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The Effects of a Peer-Supported Mindfulness Practice on Teacher Stress Reduction

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this action research project was to measure the effects of daily mindfulness practice with peer-support on teacher stress reduction. Nine female Montessori teachers participated in study and taught at private Montessori schools in suburban or rural settings. The participating teachers practiced a short mindfulness activity daily such as the body scan, sitting meditation, yoga, or mandala coloring and wrote reflections in their daily journal for four weeks. The teachers also participated in a weekly peer support group for community building and wrote reflections in their weekly journal. The teachers participated in a pre- and post- intervention stress questionnaire and attitude scale. A majority of the teachers in this study showed a decrease in teacher stress and an increase in positive attitudes towards colleague support and school climate. The majority of the teachers also shared mindfulness with their students, and the overall results were positive. Further studies should consider whether mindfulness or community building was the more effective intervention in reducing teacher stress.

*Keywords:* teacher stress, mindfulness, peer-support, community building, school climate, Montessori, teacher education

### **Introduction**

Before the school day begins, a teacher enters the classroom thinking about all of her duties and upcoming meetings with an administrator and a parent. She rushes to make sure that she prepared the environment and lessons and if she is missing anything. This precious time in the morning quickly passes as teachers from other classrooms come into the room to interrupt with questions and emergencies as the 28 children simultaneously trickle into the room. The teacher already observes arguments and neediness among the children. She looks for her co-teacher for support but finds her working with a child for an extended period. The teacher senses a lack of communication and teamwork and makes a note to meet with her co-teacher after school. These events set a stressful tone for the rest of the day; disagreements among the children continue, uncertain communication among the teachers continue, and the teacher finds that she was unable to present most of her lessons. After the children leave for the day, the teacher has to run to a quick meeting with her administrator, leaving little time to prepare for her next meeting with a parent. She also has to prepare for tomorrow as well as talk to her co-teacher. When she returns from her administrator meeting, she realizes that she will need to stay late this week to prepare next month's curriculum. The feeling of overwhelm and stress settles in. The teacher, who once felt joy, pride, and excitement about teaching now feels frustrated, worried, and vulnerable. Does this story sound familiar?

This story paints a picture of a teacher's typical stress-filled day. Stress may not be the first thing a teacher thinks about when she decides to get into the teaching profession. Many teachers express that they have fulfilled their calling by deciding to become a teacher. It is their life's work or vocation. To educate and work with children is an exciting, rewarding and fulfilling profession. Though, teaching has become an increasingly stressful job. Stress and

burnout can occur to any teacher of children of all ages in any school setting. Part of being a teacher is to wear many hats, to work with a large number of needy children, as well as to deal with the demanding needs of parents and administrators. As the years go by, teachers face more demands as children with learning differences increase, and the demands of administrators or governing bodies increase. Teachers can often feel a lack of community or teamwork with other teachers in their building adding to the stress.

Teachers can manifest stress in different ways. For example, they may become anxious, experience poor sleep, feel helpless, and they can become irritated or impatient with their students (Richards, 2012, p. 304). These stress manifestations can make it difficult for teachers to function optimally in their classrooms and it can have a negative effect on the children and school community. Eventually, stress can lead to burnout and teacher turnover. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to find a way to cope with stress on a daily basis. As a Montessori teacher of nine years and a Montessori teacher educator for two years, I have experienced stress first-hand in the classroom.

I have also listened to the stories of stress from other teachers. As a way to cope with stress, teachers can help to regulate their emotions and reduce stress by practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness has been found to reduce stress, regulate emotions, as well as relieve pain, anxiety, and depression (Flook et al., 2013, p. 2). It can also bring an overall sense of calm and well-being. Mindfulness is awareness of your body, breath, thoughts, and surroundings but it is more than just sitting for twenty minutes a day and focusing on your breath. It is also finding mindful moments throughout the day in everyday life. (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 5). The only moment that exists is now, and knowing this can set a positive tone for the day, and it can help us become

more aware and less emotionally reactive. After all, the many different stressors teachers experience are beyond the teachers' control.

In addition to research on teacher stress and mindfulness intervention, there is literature on community building to cope with teacher stress. Reflecting on my experiences, discussions, and observations helped me to realize that community building could be the missing piece to the puzzle of teacher stress. As a teacher, I have experienced a lack of a strong community in school environments, which can foster feelings of isolation and disconnectedness and further add to teacher stress. As interdependent beings, a strong school community with teacher support and teamwork is key (Wolgast & Fischer, 2017, p. 100). In this study, I implemented a mindfulness intervention for teacher stress reduction and extended this further by incorporating peer-support groups. The teachers practiced mindfulness daily and also met once a week with another teacher participating in the study over a four-week period.

Nine Montessori teachers participated in this peer-supported mindfulness study. All nine teachers are women and work at private Montessori schools in suburban or rural settings. The teachers range in age from 30 to 49 and have between six to twenty-five years of teaching experience. I grouped the teachers by school or teacher education program for peer-support meetings. Of the nine participants in the research, five are in the early childhood classroom, three are in the lower elementary classroom, and one is a toddler teacher.

There is research on mindfulness for teacher stress reduction as well as research on community building for stress reduction. However, there is no research on implementing mindfulness and community building for stress reduction together. Furthermore, while there is research on stress reduction for teachers in traditional schools, there is no research on stress reduction for teachers in Montessori schools. The purpose of this study is to see what effect a

four-week peer-supported mindfulness practice will have on reducing teacher stress in Montessori Early Childhood, Toddler, and Elementary classrooms.

### **Review of Literature**

Researchers have found evidence that the teaching profession has become increasingly stressful over recent years. The literature points out that there are several different reasons why teachers are stressed out. Teachers state that they are overworked, emotionally exhausted, drained and frazzled at the end of the day, week, month, and year. Teachers find that they often bring work home and often find it hard to detach from the children and the job emotionally. Also, teachers find that they usually have little time to collaborate with colleagues, which adds to stress. Additionally, there are several manifestations of teacher stress, and there are several different ways in which teachers cope with stress. Many researchers have used Mindfulness practices as a strategy to cope with teacher stress. Other researchers have found that community-building meetings have been a helpful strategy in coping with teacher stress.

It is imperative to address the problem of teacher stress. It can be difficult or impossible for stressed teachers to function at the highest level in the classroom, which can lead to inattentiveness and negativity. This can ultimately affect the well-being of the children, and it can also affect the behavior of the children and the overall tone of the classroom, causing more stress. Additionally, teacher stress leads to teacher burnout and attrition. Evidence has shown that many teachers have left the profession due to stress and burnout.

### **Causes of Teacher Stress**

According to the literature, there are several different factors and reasons why teachers are stressed. After organizing the different reasons for teacher stress, there are three main

categories all of the different stressors can fall under; a heavy workload, emotional demands, and social school climate.

Under the category of heavy workload, it has been identified by the literature that teacher stress is caused by increased pressures and demands from administration and parents (Aydin & Kaya, 2016; Richards, 2012; Sass et al., 2011). According to a research study on teacher stress by Aydin & Kaya, qualitative and quantitative data showed that the major contributing factor for teacher stress is administrative, which places high demands and responsibilities on the teachers. (p. 193, 2016). Also, the questionnaire study conducted by Richards showed that the top stressors teachers experience include feeling overcommitted with too many duties and responsibilities, as well as teaching too many needy students with not enough support (p. 302, 2012). More literature states that according to studies, teachers have an increased number of students with behavioral issues and special needs (Flook et al., 2013; Hartwick & Kang, 2013; Roeser et al., 2013).

Under the second category, emotional demands, some literature states that teachers are becoming emotionally exhausted (Chang, 2009; Roeser et al., 2013). According to Chang (2009), the teaching profession is heavily rooted in emotion and that teachers deal with a host of emotions, such as “passion, excitement, joy, pride, and hope. However, teaching also offers opportunities to feel worried, frustrated, guilty, angry, powerless, fearful, vulnerable, and disappointed” (p. 203). Roeser (2013) states, “teachers’ job stress is due primarily to the inherently social-emotional demands of working with up to 30 or more children or adolescents at once” (p. 788).

Under the third category, social school climate, teachers can also experience stress because of a lack of positive school climate or positive social connections with colleagues



(Chang, 2009; Collie et al., 2012; Richards, 2012; Roeser et al., 2013; Sass et al., 2011; Wolgast & Fischer, 2017). According to Collie et al. (2012), school climate refers to the quality of relationships between colleagues in school environments, and “research has shown that teachers’ perceptions of school climate are a key predictor of teachers’ sense of stress, teaching efficacy, and job satisfaction” (p. 1189). Also, Wolgast & Fischer (2017) state that teacher stress levels increase when there is a lack of teamwork (p. 99). Some literature suggests that teachers experience negativity in their community or have difficulty with colleagues such as widespread gossiping and rivalry, which causes teacher stress (Chang, 2009; Richards, 2012).

### **Mindfulness for Teacher Stress Reduction**

Considering the different causes of teacher stress, we find that many aspects of the job of teaching will not change. Thus, teacher emotional response to the job needs to change. Rather than focusing on trying to change things that teachers are unable to control, such as administrative policies and workload demands, colleague dispositions or the increasing special needs of the children, the more efficient way to fight teacher stress is regulation of emotions.

Based on several studies, a successful way to reduce teacher stress is the intervention of a mindfulness practice to regulate emotions (Flook et al., 2013; Hartigan, 2017; Kyte, 2016; Roeser et al., 2013). Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005), the author of “Wherever You Go, There You Are” describes his definition of mindfulness as paying attention and being aware in the present moment, on purpose without judgment and with an open heart. Kabat-Zinn uses the word “heartfulness” to describe mindfulness further (p. 7). Mindfulness is an internal practice, focusing on breath, awareness, self-reflection, and self-compassion.

Mindfulness practice is also a spiritual practice. Smith (2013) states, “I have found that spiritual practice is a huge help in stress management. When we have taken care of ourselves and

feel calm and rested, we are more likely to be patient, to think creatively, and to respond with the kindness in our classrooms” (p. 48). Further, Montessori writes, “This means we need something more than physical hygiene. Just as the latter wards off injuries to his body, so we need mental hygiene to protect his mind and soul from harm” (as cited in Smith, 2013, p. 48).

Flook et al. (2013) studied the impact of a mindfulness program on reduction of teacher stress. The study incorporated a modified version of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, which is widely known to reduce stress. MBSR training is an eight-week daily mindfulness course that helps to bring awareness to the breath, body sensations, thoughts, and emotions.

In Flook et al.’s study, teachers participated in a combination of mantra (repeated word or phrase), breath work, sitting meditation and some yoga. The quantitative results of this study show that the mindfulness intervention reduced teacher psychological symptoms of burnout and stress (2013). Similarly, Kyte’s (2016) study also implemented mindfulness to regulate emotions and to fight teacher stress. Kyte’s intervention focused more on Yoga, breath work, and meditation. Kyte (2016) explains that Yoga is a physical mindfulness practice and its purpose is to gain awareness of the body to maintain happiness and well-being (p. 1146). Kyte’s study included only qualitative data in the form of teacher narratives. The results of Kyte’s study show that the mindfulness intervention helped the teachers to feel a stronger sense of serenity in their school environments (2016).

Like Flook et al. (2016), Roeser et al., (2013) conducted a long-term study implementing a modified mindfulness training (MT) based on MBSR intervention for teachers for self-regulation and self-compassion while reducing teacher stress. The study was successful and found that the study was feasible and accepted by the participants (p. 799). According to Roeser

et al., (2013) the quantitative data revealed that the MT helped to significantly reduce teacher stress levels after three-months of the intervention. Another study implemented by Hartigan (2017) also incorporated a modified version of MBSR for an Early Childhood/Special Education Graduate program. The pre-service teachers practiced breathing and meditation to refocus their emotions and to help with self-regulation. The study found that mindfulness practice helps teachers with emotional regulation. An added benefit is that mindfulness practice ultimately helps teachers to “model presence, understanding and acceptance” for the children (Hartigan, 2017, p. 156). Hartigan’s study found that teachers experienced stress relief and a sense of calmness in both their personal and professional lives. Additionally, a supervisor praised one teacher from the study regarding her calm and respectful demeanor while handling a student’s tantrum (2017).

Scientific research has shown several benefits from a mindfulness-based practice, such as “left-sided anterior activation of the brain, a pattern that is associated with positive affect and well-being” (Flook et al., 2013, p. 2). Further, “mindfulness may make individuals less reactive to negative experience and more likely to notice positive experience, resulting in a cascade of psychological and physiological benefits” (Flook et al., 2013, p. 3). Also, Kyte (2016) states that neurobiology research on mindfulness shows the benefits for teachers and students with an “overall sense of well-being, enhanced teacher efficacy and classroom management, and expanded relationship building” (p. 1147). Further, mindfulness practice helps enable a sense of calm and a focused mind, as well as self-regulation, awareness and reduced emotional stress (Kyte, 2016, p. 1147).

### **Community Building for Teacher Stress Reduction**

While mindfulness practices are helpful strategies for internal coping mechanisms for teacher stress, external coping strategies have also been used to manage teacher stress. Wolgast & Fischer (2017) implemented a study on colleague support and goal-oriented cooperation and its effect on teacher stress. This study had its roots in social interdependence theory (SIT). Johnson and Johnson define SIT as “the idea that individual behavior is associated with social processes involving interdependencies among individuals” (as cited in Wolgast & Fischer, 2017, p.100). In other words, teachers are affected by school climate and relationships with colleagues. Wolgast & Fischer’s (2017) methodology was to group teachers to work together on cooperative studies, such as preparing lessons. The results showed that teachers demonstrated lower levels of perceived stress than those that did not cooperatively participate, which is in line with SIT theory.

These results are very much in line with findings from Collie et al., (2012) who completed research on school climate and social-emotional learning and their effect on teacher stress, job satisfaction, and teaching efficacy. Though not an intervention but rather an interview-based study, the researchers found similar results that link social aspects of the profession to an effect on stress levels and, ultimately, teacher efficacy. The findings emphasize “that teachers are not isolated individuals separate from their environments and also that their perceptions of the environments are highly important” (Collie et al., 2012, p. 1196). This provides additional credence to the social interdependence theory.

Lastly, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) performed research on the relationship between job satisfaction and stress levels to individual coping strategies. This is also interview-based research that spans age ranges from young teachers to more senior teachers and investigates how coping

strategies change depending on the age of the teacher. The results showed that younger teachers tended to simply work harder, where middle-aged and senior teachers also used sick time/leave to decompress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). One interesting point in this study that consistently came up in the teacher's responses is the heavy burden and exhaustion placed on the individual. Teachers responses included phrases such as "everything stands or falls on me," "it lies heavily on my conscience," and "I feel that I am worn out" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 187-188). Based on the teacher's responses, it appears that a sense of community in the teaching profession is needed to alleviate stress. Also, the positive results of previous research seem to confirm the reliability of a community or peer-supported intervention.

### **Conclusion**

Based on my findings teacher stress is a serious problem as stated in the literature, but the interventions go in different directions. Studies show that there are external and internal strategies to solve teacher stress. This study will include a blended intervention of mindfulness strategies (internal) as well as teacher community building and social support (external) such as having weekly peer-support meetings as well as accountability partnering.

This research study includes a combination of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction techniques (meditation, yoga, breathing, mandala coloring) along with peer support meetings for teachers to cope with work-related stress. The theoretical basis for this research study includes mindfulness strategies because of Emotional Regulation Theory (Roeser et al., 2013) as well as peer-support groups because of Social Interdependence Theory (Wolgast & Fischer, 2017).

Also based on the literature, there are suggestions for further study. Hartwick & Kang (2013) say that teacher education and professional development should include stress management strategies and should include spiritual coping; there should be a requirement for a

stress management plan and spiritual retreats. Chang (2009) says teachers should undergo similar stress management training found in social work education to help reduce stress.

### **Description of Research Process**

This study began by recruiting teachers from Montessori Schools and a Montessori teacher training center, where I have worked as a teacher trainer and consultant. Nine teachers agreed to participate in this study and were given active teacher consent forms (see Appendix A). The active consent form outlined the peer-supported mindfulness intervention and what they should expect to do as a participant. Participating teachers were asked to practice a short mindfulness activity daily and reflect on this in a daily journal for four weeks. The teachers were also asked to meet weekly with other participating teachers in their school or program and reflect on this in a weekly journal for four weeks. After the teachers signed the active consent forms, the teachers were given a resource document (see Appendix B) to provide more information about mindfulness and the different mindfulness practice options with links to audio and video.

The mindfulness practice options described in the resource document included the body scan, sitting meditation, yoga, and mandala coloring. This resource document also contained a link to the Palouse Mindfulness website, a free eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction course encompassing a wide variety of resources and information. I also made myself available to provide additional mindfulness tools and help to clarify any information noted in the resource document. All teacher data and information was kept confidential, and each teacher was assigned a participant identification number to include on all of the data forms. Before the study began, teachers anonymously participated in a background questionnaire (see Appendix C). The purpose of the background questionnaire was to learn more information about the teachers and background variables such as what level they teach, how long they have been teaching, and if the

teacher was currently in teacher training. Teachers also anonymously participated in a pre-intervention stress questionnaire (see Appendix D), and a pre-intervention stress attitude scale (see Appendix E). The teachers also received their daily mindfulness journal (see Appendix F) and their weekly meeting journal (see Appendix G).

The purpose of the pre-intervention stress questionnaire was to provide quantitative data on teacher stress levels at the beginning of the intervention. Teachers completed this questionnaire before the intervention, and they completed this questionnaire again at the end of the four-week intervention period. This pre- and post- stress questionnaire helped to answer whether the intervention had a measurable effect on teacher stress levels. This questionnaire was adapted from the Richards (2012) survey used to measure teacher stress levels. The questions asked included Richards (2012) top manifestations of teacher stress such as feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. Additionally, questions included Richards (2012) top sources of teacher stress such as needy students, needy parents, and a heavy workload.

The teachers also completed the pre-intervention attitude scale. The attitude scale focused on teacher attitudes and how they felt before the intervention. They completed the attitude scale again at the end of the four-week intervention. The attitude scale included two parts: the colleague support attitude scale and the perceived stress scale. The purpose of the colleague support attitude scale was to provide quantitative data to determine teacher attitudes towards specific aspects of the school such as their work, colleagues, collaboration, community, and school climate. The questions were adapted from Wolgast, A., & Fischer, N. (2017) and asked about colleague connection and support. The perceived stress scale was adapted from Sheldon Cohen at Mind Garden (see Appendix E), a psychological instrument to measure the perception of stress. The questions asked in this scale include how often they have felt nervous or stressed

and how often they have felt upset when the unexpected happens. The attitude scale responses at the beginning and the end of the intervention helped to answer whether or not teacher attitudes towards each school aspect have shifted and what effect peer-support groups and mindfulness intervention had on teacher stress levels.

Before the four-week intervention, the teachers received a daily mindfulness journal which was set up as a daily calendar for teachers to track a daily mindfulness activity and a small reflection on the activity chosen. The mindfulness journal provided structure to ensure that the teachers were practicing mindfulness activities daily. The journal also offered insight on how frequent the teachers chose the mindfulness activities, and it also helped to determine if specific mindfulness activities had a more significant effect than others based on the reflection on the activity. The mindfulness journal helped to illustrate if there was an effect on teacher stress levels and if specific mindfulness activities were more or less helpful in reducing stress. The journals were coded for positive or negative reflections on the teacher mindfulness practices, through qualitative data analysis techniques. Teachers also indicated a positive or negative practice by choosing an emotion face. The teachers were encouraged to share mindfulness activities with their students and reflected on the outcome in their daily journals.

In addition to the daily mindfulness journal, the teachers used a weekly peer-support meeting journal. Reflection data was also collected on the weekly peer-support teacher meetings to see the effectiveness of regularly meeting with another teacher participating in the study. The weekly meeting journal included prompts and guiding questions for the teachers such as what stressed them out each week, how the mindfulness practices were going, and what were their goals for the following week. The weekly peer meeting journals helped to illustrate if specific peer-support teacher meetings were more or less helpful in reducing stress. The peer-supported



meeting journals were coded for positive and negative reflections through qualitative data analysis techniques. One teacher from each group wrote the responses in the journal and submitted this journal at the end with the participant identification numbers of all teachers who attended.

During this four-week study, the teachers were contacted once per week to confirm their continued enthusiasm and motivation with the daily practices as well as the brief weekly meetings with their peers. At the midpoint of the study, the teachers were also given an open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix H) to check-in on the progress status of how the teachers were doing with their daily practices and weekly meetings. The purpose of the open-ended questionnaire was to ensure that the teachers were continuing with the daily mindfulness practices and weekly meetings. The purpose of this questionnaire was also to allow the teachers to feel more connected during this unsupervised study. It included information on how the mindfulness tools and peer support meetings were working, and if the teachers had any questions. The questions asked included how the mindfulness practices and meetings can be improved, if they introduced mindfulness to their students, if there was any reduction in stress, and if there were other ways they coped with stress beyond those provided in the resource document.

At the completion of the four-week intervention, the teachers received the post-intervention stress questionnaire and the post-intervention attitude scale. It was communicated to the teachers that this was the same questionnaire and attitude scale taken in the beginning, and the purpose was to measure any reduction in stress and shifts in attitudes and feelings. At the end of the four-week study, all teacher daily mindfulness journals and weekly teacher journals were collected for analysis.

## **Analysis of Data**

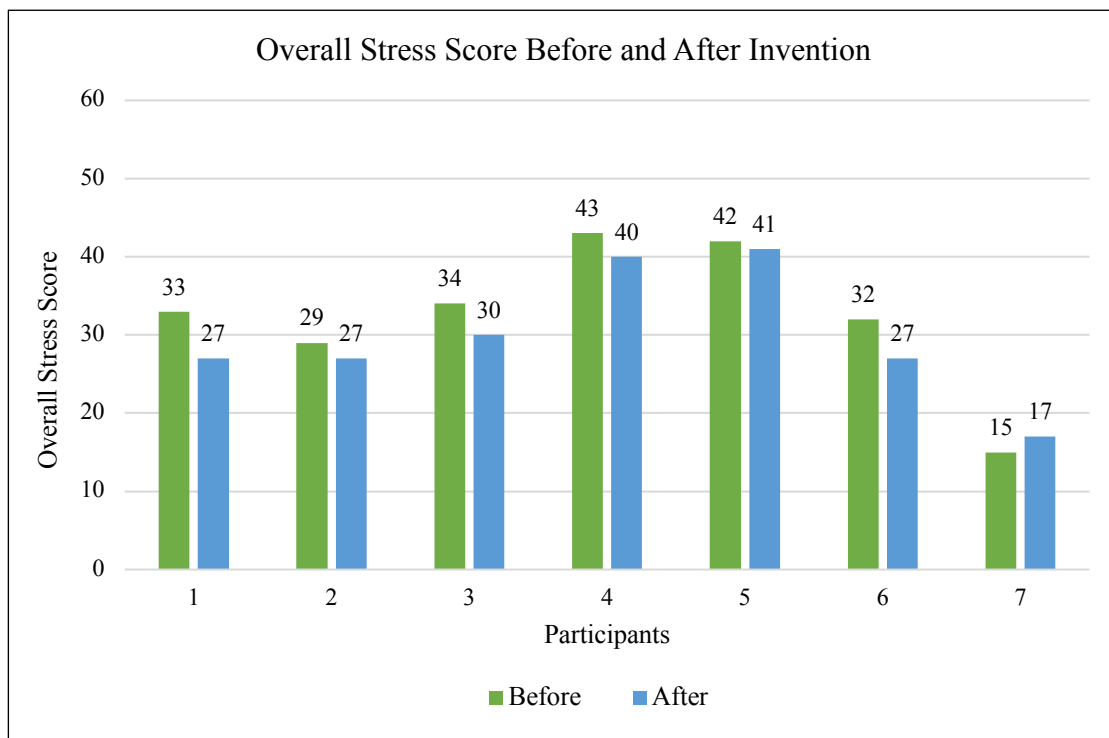
### **Background of Participants**

Eight out of the nine teachers participated in the Background Questionnaire. The purpose of the Background Questionnaire was to learn if the participants were currently in training, the total number of years they have been teaching, and the grade level they teach. According to the data, three of the nine teachers were a part of a year-long early childhood Montessori teacher training program accredited by the American Montessori Society and work at the same school. One teacher in this group is also a director. These three teachers were grouped for the peer-support meetings. The remaining six teachers were not taking a Montessori teacher training program. For the peer-support meetings, these six teachers were grouped by three different schools, two teachers in each school. Two teachers are in early childhood, three teachers are in lower elementary, and one teacher is in a toddler room. The toddler teacher was grouped with a lower elementary teacher from the same school. All nine teachers are full-time lead teachers, work at private Montessori schools in suburban or rural settings, and have between six and twenty-five years of teaching experience.

### **Teacher Stress Questionnaire**

The purpose of the Teacher Stress Questionnaire was to gather baseline data and to illustrate stress levels of the teachers before and after the four-week peer-supported mindfulness intervention. Seven out of the nine teachers participated in the stress questionnaire before and after the study. Each teacher answered each statement by selecting “0” for “disagree” or “4” for “agree” and “0” for “not at all stressed” or “4” for “extremely stressed.” There are fifteen statements in the questionnaire, and the highest possible stress score for the questionnaire is 60. A higher score means a higher amount of stress. The total stress questionnaire score was added

for each teacher. Figure 1 displays the total stress scores of each teacher before and after the intervention. Table 1 displays the fifteen statements in the questionnaire. Figure 1 indicates that the reduction in stress is slight, however 86% of teachers showed a reduction in stress. Six out of seven participants showed a reduction in stress levels after the peer-supported mindfulness intervention. However, one teacher had a slight increase in stress, but she had the overall lowest stress score before and after the intervention.



*Figure 1: Overall Stress Score Before and After Intervention*

Teacher Stress Questionnaire Statements	
Statement 1	I am not satisfied with my teaching job.
Statement 2	I am not as idealistic and enthusiastic about teaching as I once was.
Statement 3	I feel physically exhausted much of the time.
Statement 4	I have poor quality of sleep.
Statement 5	I feel overwhelmed with what is expected of me as a teacher.
Statement 6	I have doubts about my ability to make a difference in student's lives.
Statement 7	What are your stress levels due to needy students, student behavior, or discipline problems?
Statement 8	What are your stress levels because of difficult or needy parents?
Statement 9	What are your stress levels when you experience a heavy workload?
Statement 10	What are your stress levels when you feel like you do not have enough time to complete all of your duties and responsibilities?
Statement 11	What are your stress levels on teaching children who do not seem motivated to learn?
Statement 12	What are your stress levels on your lack of control over school decisions that affect you or your students?
Statement 13	What are your stress levels on being "accountable?"
Statement 14	What are your stress levels on feeling like you are isolated or feeling like you do not have enough time to work with or meet with your colleagues and administrators?
Statement 15	What are your stress levels on feeling like you do not have enough time to relax?

*Table 1: Teacher Stress Questionnaire Statements*

The statements 11, 8, 14, and 15 (see Table 1 and Figure 2) showed the greatest reduction in stress. These statements relate to unmotivated children, needy parents, feeling isolated from colleagues, and the feeling of not enough time to relax. Figure 2 below displays these four

statements with the greatest stress reduction. Figure 2 also shows the average score for each statement before and after the intervention.

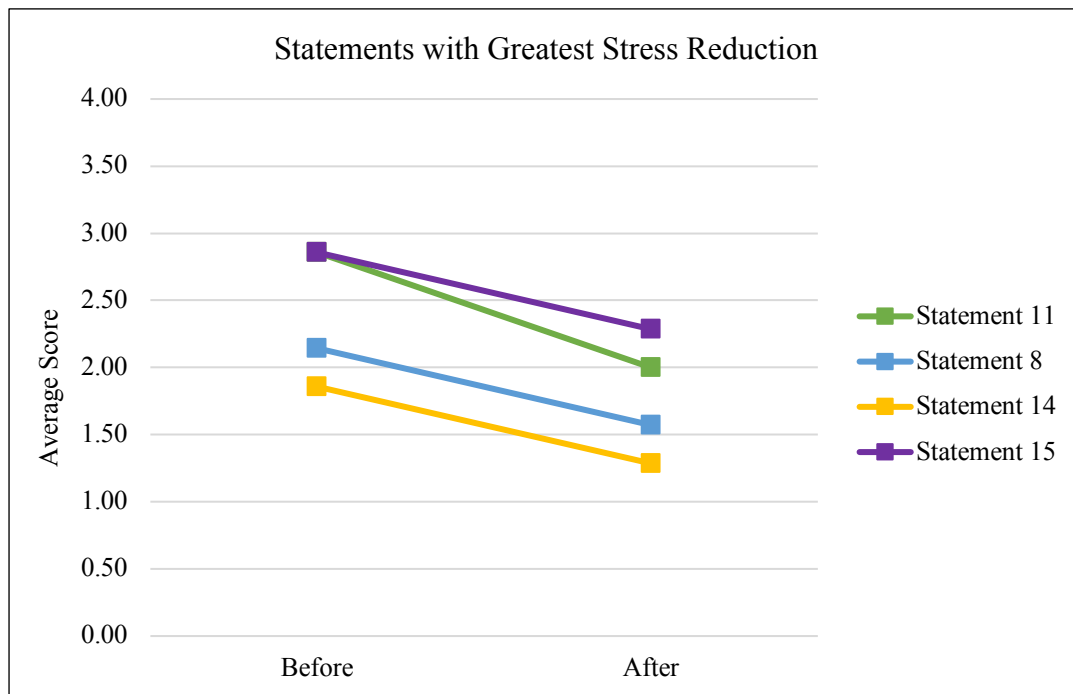


Figure 2: Statements with Greatest Stress Reduction

### Teacher Attitude Scale

Similar to the Teacher Stress Questionnaire, the purpose of the Teacher Attitude Scale was to gather baseline data to show attitudes and feelings about colleagues, work climate and perceived stress before and after the intervention. The first part of the Teacher Attitude Scale is the colleague support attitude scale which contains nine statements relating to the community building aspect of the intervention. The second part is the perceived stress scale containing ten statements. Six out of the nine teachers participated in the Teacher Attitude Scale.

For the colleague support scale, the teachers answered each statement by selecting “4” for “very true” or “1” for “not true at all.” The lowest numerical score of “1” means that the teacher has the least positive attitude about colleague support and school climate. The highest numerical

score of “4” means that the teacher has the highest positive attitude about colleague support and school climate. The overall score was added for each participating teacher. Since there are nine statements in this section, the highest possible score a teacher can receive for this scale is 36. The higher score means a higher positive attitude.

Figure 3 below indicates that 67% of the teacher participants show an increase in positive attitude after the intervention. Six teachers show a slight increase, one teacher shows the same score and one teacher shows a slight decrease in a positive attitude. Also, 67% of teachers already had a high positive attitude score before the intervention. Table 2 below displays the nine statements from the colleague support attitude scale.

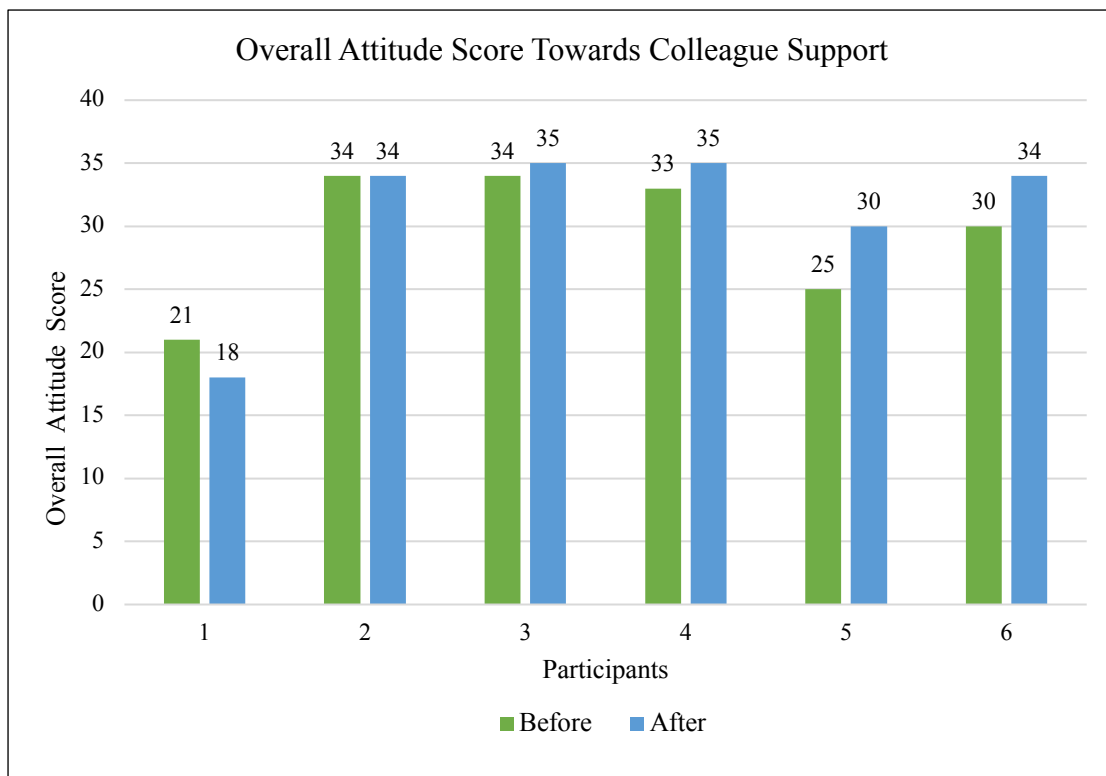
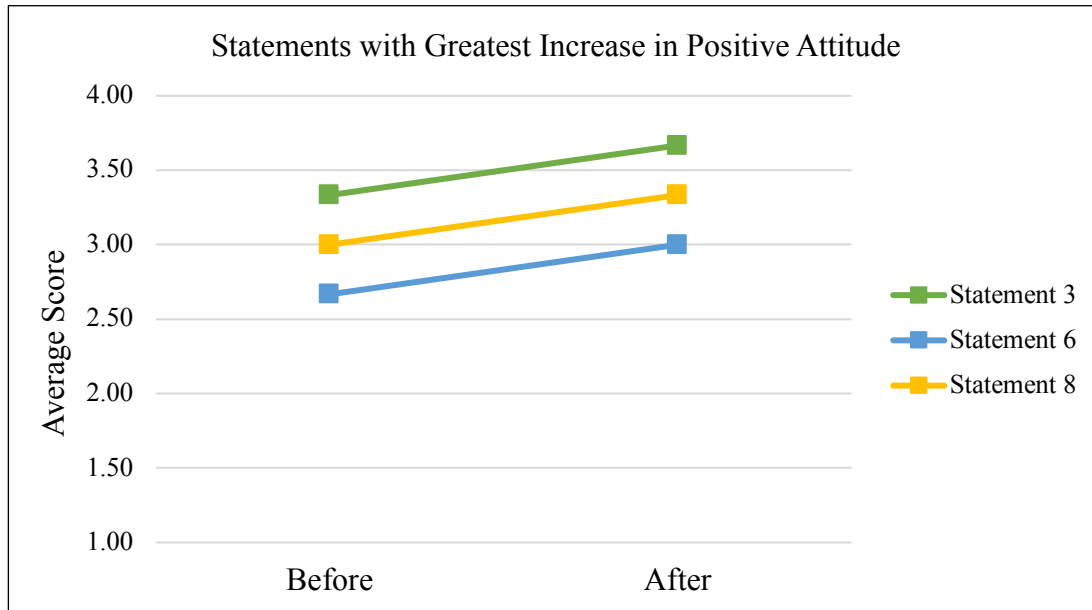


Figure 3: Overall Attitude Score Towards Colleague Support

Colleague Support Scale Statements	
Statement 1	I feel connected with my colleagues.
Statement 2	There is good team spirit.
Statement 3	We stick together as a team.
Statement 4	I feel that I am supported and understood by my colleagues.
Statement 5	My colleagues are supported and understood by me.
Statement 6	When teachers have different opinions, we talk about them openly.
Statement 7	I feel comfortable with my colleagues.
Statement 8	I feel that there is a consensus among our colleagues concerning the school's philosophy and educational concepts.
Statement 9	I find that meetings with colleagues are productive, useful and important.

*Table 2: Colleague Support Scale Statements*

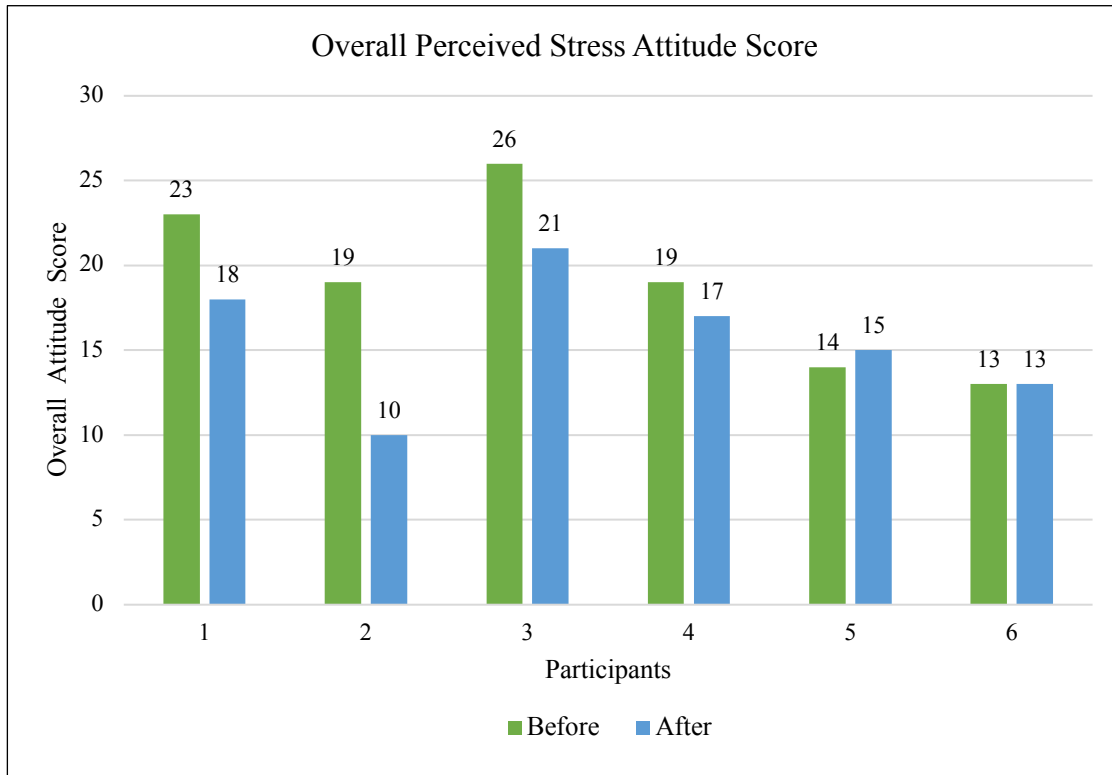
Statements 3, 6, and 8 showed the greatest increase in positive attitudes, and they relate to teamwork, talking about different opinions, and an agreement on philosophy and educational concepts (see Figure 4 and Table 2). Figure 4 displays these three statements with the greatest increase in positive attitude. Figure 4 also shows the average score for each statement before and after the intervention.



*Figure 4: Statements with Greatest Increase in Positive Attitude*

The second part of the Teacher Attitude Scale is the perceived stress scale. The teachers answered each statement by selecting “0” for “never” or “4” for “very often.” For each question, the numerical score “0” indicates the lowest amount of perceived stress and “4” indicates the highest amount of perceived stress. There are ten statements for the perceived stress attitude scale, and the highest possible stress score is 40. The higher score means a higher level of perceived stress. The overall perceived stress scale score was added for each teacher. Figure 5 below displays the total perceived stress scale scores of each teacher before and after the intervention. Figure 5 below indicates that there is a reduction in perceived stress in 67% of the participating teachers after the intervention. Four participants out of the six showed a reduction in perceived stress; one participant showed the same score and one participant showed a slight increase in perceived stress but overall had a low score compared to the other participants.





*Figure 5: Overall Perceived Stress Attitude Score*

Table 3 below displays the ten statements from the perceived stress scale. Statements 3, 10, and 2 showed the greatest reduction in perceived stress, and they are related to the frequency of feeling nervous or stressed, overcoming a large number of difficulties, and controlling important things in life (see Figure 6). Figure 6 displays these three statements with the greatest reduction in perceived stress. Figure 6 also shows the average score for each statement before and after the intervention.

Perceived Stress Scale Statements	
Statement 1	In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
Statement 2	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
Statement 3	In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?
Statement 4	In the last month, how often have you not felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
Statement 5	In the last month, how often have you not felt that things were going your way?
Statement 6	In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
Statement 7	In the last month, how often have you not been able to control irritations in your life?
Statement 8	In the last month, how often have you not felt that you were on top of things?
Statement 9	In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?
Statement 10	In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Table 3: Perceived Stress Scale Statements

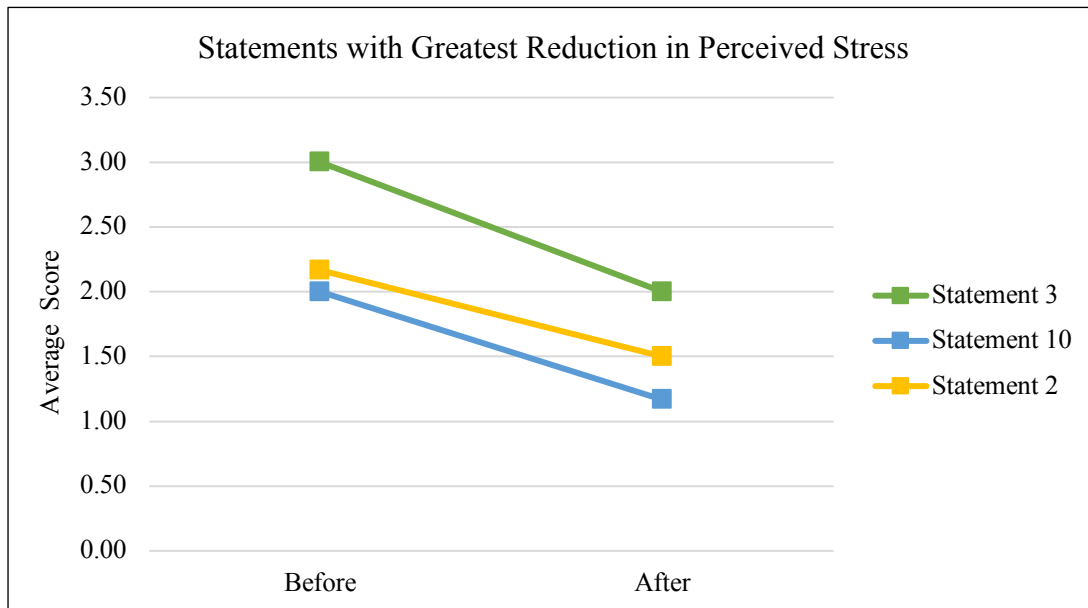
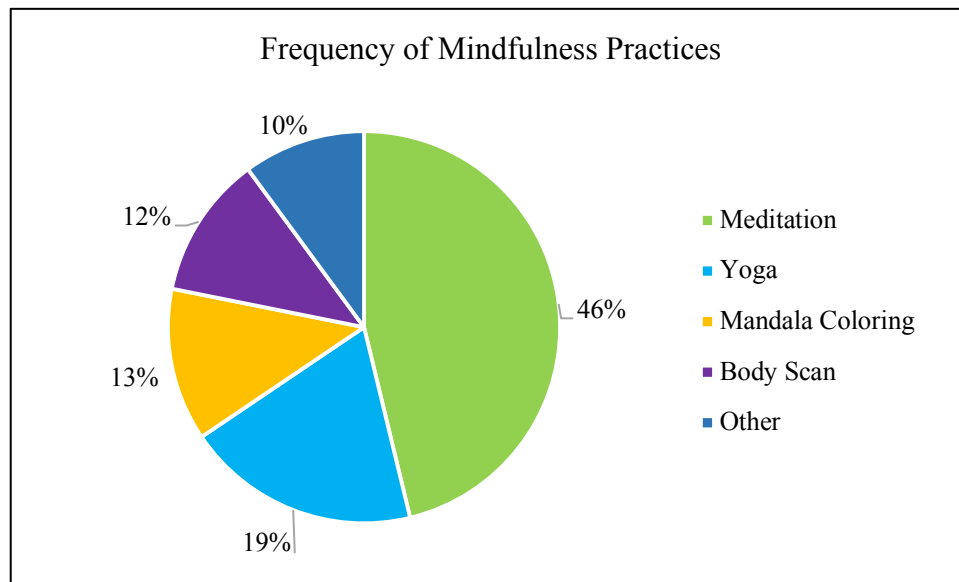


Figure 6: Statements with Greatest Reduction in Perceived Stress

### Teacher Mindfulness Journal

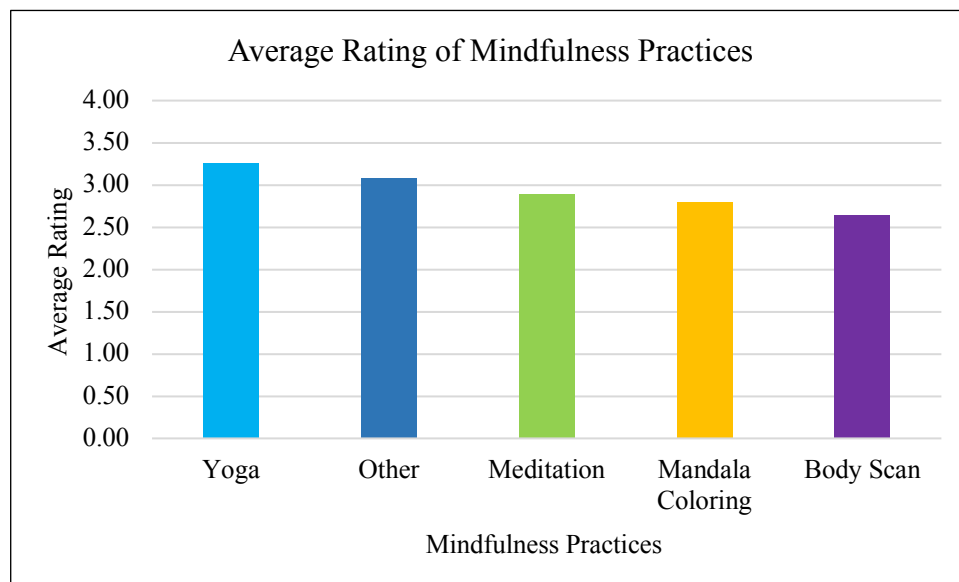
Eight out of the nine teachers participated in the Teacher Mindfulness Journal. The teachers chose a mindfulness activity each day to practice for at least three minutes and wrote about their thoughts, emotions, and feelings in their journal. The mindfulness practices include the body scan, meditation, yoga, mandala coloring, or other mindfulness activity. The purpose of the journal is to determine how frequently the teachers chose the mindfulness practices and if the practices had a positive or negative effect, and if the practices were effective in reducing stress. Figure 7 displays the frequency of the mindfulness practices chosen by the teachers. According to the data, the teachers chose meditation 46% of the time, followed by yoga at 19% of the time during the intervention. Seven out of the eight of the teachers tried most of the practices at least once, and all seven of these teachers shared the mindfulness practices with their students. One teacher practiced meditation only and did not share mindfulness with her students.



*Figure 7: Frequency of Mindfulness Practices*

The teachers were also asked to rate their practice by selecting from five emotion faces ranging from very positive to very negative. A numerical score was assigned to the emotion face

ratings with “4” being “very positive” and “0” being “very negative.” Figure 8 shows the average rating for each mindfulness practice. Even though teachers practiced meditation the most, the data suggests that teachers rated yoga as a slightly more positive experience than meditation. The data also shows that the average rating for each mindfulness practice is positive. The teachers wrote about the positive benefits of the mindfulness practices in their journals. The common benefits of the practices include the feeling of relaxation, the sense of overall calmness, and a feeling of relief. Many of the teachers noted that the mindfulness practices helped them to feel more focused and it set a positive tone for the rest of the day.

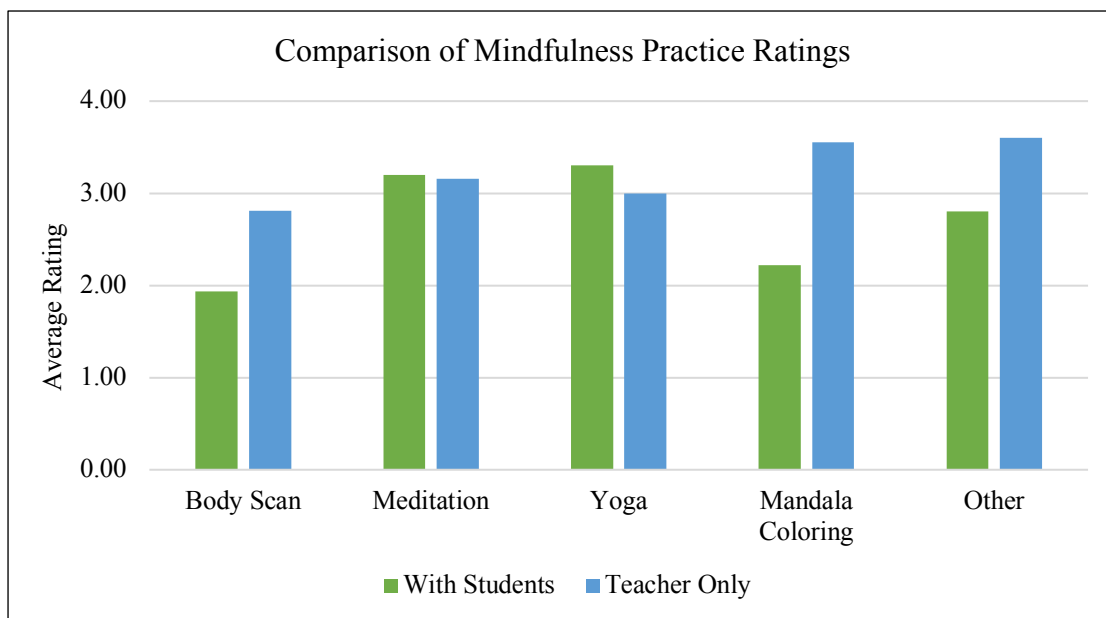


*Figure 8: Average Rating of Mindfulness Practices*

Teachers were also asked to describe if they shared the mindfulness practice with their students and the outcome. Seven out of the eight teachers shared mindfulness with their students on some days, but the data shows that the outcomes were mixed. Figure 9 compares the average rating of mindfulness practices when shared with students and mindfulness practices performed solely by the teacher. The data indicates that when the teachers shared mindfulness with their

students, yoga and meditation had the highest average ratings and showed a slight rating improvement than when performed alone by the teacher. The teachers noted that the students enjoyed yoga and were more focused and calm after practicing yoga. One teacher noticed a positive shift in the tone of the room after sharing meditation with her students. However, the teachers noted that many of the students became discouraged with the body scan and mandala coloring, evident by the lower average rating with student participation.

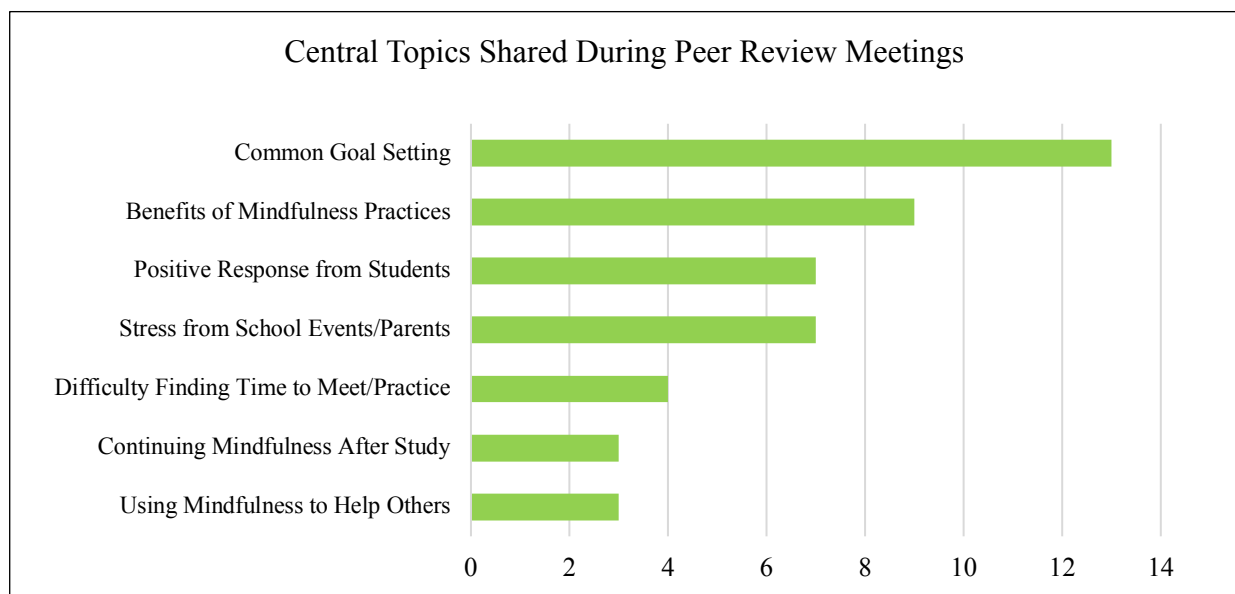
Mandala coloring, other activities, and meditation had the highest average ratings when teachers practiced mindfulness in solitude. One teacher noted that mandala coloring was peaceful and helpful after a long stressful day. Another teacher stated that she felt stress relief while participating in other mindfulness activities such as nature walks, bicycle riding and taking a dance class. The data results suggest that specific mindfulness activities are a better choice with a group of students, while other practices are a better choice for teachers in solitude. The data results also suggest that meditation and yoga is the practice that is the most beneficial and feasible when practiced in the classroom with the students.



*Figure 9: Comparison of Mindfulness Practice Ratings*

### Teacher Peer Meeting Journal

Six out of the nine teachers participated in the Teacher Peer Meeting Journals. The teachers were grouped by school or teacher education program and met once per week for at least fifteen minutes for the four-week intervention. Each group discussed how the mindfulness practices are working, if they shared mindfulness with their students, what is stressing them out, what advice they can share, positive moments, and goals for the following week. The qualitative data from the peer-meeting journals was coded to tally common discussion topics and shared experiences. Figure 10 displays the most frequent topics shared during the overall four-week collaboration sessions. The topic most shared was setting common goals and sharing new ideas, which came up more than once each week for each participating teacher group.



*Figure 10: Central Topics Shared During Peer Review Meetings*

According to the data, common goals shared include continuing work on normalizing the classrooms, practicing patience and compassion, figuring out ways to stay on track with the mindfulness practices daily, and coming up with new mindfulness activities for the students. The data also suggests that the benefits of mindfulness and the positive response from students

frequently came up in the discussion. Two groups commented how they observed the children's eagerness to participate in the mindfulness activities. Another teacher shared with the group that one of her students uses meditation in situations when she feels nervous.

Some groups shared that it is sometimes difficult to remember to practice mindfulness daily, but when they do remember, they find the experience pleasant and valuable. It has inspired them to incorporate meditation into their classrooms. The journal reflections suggest that the participating three groups were able to meet weekly, but it was difficult for the teachers to schedule the time to meet. One teacher group stated that even though they are busy, setting aside time for a short weekly meeting and talking to reconnect has helped them to feel less stressed out.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the four-week peer-supported mindfulness intervention had a positive impact on reducing teacher stress. A majority of the teachers in this study showed a decrease in teacher stress and an increase in positive attitudes towards colleagues and school climate. The majority of the teachers shared mindfulness with their students, and overall the results were positive. Many teachers noted that after they practiced mindfulness, they were more focused and present with the students and felt a sense of relief. More than one teacher stated that as a result, the students were more focused and peaceful.

The results are promising, considering the small sample size and constrained time frame for the study. The results show that the combination of mindfulness activities and peer support is an effective mechanism for reducing teacher stress. However, the study finds that some mindfulness activities were effective when used together with the students, while other activities were more effective when the teacher was alone. This could be due to many factors such as

teacher attitude and preference, knowledge of how to incorporate mindfulness activities in the classroom, and if the activity was appropriate for the particular group of students. Also, one peer teacher group stated that they are fortunate to teach in a Montessori classroom which already helps to keep their stress levels low. Further study in different capacities and environments could shed light on even more positive outcomes on reducing teacher stress.

### **Further Action**

From the data collected in the teacher journals and midpoint open-ended questionnaires, participating teachers affirmed that there are aspects of teaching that are stressful. The teachers indicated that mindfulness, as well as connecting with another teacher, helps to reduce their stress. Teachers stated that their workday is demanding, but allowing time for mindfulness practices made them feel as though they had breaks throughout the day to focus on themselves and to be present. Finding time in a teacher's day to be mindful allows for reflection and fewer distractions, allowing for freedom to teach more efficiently. Additionally, finding time to meet with other teachers, even for a short time on a weekly basis, provides collaboration and the feeling that they are not alone. The teachers stated in their journals that it was helpful and inspiring to connect and share ideas with another teacher.

Teachers have an ever-growing list of duties and responsibilities, which was also evident in the teacher journals. To add to their stress, teachers also have a strong drive to complete their tasks, to be creative, to take on new challenges, and to be there for their students. "Mindfulness can bring about profound relief from all of this driven-ness" (Nhat Hanh & Weare, 2017, p. 196). Mindfulness gives teachers the time and space to be aware and present wherever they may be. It was apparent in the journals that the teachers were passionate about their work and were driven



to accomplish their goals. The teachers stated that they were inspired to bring more mindfulness activities into their classroom after observing the positive benefits in themselves and the children. The teachers also stated that they felt encouraged to share these ideas and goals with other faculty members.

Before this study began, I participated in an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Course which included daily documented mindfulness practices. I observed a benefit in the reduction of stress and an improvement in overall well-being. I am an independent Montessori teacher educator and consultant and not part of a day-to-day school community. Though I get to interact with teachers and students regularly, this independent role still leads to many stresses from isolation. These stresses stem from the feeling that I have to do everything myself and from the lack of peer support available on a day-to-day basis. But as a former Montessori classroom teacher of nine years, I still experienced a lack of strong school community in some school environments and sensed stress among many of the teachers. A lack of community could have been a result of little time to meet with colleagues, which led to feeling isolated. The results of this study revealed the importance of community and peer-support for stress reduction, which will influence my practices as an educator going forward.

The study results also revealed that mindfulness could help with educator stress reduction. Surprisingly, the results of this study show that teachers shared mindfulness practices with the students sometimes more often than practicing mindfulness without students. The teachers expressed delight in the students' eagerness to participate in mindfulness, as well as the students' enjoyment of the practices. The results also showed that some mindfulness practices were more effective and appropriate for the students, such as meditation and yoga. Nhat Hanh and Weare (2017) point out that mindfulness helps students with focus and learning. "All

teachers want their students to be able to focus, concentrate and pay attention: this is the basis for any kind of learning” (p. 224). Furthermore, when teachers practice mindfulness, they have an increase in compassion and kindness for themselves and others. They exhibit more focus and presence with the students. They make better teachers with greater levels of classroom management and are more supportive of the needs of their students (Nhat Hanh & Weare, 2017, p. xi). These examples illustrate how mindfulness for teacher stress reduction can make a positive impact on student learning.

One downside of this study was that it did not answer the question of whether mindfulness or community building was the more effective intervention in reducing teacher stress. The study shows that the two factors worked together as an effective mechanism for reducing stress, but it is unclear if the community building aspect enhanced the effectiveness of the mindfulness or vice versa. According to the quantitative data from the questionnaire and attitude scale, there was a general slight reduction in stress, but most participating teachers already had positive attitudes about their school climate and colleague collaboration before the study. The outcome could also depend on the personality of the teacher. For example, an introverted teacher may prefer mindfulness practices over peer meetings, while an extroverted teacher may prefer peer meetings over mindfulness activities. Further studies including two sample groups with separate interventions of mindfulness and community building may determine which intervention is more effective for stress reduction.

Another drawback of this study was that there was high variance in the test group, such as different teaching levels, some teacher trainees, and teachers from four different schools with just two or three teachers in each peer group. Additionally, there were four mindfulness options. Further studies with fewer variables could help to identify more straightforward and

comprehensive results. For example, one study could include a group of Montessori early childhood teachers from the same school, practicing the sitting meditation daily without their students, and meeting together weekly for community building. Another study could include a daily group-led mindfulness practice during the duration of a summer Montessori teacher training program.

Teaching is a stressful profession. Situations that lead to stress are usually not in the teachers' control. It is my hope that this study will inspire teacher education programs to offer stress reduction courses for new teachers. It is essential for teachers to learn about stress and the different ways to cope with stress at the time of teacher training and to continue exploring stress reduction strategies throughout their careers. Moreover, I hope that this study inspires administrators and current teachers to participate in stress reduction professional development courses, as well as to incorporate community-building and mindfulness programs into their daily practices and classrooms.

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**Appendix A**

**Peer-Supported Mindfulness Practice and Teacher Stress Reduction  
Active Consent Form**

January 4, 2018

Dear Teacher,

As you may know, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education degree. An important part of my program is the Action Research project.

As a Specialist Teacher and a Montessori Teacher Educator at Summit Montessori Teacher Training Institute in Davie, FL, I have chosen to learn about mindfulness and peer-support groups for teachers because of teacher work-related stress. I am working with a faculty member at St. Catherine University and a project coach to complete this particular project.

I will be writing about the results that I get from this research, however none of the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any teacher, staff, administration, parents, or students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular teacher. Only my advisor, my project coach, and I will have access to the identifiable data for this study; we will keep it confidential.

When I am done, my work will be electronically available online at the St. Kate's library in a system called SOPHIA, which holds published reports written by faculty and graduate students at St. Catherine University. The goal of sharing my final research study report is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

I am gathering data from questionnaires and attitude scales regarding work-related background information as well as perceived stress levels. All information will be confidential. There is no foreseeable risk to participants.

**Procedures:**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to:

- Practice a daily short mindfulness activity (A choice of yoga, meditation, body scan, breathing or mandala coloring) for 3-10 minutes before or after class or during your breaks. You will document and reflect on your daily mindfulness practices in an easy-to-use journal that will include guided prompts and questions. You may choose to share your mindfulness practices as an activity for your students as well, and reflect on it.
- Meet briefly (15-30 minutes) with other participating teachers from your school/program for weekly peer-support, discussing your mindfulness practices and other teaching-related goals. You will briefly reflect on peer-support discussions in the easy-to-use weekly journal provided, with guiding questions/agenda.
- There will be a midpoint open-ended questionnaire where you can answer questions regarding how the mindfulness practice and weekly peer-support meetings are going.
- There will be brief questionnaires and attitude scales for you to complete before and

## PEER-SUPPORTED MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

after the study to collect your work and home background information as well as any perceived stress levels and attitudes about work.

This study will take approximately a total of **three** hours over the entire course of four weeks.

**This study is voluntary. If you decide you do want to be a participant and/or have your data (mindfulness journal, peer-support meeting journals, questionnaires, and attitude scales) before, during, and after the study, included in my study, you need to check the appropriate box(es), sign this form, and return it by January 12, 2018.** If at any time you decide you do not want to continue participation and/or allow your data to be included in the study, you can notify me and I will remove included data to the best of my ability.

If you decide you do not want to participate and/or have your data included in my study, you do not need to do anything. There is no penalty for not participating or having your data involved in the study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, at [dvitolo807@stkate.edu](mailto:dvitolo807@stkate.edu) or 845-800-4944. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, you can ask me or my project coach, Amanda Perna, at [amperna@stkate.edu](mailto:amperna@stkate.edu) or my instructor, Sandra Andrew, at [swandrew@stkate.edu](mailto:swandrew@stkate.edu) who will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.

If you would like to be recognized for your contributions to this research, please write your name here as you would like it to be included.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

### Opt In

Please check all that apply. I DO want to:

- participate in this study.
- have my data included in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant in Research

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please respond by January 12, 2018.

## Appendix B

### Mindfulness Study Resources

In your *Daily Mindfulness Journal*, there are many mindfulness practice choices including the *body scan*, *traditional sitting meditation*, *yoga*, and *mandala coloring*. Each day, you will choose one and practice for 3-10 minutes (or more) before your day starts, during your break or at the end of the day, depending on your schedule and needs. In this resource packet, I will provide resources for these different mindfulness practices. You are welcome to use your own mindfulness resources, classes, videos, books or meditations if you choose. If you need more resources, ideas, or choices, email me and let me know what you need. You can do the same mindfulness practice for the entire study, or you can change it up as often as you wish.

A great resource for mindfulness is at the website, [www.palousemindfulness.com](http://www.palousemindfulness.com). This is a free eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course where you can find meditation audio files and great videos and articles about mindfulness.

(Note: You can do the free eight-week course and receive an MBSR certificate at the end if you choose. Note that the eight-week MBSR course requires that you document 30-minute mindfulness practices daily at least six days per week.)

#### Body Scan

You can find more information about the *Body Scan* at this link:  
<https://palousemindfulness.com/docs/bodyscan.pdf>

You can listen to the MBSR *Body Scan* meditation at this link (30 minutes or 20 minutes):  
<https://palousemindfulness.com/meditations/bodyscan.html>

3-minute, 5-minute or 10-minute *Body Scan*:  
<http://elishagoldstein.com/videos/3-minute-body-scan/>  
<https://soundcloud.com/mindfulmagazine/3-minute-body-scan-meditation>

Remember to write about your body scan experience in your daily journal. It is easier to write down as soon as possible because it will be difficult to reconstruct your thoughts and feelings later.

#### Sitting Meditation

You can find more information about the *Sitting Meditation* at this link:  
<https://palousemindfulness.com/docs/sittingmeditation.pdf>

You can listen to the MBSR *Sitting Meditation* at this link (30 minutes or 20 minutes):  
<https://palousemindfulness.com/meditations/sittingmeditation.html>



## PEER-SUPPORTED MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

3-minute sitting meditation:

<https://soundcloud.com/jiovann-carrasco/3-minute-breathing-meditation>

5-minute sitting meditation:

<https://www.tarabrach.com/brief-meditation-5-minute/>

<https://soundcloud.com/mindfulmagazine/5-minute-breathing-meditation>

Other guided meditation resources with great audio files:

<https://www.tarabrach.com/guided-meditations/>

<https://www.headspace.com/>

(You can download the headspace app on your smart-phone to get started)

<https://soundcloud.com/>

(You can search for many types of meditations and durations)

<https://www.mindful.org/category/meditation/mindfulness-practice/>

Remember to write about your sitting meditation experience in your daily journal. It is easier to write down as soon as possible because it will be difficult to reconstruct your thoughts and feelings later.

**Note about Mindfulness meditation:** It is important not to be hard on ourselves if our mind wanders during meditation. This will defeat the whole purpose of why we are meditating in the first place. It is essential to be kind and compassionate towards ourselves. We want that peacefulness within us to carry through the day and to spread this to others and the children. If your mind wanders, just notice your thoughts without judgment and go back to focusing on the sensations of the breath. Also, we are not trying to empty our mind as an end goal, but instead we are trying to become aware of our awareness. Any moment we are aware of our mind wandering, it should be a moment of celebration because we are noticing that we are aware. We also want to bring this awareness throughout our day, not just when we are meditating.

### Yoga

The MBSR website has yoga resources and 30-minute videos for yoga with the option to sit in a chair to do yoga if you are experiencing any pain or limitations. It is okay if you only do part of the video if you are short on time:

<https://palousemindfulness.com/meditations/yoga1.html>

<https://palousemindfulness.com/meditations/yoga2.html>

## PEER-SUPPORTED MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

The Yoga with Adrienne YouTube channel has many great short yoga videos.

You can check out her channel to find your favorite videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/yogawithadriene>

She has a great 30-minute video for teachers:

<https://youtu.be/zRDQqJEuRcw>

She also has a great 10-minute video for the classroom:

<https://youtu.be/Td6zFtZPkJ4>

There is also a 5-minute yoga video:

<https://youtu.be/4C-gxOE0j7s>

And another 10-minute yoga video for self-care:

<https://youtu.be/VpW33Celubg>

You can also take a yoga class at a yoga studio if that works for your schedule.

I am also a 200-hour registered yoga teacher. If you have any questions about yoga or need further assistance about particular postures or modifications, contact me anytime.

Remember to write about your yoga experience in your daily journal. It is easier to write down as soon as possible because it will be difficult to reconstruct your thoughts and feelings later.

### **Mandala Coloring**

I will send you mandala coloring sheets which you can print out and color if you choose taken from *Stress Less Coloring Mandalas: 100+ Coloring Pages for Peace and Relaxation* by Jim Gogarty. The mandalas may take several days to complete, depending on how much time you spend on them. You can also search online for free mandalas to print out or you can buy a mandala coloring book at a bookstore if you choose.

Below are resources about Mandala coloring for mindfulness and reducing stress:

<http://www.fulfillmentdaily.com/much-plate-coloring-mandalas-can-create-balance-life/>

<https://www.colorit.com/blogs/news/85320388-amazing-benefits-of-coloring-for-adults>

Remember to write about your mandala coloring experience in your daily journal. It is easier to write down as soon as possible because it will be difficult to reconstruct your thoughts and feelings later.

## PEER-SUPPORTED MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

### **Introducing Mindfulness to your Students**

You can also introduce mindfulness activities to your students if you choose. This is encouraged. Depending on your students' age level, you can lead a short sitting meditation or body scan with your students or introduce yoga poses. You can also put a mandala coloring sheet for children on your peace shelf or art shelf. You can write about the outcomes of sharing mindfulness with the children in your mindfulness journals.

You can also model mindfulness meditation in front of the children during your group time, showing them how you meditate and the children can join in.

There is also a section on the MBSR website with resources on mindfulness for children. The Kindness Curriculum is free:

<https://palousemindfulness.com/resources/books.html>  
<https://palousemindfulness.com/resources/training.html>

Yoga Resources for school children:

<https://www.kidsyogastories.com/yoga-in-schools-resources/>  
<http://www.kiddingaroundyoga.com/blog>

### **Peer Support Meetings**

The purpose of the weekly 15-minute peer-support meetings is to reduce teacher stress through collaboration, goal-oriented cooperation, and community building. Also, your team members will be your accountability partners. You will help and support each other to keep up with the daily mindfulness practices.

### **The Purpose of this peer-supported mindfulness study:**

Teachers are under a great deal of work-related stress which can lead to teacher burnout and attrition. The purpose of this research is to see if a combination of modified mindfulness practices taken from Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), along with weekly teacher peer-support meetings can help with teacher stress reduction.

**Appendix C**

**Background Questionnaire**

1. How many years have you been teaching in the classroom?
  - a. 0-5
  - b. 6-10
  - c. 11-14
  - d. 15-20
  - e. 21-25
  - f. 26 and up
  
2. What age level/grade do you currently teach?
  - a. Infant/Toddler (ages 0 to 2.5)
  - b. Pre-K-K (ages 2.5 to 6)
  - c. Grades 1-3 (ages 6-9)
  - d. Grades 4-6 (ages 9-12)
  - e. Grades 7-9 (ages 12-15)
  - f. Other (Administrator, etc.)
  
3. What type of school do you teach at?
  - a. Private Montessori School
  - b. Public Montessori School
  - c. Private Religious School
  - d. Traditional Public School
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Do you have students in your classroom with varying or special needs?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What is your highest level of Education?
  - a. High School graduate
  - b. Associate's (2 year) degree
  - c. Bachelor's (4 year) degree
  - d. Graduate degree
  - e. Doctorate/PHD degree
  
6. Are you currently a student in a teacher training or teacher education program?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
7. Have you completed a teacher training or teacher education program?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

## PEER-SUPPORTED MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

8. Are you a lead teacher or assistant teacher, and are you full-time or part-time?
  - a. Lead Teacher, full-time
  - b. Assistant Teacher, full-time
  - c. Lead Teacher, part-time
  - d. Assistant Teacher, part-time
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. What is your age range?
  - a. 18-19
  - b. 20-29
  - c. 30-39
  - d. 40-49
  - e. 50-59
  - f. 60-69
  - g. 70 and up
  
10. What is your marital status?
  - a. Married
  - b. Divorced/Separated
  - c. Single
  
11. How many children do you have of your own, at home?
  - a. 0
  - b. 1
  - c. 2
  - d. 3
  - e. 4 or more
  
12. If you have children of your own at home, what are their age ranges? (Choose all that apply)
  - a. 0-3
  - b. 4-6
  - c. 7-9
  - d. 10-12
  - e. 13-17
  - f. 18 and up
  - g. None

**Appendix D**

**Pre- and Post- Intervention Questionnaire to measure Stress**

Please rate your stress level for each question. Your responses are confidential.

- 0 = Disagree
- 1 = Slightly Disagree
- 2 = Neutral
- 3 = Slightly Agree
- 4 = Agree

1. I am not satisfied with my teaching job. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I am not as idealistic and enthusiastic about teaching as I once was. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I feel physically exhausted much of the time. \_\_\_\_\_
4. I have poor quality of sleep. \_\_\_\_\_
5. I feel overwhelmed with what is expected of me as a teacher. \_\_\_\_\_
6. I have doubts about my ability to make a difference in student's lives. \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate your stress level for each question. Your responses are confidential.

- 0=Not at all stressed
- 1=Slightly stressed
- 2=Somewhat stressed
- 3=Moderately stressed
- 4=Extremely stressed

1. What are your stress levels due to needy students, student behavior, or discipline problems? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are your stress levels because of difficult or needy parents? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What are your stress levels when you experience a heavy workload? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What are your stress levels when you feel like you do not have enough time to complete all of your duties and responsibilities? \_\_\_\_\_

## PEER-SUPPORTED MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

5. What are your stress levels on teaching children who do not seem motivated to learn?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What are your stress levels on your lack of control over school decisions that affect you or your students? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What are your stress levels on being “accountable?” \_\_\_\_\_
8. What are your stress levels on feeling like you are isolated or feeling like you do not have enough time to work with or meet with your colleagues and administrators? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What are your stress levels on feeling like you do not have enough time to relax?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Reference:

Richards, J. (2012). Teacher stress and coping strategies: A national snapshot. *The Educational Forum*, 76(3), 299-316.

**Appendix E**

**Pre- and Post- Intervention Attitude Scale**

**Colleague Support Scale**

Please read each statement carefully before answering. To the left of each item, indicate how you feel about colleague support, using the following scale. Your answers are confidential.

4=Very True            3=Mostly True            2=Slightly True            1=Not True at All

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I feel connected with my colleagues
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. There is good team spirit
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. We stick together as a team
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I feel that I am supported and understood by my colleagues
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. My colleagues are supported and understood by me
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. When teachers have different opinions, we talk about them openly
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I feel comfortable with my colleagues
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I feel that there is a consensus among our colleagues concerning the school's philosophy and educational concepts
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I find that meetings with colleagues are productive, useful and important

Reference:

Wolgast, A., & Fischer, N. (2017). You Are Not Alone: Colleague Support and Goal-Oriented Cooperation as Resources to Reduce Teachers' Stress. *Social Psychology Of Education: An International Journal*, 20(1), 97-114.

(continued on next page)



## PEER-SUPPORTED MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

### Perceived Stress Scale

Retrieved from: <https://www.mindgarden.com/documents/PerceivedStressScale.pdf>

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate by circling how often you felt or thought a certain way. Your answers are confidential.

0 = Never    1 = Almost Never    2 = Sometimes    3 = Fairly Often    4 = Very Often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

0    1    2    3    4

2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

0    1    2    3    4

3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?

0    1    2    3    4

4. In the last month, how often have you not felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

0    1    2    3    4

5. In the last month, how often have you not felt that things were going your way?

0    1    2    3    4

6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

0    1    2    3    4

7. In the last month, how often have you not been able to control irritations in your life?

0    1    2    3    4

8. In the last month, how often have you not felt that you were on top of things?

0    1    2    3    4

9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?











0    1    2    3    4

10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?




0    1    2    3    4

PEER-SUPPORTED MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Appendix F

<p><b>Daily Mindfulness Journal for Week # _____ (Four weeks total)</b></p> <p>Choose a mindfulness activity and practice it for at least 3-10 minutes (or more) before, after school, or breaks, etc. In the box on the right, describe the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your main cause of stress today (if any)</li> <li>• Reflect on how you liked this practice and if it helped your stress level today.</li> <li>• How many minutes you practiced mindfulness today</li> <li>• Describe your impressions of your mindfulness practice (your thoughts, emotions, what came up, how it felt, physical sensations, etc.).</li> <li>• Describe if you shared a mindfulness activity with your students today and the result</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Monday</b></p> <p>____/____</p>	<p><u>Practice: (choose one)</u></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Body Scan</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meditation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yoga</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mandala Coloring</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)</p> <p><u>Practice Rating (choose one)</u></p> <p> <input type="radio"/>  <input type="radio"/>  <input type="radio"/>  <input type="radio"/>  <input type="radio"/>  </p>	
<p><b>Tuesday</b></p> <p>____/____</p>	<p><u>Practice: (choose one)</u></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Body Scan</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meditation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yoga</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mandala Coloring</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)</p> <p><u>Practice Rating (choose one)</u></p> <p> <input type="radio"/>  <input type="radio"/>  <input type="radio"/>  <input type="radio"/>  <input type="radio"/>  </p>	

PEER-SUPPORTED MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

<p>Wednesday</p> <p>___/___</p>	<p><u>Practice: (choose one)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>___ Body Scan</li><li>___ Meditation</li><li>___ Yoga</li><li>___ Mandala Coloring</li><li>___ Other (specify)</li></ul> <p><u>Practice Rating (choose one)</u></p> <p></p>	
<p>Thursday</p> <p>___/___</p>	<p><u>Practice: (choose one)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>___ Body Scan</li><li>___ Meditation</li><li>___ Yoga</li><li>___ Mandala Coloring</li><li>___ Other (specify)</li></ul> <p><u>Practice Rating (choose one)</u></p> <p></p>	
<p>Friday</p> <p>___/___</p>	<p><u>Practice: (choose one)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>___ Body Scan</li><li>___ Meditation</li><li>___ Yoga</li><li>___ Mandala Coloring</li><li>___ Other (specify)</li></ul> <p><u>Practice Rating (choose one)</u></p> <p></p>	

**Appendix G**

**Weekly Peer Meeting – Minutes and Reflection**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Week # \_\_\_\_\_ (four weeks total)

Participants (Use participant ID #s) \_\_\_\_\_

Meet for 15 to 30 minutes each week with your partner/group. One participant fills out this meeting reflection for the meeting. Describe what you discussed and reflect on how the meeting went. All answers are confidential.

Discuss with your partner/group how your mindfulness practices are going this week. Did you share any activities with your students? What was the result?

Discuss with your partner/group what is stressing you and your colleagues this week? Are there any events, projects, assignments or meetings coming up? Can you offer any help/advice for your partner/group?

Discuss with your partner/group a positive moment you had at school this week. It could be with a student, a lesson, with a parent, administrator, etc.

Discuss with your partner/group your classroom goals for this week and next week.

## Appendix H

### Mid-point of study open-ended questionnaire

1. What do you think of the mindfulness practices? Do you think mindfulness is helpful for stress-reduction for adults?
2. Are you finding that it is taking a lot of your time to incorporate mindfulness into your day? Is it a nuisance or a help? What could make it better?
3. What mindfulness activities have you introduced to your students? Have you modeled mindfulness practice for your students while they were present? How do you think mindfulness is helpful for children?
4. What do you think of your weekly peer-support meetings? What have you learned from your peers?
5. What is your stress level? Have you noticed any stress-reduction? If so, how? What else do you do to cope with stress?