as a secular practice and its effects on the different culturally and socioeconomically student and teacher population, there is sufficient consensus in the research to imply that incorporating mindfulness in the curriculum ensures that teachers and students have a better outcome of being present and conscious in the classroom, while simultaneous finding a purpose to teaching and learning.

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Appendix A
Table of Specification

Interview Questions	RQ 1: What is the teacher's background knowledge of mindfulness and/or mindfulness programs?	RQ 2: What is the teacher's experience with using self-compassion and mindfulness techniques that might promote a positive relationship with students and class engagement?	RQ 3: What might teachers want to learn more about that will facilitate practicing and integrating mindfulness in the classroom?
INTERVIEW: IQ1. Have you had prior personal experience with mindfulness? If so, what? -is it informal (walking, eating) or formal (meditation) mindfulness practices?	X		
IQ2 Do you think mindful awareness is useful in the classroom? (a general self-awareness in the classroom)		X	
IQ3 What is your knowledge of self-compassion or compassion training? And if so, what was your experience with it?	X		
IQ4 Do you have experience attending a mindfulness-based program?	X		
IQ5 Have you ever developed/ implemented a school-based mindfulness program?	X		
IQ6 Do you think that mindfulness-based programs are efficacious and cost-effective ways of improving the teacher-student relationship, and learning outcomes?	X		
IQ7 Do you notice that your mood affects communication and engagement with students? If so, how?		X	
IQ8 Do you notice when your students are displaying any positive or negative behavior and how that affects your mood in the moment? And if you do, how do you think it impacts the climate of the classroom?		X	
IQ9 How aware are you of your own body language and personal biases during instructional time and teacher-led discussions?		X	
IQ10 What might you want to learn more about that will facilitate practicing and integrating mindfulness in the classroom?			X

Appendix B
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: Zoom

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' knowledge and attitude toward mindfulness practices for promoting qualities of self-compassion and empathy that enhance positive relationships and student engagement in the classroom.

Consent to interview: _____ Consent to record interview: _____

Educational Background/Degrees: _____

Certifications _____

Years of experience as a teacher: _____

Years working for the county and/or state: _____

Subject of Teaching: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Opening statement to encourage them to think about their experiences with mindfulness practices: Encourage participants to provide their own definition of what mindfulness is and what it means to them.

Interview Questions:

1. Have you had prior personal experience with mindfulness?
 - a) If so, what? -is it informal (walking, eating) or formal (meditation) mindfulness practices?
2. Do you think mindful self-awareness is useful in the classroom?
3. What is your knowledge of self-compassion or compassion training?
 - a) If so, what was your experience with it?
4. Do you think that mindfulness-based programs are efficacious and cost-effective ways of improving the teacher-student relationship, and learning outcomes?
5. Do you have experience attending a mindfulness school-program?
6. Have you ever developed/ implemented a school-based mindfulness program?
7. Do you notice that your mood affects communication and engagement with students?
 - a) If so, how?

8. Do you notice when your students are displaying any positive or negative behavior and how that affects your mood in the moment? And if you do, how do you think it impacts the climate of the classroom?

9. How aware are you of your own body language and personal biases during instructional time and teacher-led discussions?

10. What might you want to learn more about that will facilitate practicing and integrating mindfulness in the classroom?

Appendix C

Letter to Superintendent

Dear Mr. McElhinney,

I am currently in the process of completing a dissertation that focuses on the benefits of mindfulness in the classroom. There is empirical evidence that suggests that mindfulness practices can alleviate and improve symptoms of stress, burnout, and anxiety among teachers and students. My study focuses on understanding teachers' knowledge and experience with formal and informal mindfulness practices, and mindfulness-based-school programs. I would like your permission to recruit 10 educators from any of the campuses. This is a research study, designed to test and create new ideas that will contribute to the development of future Social Emotional Learning programs that are integrated in the curriculum. The purpose of this research study is to examine teachers' awareness and experiences with informal and formal mindfulness practices for promoting qualities of self-compassion and empathy that enhance positive relationships and engagement in the classroom. This study seeks to contribute to the current mindfulness literature.

The responses from the participants will be used to develop and enhance future mindfulness-based school programs. The prospect participants do not need to have a regular formal or informal mindfulness practice, they just need to express an interest or have some familiarity with the term mindfulness. Please send the attached letter of consent to the teachers, this is solely based on a voluntary basis.

Thank you for your attention and participation in this matter,

Hiram Ortega- PI

Appendix D

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

General Informed Consent Form
NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled
Examining Teachers' Experiences of Mindfulness Practices to Promote Positive Communication and Relationships in the classroom.

Who is doing this research study?

College: Fischler College of Education

Principal Investigator: Hiram Ortega; B.A., M.S.

Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: James Miller

Co-Investigator(s): N/A

Site Information: Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

Funding: Unfunded

What is this study about?

This is a research study, designed to examine and develop ideas that other people can use. The purpose of this research study is to examine teachers' experiences with informal and formal mindfulness practices for promoting qualities of self-compassion and empathy that enhance positive relationships and student engagement in the classroom. This study seeks to contribute to the current mindfulness literature. The responses from the participants will be used to develop and enhance future mindfulness-based school programs.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this research study because you are a teacher that is in direct contact with high school students.

This study will include 10 people.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

While you are taking part in this research study, there will be a total of one 15-20 minutes zoom session, in which you will answer a total of 10 interview questions. There will not be a need for a follow-up.

You may have to come back to the site every N/A

Research Study Procedures - as a participant, this is what you will be doing: During the video recording interview, you will discuss your experiences with informal and formal mindfulness practices, and offer a personal definition or

interpretation of mindfulness and mindfulness-based school programs. You will be video/audio recorded via zoom, it will consist of interpreting and reflecting on the practice of mindfulness, and your informal/formal experiences with the practice. During the interview, there will be a total of 10 interview questions. Each interview should last for approximately 15-20 minutes. There will not be a need for a follow-up.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life. The interview questions do not pose any risks to the participant.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You have the right to leave this research study at any time or refuse to be in it. If you decide to leave or you do not want to be in the study anymore, you will not get any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get. If you choose to stop being in the study before it is over, any information about you that was collected **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the end of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigators. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form, if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits from being in this research study. We hope the information learned from this study will provide valuable information in the design and implementation of mindfulness-based school programs for teachers and students.

Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?

You will not be given any payments or compensation for being in this research study.

Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for being in this research study. Ask the researchers if you have any questions about what it will cost you to take part in this research study (for example bills, fees, or other costs related to the research).

How will you keep my information private?

Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. The interview will be video recorded for the purpose of collecting data from the interview questions and then analyzing the transcribed document. Recordings will be destroyed after all the transcribed data has been analyzed. This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution. If we publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, we will not identify you. All confidential data will be kept securely in a safe file within the researchers' personal computer, this file will be kept hidden from the public, and all efforts will be made to ensure that the participants' identities are hidden and confidential. All data will be kept until all the data has been analyzed from the end of the study and destroyed after that time by disposal of all data permanently.

Will there be any Audio or Video Recording?

This research study involves video recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution. The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to or viewing the recording.

Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?

If you have questions now, feel free to ask us. If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

Primary contact:
Hiram Ortega; B.A., M.S.

Research Participants Rights

For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

Appendix E
Site Approval Letter



SITE APPROVAL LETTER

Nova Southeastern University
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314-7796

Subject: Site Approval Letter

To whom it may concern:

This letter acknowledges that I have received and reviewed a request by Hiram Ortega to conduct a research project entitled *“Examining Teachers’ Experiences with Mindfulness Practices to Promote Positive Relationships and Student Engagement in the classroom.”* at IntelliSchool and I approve of this research to be conducted at our facility.

When the researcher receives approval for his/her research project from the Nova Southeastern University’s Institutional Review Board/NSU IRB, I agree to provide access for the approved research project. If we have any concerns or need additional information, we will contact the Nova Southeastern University’s IRB at (954) 262-5369 or irb@nova.edu.

Sincerely,

Mick McElhinney
Superintendent
602-564-7384
mmcelhinney@intellischool.org

Appendix F
Data Analysis Codes

Data-Analysis Codes

Category	No. participants	No. Transcribed excerpts included
Anxious	8	3
Journaling as a means of meditation	3	4
A work in progress	7	4
Emotional control	6	5
self-awareness of anxiety nervousness	3	5
Self- awareness in the classroom	4	7
Feels empathy towards students	10	5
Compassionate training in schools (self-compassion)	6	5
Lack compassion	7	6
Teachers	4	7
Mindfulness programs	6	8
Relationships	5	6
Mindful activities	5	4
Meditation	7	6
Yoga	4	2
Art therapy	1	2
Canvas programs for students	1	1
Communication w/ students	5	3
Disappointment	2	2
Feeling annoyed	3	3
Implementing and developing mindfulness-based strategies for all subjects	6	4
Finding ways to implement it as an English teacher	3	4
Literature	3	1
Time consuming	3	2
Instructional time	5	5
Journaling	2	1
Meditation	8	7
Music therapy programs	1	2
Mindfulness programs that adapt to the needs of teachers	10	6
Mindful activities during instructional time	8	5
Mood altering relationship with students	3	3
Subtle opportunities within curriculum	4	3
Problems communicating with the students	8	7
Productivity during study hall	1	1

Reflecting on life and important things	10	3
Reading initiatives for students	2	2
Teacher's mood affects the students	10	8
Upset	5	2
Challenges that you have to face	10	7
Everybody's feelings and thoughts around you	4	2
Fear	3	3
Focused in the moment and not worrying about future	4	3
Finding inner peace	3	4
Make adjustments as needed	1	2
Mind and your body	5	4
Personal ethos about the way you conduct yourself	2	1
Handling Stress	9	6
Tell yourself that it will all kind of just be okay	2	1
The importance of acknowledging	2	2