Effects of Mindfulness on Teacher Stress and Self-Efficacy

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Effects of Mindfulness on Teacher Stress and Self-Efficacy

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in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Advisor___________________________________  Date_______________________
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April Netz and Lauren Rom
Abstract

Teachers experience high levels of stress due to the demands of their profession. The purpose of this study is to determine if mindfulness and meditation have an effect on stress levels and self-efficacy. The researcher-participants were two female teachers in public schools. Five days a week for four weeks, the participants practiced mindfulness activities from a curated list including Body Scan, Meditation, Breathing, Yoga, and Journaling. The participants detailed their stress levels before and after the intervention each day and weekly through different means of data collection. The study used pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, daily journals, and weekly questionnaires to track stress levels. The intervention findings show an overall decrease in stress, one participant’s self-efficacy improved, and the other participant’s self-efficacy decreased. Future research should consider a more varied participant base, a longer period of intervention, a control and experimental group, and other forms of data collection.

Keywords: mindfulness, teacher stress, self-efficacy, meditation, self-study
As preservice teachers, the researchers were very excited to get into local classrooms and begin serving the children in their community. However, during their first student teaching placements, they found that excitement and passion among other teachers was tempered by many stressors. These included testing, curriculum, lack of prep time, low pay, and under-supported student needs. During her internship, teachers even advised April to take a close look at the culture of teaching and community views of teaching and reconsider it as a career choice due to the stressors involved in the career. With more experience, April realized her peers from preschool through middle school teachers in Indiana and Wisconsin encounter these stressors. April discovered that teacher stress is very common and affects the mental and physical wellbeing of teachers across America. In fact, the number of peer-reviewed articles on teacher stress, injury, safety or health doubled in the 2000-2009 decade compared to the combined total of all previous articles, and that number continues to increase (Sauter, 2017).

The researchers found, through their time in eight different schools across three states with preschool through middle school students, many teachers experienced the effects of teacher stress. They noticed that, though these teachers may be highly educated, hard-working, good mentors, with strong teaching skills, some commonly took “mental health days.” The researchers also heard some other teachers talk about viable jobs outside of education, exhibiting a lack of happiness, confidence, and self-efficacy in their role as teachers. Underpaid positions also created a source of stress as many teachers took on second jobs or found summer jobs to supplement their income.

Through a combination of research and experience, the researchers found that mindfulness and yoga are increasingly common strategies for stress management. Mindfulness encourages participants to become more aware of emotions without judgment (Aguilar, 2018),
and yoga promotes comfort and awareness of one’s emotional and physical wellbeing (Kyte, 2016). These observations caused the researchers to wonder: what are the effects of mindfulness and meditation on elementary teacher stress levels and self-efficacy? While conducting background research on the effects of mindfulness and yoga on stress, the researchers decided they would conduct a self-study to determine the effectiveness of these activities on teacher stress.

The researchers conducted this self-study to observe the effects practicing meditation and mindfulness over four weeks on teacher stress and self-efficacy. The study included two participants (the researchers) varying in ages, student grade levels, locations of schools, and teaching experience. Each day the participants recorded which stress-reducing activity they participated in and their stress levels before and after the activity. They recorded their overall stress levels weekly, which allowed the researchers to observe changes and trends in stress levels. The researchers also recorded their stress levels at the beginning and end of the study to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theory of self-efficacy was first named as a central part of Albert Bandura’s social cognitive theory in 1977. Self-efficacy is an individual’s self-confidence, belief in the ability to organize and carry out a task, and the ability to control motivation and behavior. This theory addresses the origin, functional properties, and effects of self-efficacy, as well as ways to develop and enlist positive beliefs for personal and social change (Bandura, 2012). People are likely to engage in tasks in which they feel capable - despite the level of challenge - and are similarly likely to avoid duties or activities believed to exceed their abilities (Bandura, 1977).
Furthermore, self-efficacy is the foundation of motivation and success; it affects the way people think and their vulnerability to stress and depression (Bandura, 2012).

Self-efficacy affects the quality of human functioning, including motivation and decision-making processes. Specifically, a person’s belief in their efficacy determines whether they generally think more positively or negatively, or if they think typically in self-enabling or self-debilitating ways (Bandura, 2012). Efficacy beliefs are dynamic and can strengthen through self-care such as reducing anxiety and depression, building physical strength, and regulating emotional states (Bandura, 2012).

Teacher self-efficacy expands on Bandura’s definition and includes a teacher’s perceived preparedness to accomplish the tasks and challenges of their classroom - like planning, organization, and delivering lessons and activities required to reach their educational goals (Kelm & McIntosh, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Tschannen-Moren et al. (1998) noted that teacher efficacy is most malleable at the preservice stage, and teacher training programs should scaffold teaching experiences to allow for small successes and encourage the development of teacher self-efficacy. Research suggests that a teacher’s self-efficacy can protect against stress in the school community (Kelm & McIntosh, 2012) and has a myriad of positive effects such as increased motivation, emotional and professional commitment, as well as higher student achievement and growth (Kalman & Summak, 2017; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) added that teacher self-efficacy is associated with increased job satisfaction and work engagement, as well as decreased burnout and less desire to leave the profession. Tschannen-Moren et al. (1998) also noted that self-efficacy affects a teacher’s level of stress in addition to behavior, effort, goals, and aspirations.
Along with the idea that self-efficacy can decrease teacher stress, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) discussed the reciprocal nature of the relationship - that teacher stress will decrease self-efficacy; therefore, strategies that lower teacher stress will positively affect teacher self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) described self-efficacy essentially as an individual’s belief or confidence in their ability to organize and carry out a task. Since research studies have shown that stress is closely tied to self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012; Kalman & Summak, 2017; Kelm & McIntosh, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007, 2010, 2017), further examination is required to better define teacher stress, how to effectively manage, and positively affect teacher stress to minimize adverse outcomes. It is essential for the well-being of individual teachers and their communities that teacher stress management and coping skills are researched and made available to the educational field. The literature review which follows examines extant research on the topics of teacher stress and burnout as well as the positive effects of mindfulness and meditation on stress.

**Literature Review**

Teaching is an extremely stressful occupation; this stress can be caused by factors like classroom management, peer and classroom relationships, pressures from administration, and documentation or testing requirements (Buchanan, 2017; Chang, 2009; Dean, 2010; Travers, 2017). Different situations evoke different types of stress; teacher stress is defined as negative or unpleasant emotions that result from the work of a teacher (Kyriacou, 2001; Travers, 2017). Prolonged exposure to stress without access to effective coping mechanisms can lead to teacher burnout (Dean, 2010; Kyriacou, 2001; Travers, 2017), which may contribute to teachers leaving the profession. Chang (2009) believed that enabling educators to regulate their emotions could make a positive impact on teacher stress and burnout, and Buchanan (2017) agreed, concluding
that managing stressors through mindfulness and meditation can create an internal shift from exhausted and rushed to energized and relaxed.

This section reviews scholarly work that has been done in the areas of teacher stress, burnout, and stress reduction among educators - specifically mindfulness and meditation. The purpose of this literature review is to examine existing research on teacher stress and burnout, studies related to meditation and mindfulness on educators, and to discuss calls and implications for future research. This literature review will be organized under the following headings: teacher stress and burnout, mindfulness and meditation, mindfulness and teacher stress, and implications for future research.

**Teacher Stress and Burnout**

Stress is defined as a hypothetical construct that exists when an individual responds to an actual environment (Fimian, 1982). Stress is individualized, meaning each person responds to environmental factors differently and perceives stress uniquely according to personal variables. Stress can be a positive or adverse reaction. This research examines stress in the context of an adverse reaction to external and internal factors.

Kyriacou’s (2001) model of teacher stress identifies stress as a negative emotion triggered by a teacher’s perception that the teaching environment is a threat to self-esteem or well-being. The teaching environment can include student behaviors, teacher judgment on oneself or from co-workers, workload, social approval, isolation, class size, student-student relationships, and student-teacher relationships (Chang, 2009; Fimian, 1982). Internal stressors can be summarized as personal competence, conflicting values, expectations, self-fulfillment, deficiencies in the work environment, and self-inflicted stress (Fimian, 1982).
Long term stress can result in teacher burnout. Burnout occurs when a teacher experiences prolonged exposure to stress - which is referred to as chronic stress. Chronic stress can lead to exhaustion, depersonalization, loss of motivation, decreased productivity, and lower teacher retention rates (Chang, 2009). Studies have shown that meditation and mindfulness effectively reduce stress, improve self-efficacy, increase job satisfaction, and decrease emotional exhaustion (Hülsheger et al., 2013).

**Mindfulness and Meditation**

Mindfulness has its roots in Eastern spiritual and Buddhist traditions (Hülsheger et al., 2013). Aguilar (2018) described mindfulness as a mental state in which one is focused and without judgment, living in the present, and aware of one’s emotions. Similarly, other researchers have defined mindfulness as choosing to live fully in the body and becoming more engaged with reality (Buchanan, 2017). Hülsheger et al. (2013) stated that mindfulness has four essential characteristics: (a) a receptive awareness to inner experiences and external events, (b) information processing is pre-conceptual, (c) is a present-oriented consciousness, and (d) is an inherent human capacity that varies between persons.

Mindfulness can be experienced throughout the day by being immersed in emotional, psychological, and physical responses to external events (Hülsheger et al., 2013). One can experience mindfulness throughout the day by focusing on breathing and using breathing techniques, being aware of what one feels or senses at the moment, and taking control of thoughts rather than daydreaming. Any part of the daily routine can be done mindfully by being present and actively accepting the activity.

Mindfulness can also be practiced by being in tune with and using all five senses. For example, mindful eating includes looking at the amount and color of the food, appreciating the
a aroma, exploring its texture, thoroughly enjoying the flavor and texture in the mouth, and
listening to the sounds of the food in hand and the mouth. Experiencing life and paying attention
to what you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste, as well as nonjudgmentally noticing your thoughts
and emotions, is a significant component of mindfulness (Buchanan, 2017).

Mindfulness can be achieved through many outlets, including meditation. Meditation is
learning to cultivate a calm mind, to become quiet, and peaceful (Buchanan, 2017). It is usually
an activity in which one pays attention to breathing and stillness to reach a mindful state. Some
exercises to practice meditation include body scan meditation, sitting meditation, walking
meditation, or guided imagery.

The benefits of mindfulness and meditation to educators include managing stress,
improving attention, self-regulation, emotional intelligence, increased productivity and
effectiveness, feelings of control, greater freedom of action, and less burnout (Aguilar, 2018;
Buchanan, 2017; Hülsheger et al., 2013; Gold et al., 2009).

**Mindfulness and Teacher Stress**

Teachers deal with negative emotions at school many times during a month, week, or day
in response to stimuli like student behavior, documentation requirements, testing pressures, and
perceived locus of control (Buchanan, 2017; Chang, 2009; Dean, 2010; Travers, 2017). There are
two types of response to negative emotions like stress: (a) suppression, which is to ignore the
negative emotion and fake a positive feeling; and (b) reappraisal, or changing the thinking about
an emotion to decrease its impact (Gross, 2002). Chang (2009) and Gross (2002) agreed that
reappraisal leads to greater long-term regulation and coping skills in the face of stress.
Mindfulness is a way to train the brain to notice or observe negative emotions without judgment
Mindfulness practices like managing internal thoughts and observing emotions without passing judgment help teachers reduce stress and maintain resiliency and well-being (Aguilar, 2018; Buchanan, 2017; Gold et al., 2009; Jennings & DeMauro, 2017). Gold et al. (2017) and Jennings and DeMauro (2009) found that mindfulness also reduces anxiety and depression in teachers, and Vitolo (2018) added that mindfulness could improve attitudes toward colleagues and perceptions of school climate. Gold et al. (2009) emphasized that, among other benefits, mindfulness increases teachers’ ability to cope with teacher stress. Vitolo (2018) agreed and added that peer-supported mindfulness-based interventions could have additional positive outcomes among staff in a school.

Kyte (2016) described yoga as a physical mindfulness practice, that helps practitioners gain awareness of the body to maintain happiness and well-being. After an intervention including yoga, breath work, and meditation, Kyte studied the narratives of teacher participants and discovered that these forms of mindfulness can regulate emotions and combat teacher stress, and helped the teachers feel a stronger sense of serenity in their school environment (2016).

**Implications for Future Research**

There are many studies on the causes and effects of teacher stress and burnout (Chang, 2009; Kyriacou, 2001; Vitolo, 2018). There are significantly fewer studies researching ways for teachers to cope with or combat teacher stress and burnout. Some research and studies (Aguilar, 2018; Buchanan, 2017; Chang, 2009; Gold et al., 2009) show that coping strategies to regulate emotions may ease teacher stress and burnout.
To learn how to regulate their emotions, teachers should work toward accurately identifying and reflecting on their emotions (Chang, 2009). Since mindfulness is a way to locate and observe emotions, it may be the perfect practice to ease teacher stress and burnout. Mindfulness appears to have a positive effect on teacher stress, but more diverse and varied studies are necessary to validate existing studies (Jennings & DeMauro, 2017; Vitolo, 2018). Buchanan found that her own experience as a teacher practicing mindfulness positively affected her stress levels (2017). Still, a more substantial and diverse sample size is required to generalize about the effects of mindfulness on teacher stress.

**Conclusion**

Research shows that teachers experience stress as a result of multiple factors. One thing that can help educators work through this stress, reduce teacher burnout, improve self-efficacy, and increase job satisfaction is meditation and mindfulness. This action research project will examine teacher stress and how teachers explore mindfulness and meditation in the hopes that they will experience positive benefits.

**Methodology**

The researchers who developed and carried out this self-study were two teachers from different schools serving elementary- and middle school-aged children. One teacher-researcher had three years of teaching experience in early childhood, a bachelor's degree in early childhood and special education, a Montessori primary certification (ages 3-6), and was working towards her Master's degree. She worked at a day treatment center with elementary and middle school-aged children in the public school district. The second teacher-researcher had six years of experience teaching students from kindergarten through eighth grade, taught in a second-grade classroom at the time of the intervention, had a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a
Montessori elementary certification (ages 6-12), and was working toward her Master's degree in Montessori education.

This self-study used an experimental design to assure objectivity and validity. During a period of four weeks, the researchers spent a short time each day engaged in a mindfulness activity. When preparing for this intervention, the researchers noted that it required a rather significant time commitment of approximately 10-15 minutes per day from the participants due to its self-reporting nature. Still, they determined that this time requirement was necessary for accurate reporting and assessment of the intervention.

The researchers created a list of Daily Mindfulness Exercises (see Appendix A) from which they chose an activity each day, controlling for variations in practice. This list of mindfulness activities included body scan, meditation, yoga, breathing, and journaling. As participants of this self-study, the researchers self-reported their stress and self-efficacy levels through questionnaires before and after each activity, as well as before and after the research project. The researcher-participants also filled out a daily journal about their stress level and mindfulness practice. Major variables in this intervention included participants' ability to choose any mindfulness practice from the list as well as the duration and time of day for each practice. However, these variables were considered acceptable and even necessary for authenticity - so that participants had freedom and ownership of their mindfulness practices. The dependent variables were each participant's stress level after each mindfulness exercise and any long-term change in stress and self-efficacy.

Potential participants - teachers at the schools in which the researchers worked - received an Information and Consent Form (see Appendix B) through an email, hard copy, or both. These potential participants were given a week to respond, and final participants would have then been
given a packet that included all questionnaires, journals, and Daily Exercise resources. Initially two teachers volunteered to participate in the intervention alongside the researchers, but chose not to complete the intervention or include their data in this report. At the start of this intervention, after signing the information and consent form, participants received an intervention packet. This packet included all necessary materials for the four-week study: the Pre-Intervention Questionnaire, 20 copies of the Daily Mindfulness Journal (five per week), four copies of the Weekly Check-In Questionnaire (one per week), and the Post-Intervention Questionnaire. Either the date or the week number (one through four) was labeled on each Daily Mindfulness Journal and Weekly Check-In Questionnaire to keep the forms in chronological order.

Each researcher-participant in this self-study began by filling out the Pre-Intervention Questionnaire (see Appendix C). This self-reported questionnaire was designed to gather information about each participant to determine other variables that may contribute to the effectiveness of the intervention. These variables included years of experience, level of education, classroom makeup, school setting, and initial levels of stress and self-efficacy.

Each day researcher-participants chose a practice from the Daily Mindfulness Exercises resource page (see Appendix A) and used their Daily Mindfulness Journal (see Appendix D) to record the date, time, and type of practice as well as their stress level before and after their mindfulness activity. The journal also included a space to note causes of stress, duration of mindfulness practice, and a reflection on the effectiveness of that day's practice.

At the end of each week, researcher-participants completed the Weekly Check-In Questionnaire (see Appendix E). This questionnaire monitored changes in the stress and self-efficacy of each participant through a short questionnaire each week. This questionnaire recorded
their average stress levels for the week, stress levels compared to the previous week, whether mindfulness affected teacher stress and competence, and if any major stressors occurred that week.

After the intervention, researcher-participants filled out a Post-Intervention Questionnaire (see Appendix F), which mimicked the stress and self-efficacy questions found in the Pre-Intervention Questionnaire and included a reflection regarding participants' perceived effectiveness of mindfulness for stress reduction. Since the stress and self-efficacy questions were identical to and on the same scales as the Pre-Intervention Questionnaire, changes in the responses could reasonably be attributed to the intervention.

Finally, the researchers completed the intervention by reflecting on the process and effectiveness of the intervention using the Researcher Reflection Guide (Appendix G). Guiding questions included how mindfulness affected experiences, emotions, and reactions in the classroom; whether there were any changes in confidence or self-efficacy because of the intervention; potential changes or improvements to the intervention; and whether mindfulness improved stress levels over the course of the intervention. At the conclusion of the research project, both researchers wrote a short narrative following the questions in the Researcher Reflection Guide.

Each data tool had significance in analyzing the effectiveness of this intervention. The Daily Mindfulness Journal helped determine which mindfulness activities were the most beneficial towards reducing stress levels, monitored any occurring events or stressors, and followed the waves of stress levels for each researcher-participant. The Weekly Check-In Questionnaire showed how quickly changes in stress and self-efficacy might take place, whether the changes were constant or not, and whether the reports made on the post-intervention survey
seemed consistent with the trend seen in the weekly surveys. The Pre-Intervention Questionnaire alongside the Post-Intervention Questionnaire showed whether the confidence, stress, and self-efficacy of each researcher-participant were affected by their mindfulness practice over the course of four weeks.

**Analysis of the Data**

The purpose of this self-study was to discover the effects of mindfulness and meditation on teacher stress and self-efficacy. During the study, the two researchers self-selected a mindfulness activity each school day for five days a week, over four weeks. The research design incorporated qualitative data tools, including a pre-intervention questionnaire, daily journal, weekly check-in survey, post-intervention questionnaire, and a researcher reflection to monitor stress and self-efficacy levels.

The subjects of this study, the researchers, were two female teachers in different public schools. They taught students ranging from age three to upper elementary grades, had a range of teaching experience, and both had completed part of a master’s degree. To differentiate the participants, they will be referred to as Teacher 1 and Teacher 2.

**Mindfulness Activities**

Participants used the Daily Mindfulness Exercises resource (see Appendix A) from which they chose their mindfulness activity each day. This resource included options in the categories of yoga, meditation, breathing, body scan, and journaling. Meditation was the most chosen category, followed by body scan and journaling (see Figure 1). It should be noted that Teacher 1 only selected activities from the categories of meditation and body scan (see Figure 2). Her meditation was usually practiced using a mobile app called Headspace (Headspace Inc., 2020).
Teacher 2 practiced activities from all five categories, and her most frequently chosen activities were body scan and journaling (see Figure 3).

**Teacher Stress Levels**

Figure 4 shows how stress levels improved after participants practiced the two most popular activities - body scan and meditation. On average, both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 reported improvement when comparing pre-activity stress levels with post-activity stress levels. Teacher 1 saw a greater average decrease in stress after body scans, and Teacher 2 saw a greater
average improvement after meditation. Stress levels were reported on a scale represented as five faces from a red stressed face (“4” in Figures 5 and 6) to a green stress-free face (“0” in Figures 5 and 6). The term “one level” represents one face either improved or declined from the initial response. On average, stress levels increased by about one level after practicing body scan and increased by about a half level after practicing meditation.

**Figure 4**

*Decrease in Stress Before and After Popular Activities*

![Graph showing stress levels before and after body scan and meditation](image)

In the Weekly Check-In Questionnaire, participants were asked whether the mindfulness practice was taking a lot of time and whether it felt like a nuisance or a help. Two of the five responses to this question referred to a desire to “keep it to a regular time” (Teacher 1, January 17, 2020), and the other three responses confirmed that the mindfulness practice took time out of the day, but “the activities don’t take too long” (Teacher 2, January 17, 2020). Teacher 1 also reported that the mindfulness activity “makes me feel better,” and “feels good” (January 24, 2020). This demonstrates that, despite the time commitment, teachers felt the activities were worthwhile.
In the pre-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix C), participants reported their stress levels related to school and teaching during the previous month. Participants answered the same questions at the end of the study in the post-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix F).

**Table 1**

*Change in Stress as Reported on Pre- and Post-Intervention Questionnaires*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire statements</th>
<th>Teacher 1 pre</th>
<th>Teacher 1 post</th>
<th>Teacher 2 pre</th>
<th>Teacher 2 post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel unable to control the important things in life</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel nervous or stressed</td>
<td>Fairly often</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties are piling so high that you cannot overcome them</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience headaches, stomach pain, or high blood pressure</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel irritable or impatient with students</td>
<td>Fairly often</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with my teaching job</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel overwhelmed with what is expected of me as a teacher</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have doubts about my ability to make a difference in students' lives</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see stress as a problem to be solved, and I believe I can succeed</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My professional opinion counts in the school community</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress from needy students, student behavior, or discipline problems</td>
<td>Extreme stress</td>
<td>Moderate stress</td>
<td>Moderate stress</td>
<td>Some stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress from lesson planning</td>
<td>Moderate stress</td>
<td>Some stress</td>
<td>Slight stress</td>
<td>Slight stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress from taking work home</td>
<td>Some stress</td>
<td>Slight stress</td>
<td>No stress</td>
<td>No stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress from testing and curriculum</td>
<td>Some stress</td>
<td>Slight stress</td>
<td>No stress</td>
<td>No stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Blue highlight indicates responses where both participants improved

There was no major change in the data; however, each question shown in Table 1 represents an improvement of at least one level by one of the teachers, and the questions highlighted in blue show an improvement of one level by both teachers. The data indicates an overall improvement
in reported stress by the two participants. Table 1 shows all questions for which the reported stress level changed from the Pre- to the Post-Intervention Questionnaire. The stress level of both participants improved for the statements “I feel irritated or impatient with students” and to what extent they experience “Stress from needy students, student behavior, or discipline problems.” Teacher 1 further indicated a change in stress related to students in her Daily Journal notes on three occasions: “I noticed myself stop to breathe when I was frustrated with a student today” (January 21, 2020), “I stopped to breathe again during a stressful moment with a student. I feel like the mindfulness practice is really branching out to other times of the day” (January 28, 2020), and “I think [meditation] has really helped control my emotions, especially when taking care of students” (January 31, 2020).

**Figure 5**

*Stress Level Before Mindfulness Practice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Daily Journal (see Appendix D), participants recorded their stress levels before their mindfulness practice each day. Figure 5 shows the participants’ average stress levels before practice each week, as indicated in the Daily Journal tool. The average stress levels were lowest
in weeks 1 and 3 and highest in week 2 - Figure 5 shows that there was no significant increase or decline in stress over the course of this intervention which was not immediately preceded by a mindfulness activity. Teacher 2 reported personal external factors that affected her stress levels in weeks 2 and 4.

Figure 6 compares the average stress level before and after the daily mindfulness practice, as reported in the Daily Journal (see Appendix D). The average stress levels of both participants decreased by half of a level each week with the greatest decrease in Week 1 and the smallest decrease in Week 2. This demonstrates that there is a significant decrease in stress immediately following a mindfulness practice. In the Post-Intervention Questionnaire (see Appendix F), both participants responded that mindfulness is an effective strategy for stress reduction: Teacher 2 said: “Yes, it helps ground me, be more mindful, practice peace, and relax” (January 31, 2020), and Teacher 1 responded with: “Yes. I find myself using mindfulness techniques when in stressful situations, and I feel an overall sense of being less stressed than when I started the intervention” (January 31, 2020). Additionally, participants had the option of recording notes about each mindfulness activity in the Daily Journal. There were seven total entries related to the idea that the mindfulness activity helped or inspired calm, including, “I feel calmer, more ready to go home to other commitments” (Teacher 1, January 6, 2020); “I tried another long session and I’m feeling much better about increasing the duration, I think it makes me more calm afterward” (Teacher 1, January 29, 2020); and “lots of invading thoughts in this meditation today, but as always I still feel better and more relaxed” (January 24, 2020). There were also six journal entries related to the ideas that mindfulness is hard or not effective, including Teacher 1 indicating “I don't feel much different this time” (January 9, 2020), and “I don't feel much better today, I don't know what made this a bad/hard session, maybe too long,
too stressed to be effective?” (January 30, 2020). Additionally, Teacher 1 indicated in three entries that she was using mindfulness techniques outside of the daily practice: “I find myself thinking of meditation and breathing occasionally during the day - both in stressful and relaxing situations” (January 22, 2020).

**Figure 6**

*Stress Levels Before and After Daily Mindfulness Practice*

![Chart showing stress levels before and after daily mindfulness practice](chart.png)

**Teacher Self-Efficacy**

The Pre-Intervention Questionnaire (see Appendix C) and Post-Intervention Questionnaire (see Appendix F) asked each participant to report feelings related to self-efficacy before and after the intervention. The responses indicated in the figures are on a scale of zero to four, with zero representing Strongly Disagree and four representing Strongly Agree. Table 2 examines the results from the questions related to self-efficacy. Findings show positive changes in responses for Teacher 1 and negative changes in responses for Teacher 2.
Table 2

**Self-Efficacy Responses from Pre- and Post-Intervention Questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire statements</th>
<th>Teacher 1 pre</th>
<th>Teacher 1 post</th>
<th>Teacher 2 pre</th>
<th>Teacher 2 post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel unable to control the important things in your life</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel that difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel overwhelmed with what is expected of me as a teacher</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have doubts about my ability to make a difference in students’ lives</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see stress as a problem to be solved, and I believe that I can succeed</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
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</table>

*Note. Blue highlight indicates a more positive answer while yellow highlight indicates a more negative answer.*

Participants responded to two self-efficacy statements in the Weekly Check-In Questionnaire (see Appendix E): (a) My classroom planning and organization skills are effective and (b) I teach lessons and activities which help students reach their academic goals. Responses ranged from Strongly Disagree (0) to Strongly Agree (4). As shown in Figure 7, the average responses of both statements improved during the intervention by half of a point. In the Weekly Check-In Questionnaire, Teacher 2 indicated that mindfulness was having a “positive effect” on her stress and confidence levels (January 10, 2020). Still, Teacher 1 indicated twice that “I don’t think it’s affecting my confidence” (January 24, 2020).

Based on the self-efficacy questions in the Pre- and Post-Intervention questionnaire, self-efficacy may improve or decline based on the teacher involved. However, the self-efficacy responses in the weekly questionnaire show a steady and sustained improvement in self-efficacy.
over the four week intervention. This information demonstrates that mindfulness seems to improve teacher self-efficacy, but results may depend on individual teachers and circumstances.

**Discussion**

This study was designed to determine the effects of mindfulness on teacher stress and self-efficacy. Two teachers engaged in a mindfulness activity each school day for four weeks. Overall, both teachers experienced improved levels of stress. Teacher 1 demonstrated improved self-efficacy, while the self-efficacy of Teacher 2 improved in some areas and decreased in others.

There were five mindfulness activities practiced by the participants in this study: Body Scan, Meditation, Breathing, Yoga, and Journaling. In future studies, breathing could be combined with meditation, because meditation involves controlled breathing which induces
relaxation. The most well-liked mindfulness activities based on frequency of use were Body Scan and Meditation. Of these two, the most effective activity for reducing stress was Body Scan.

Based on the Pre- and Post-Intervention Questionnaires, the most significant changes in stress were based on relationships with students. Both teachers reported that they were less irritated, impatient, and stressed by students and their behaviors. Teacher 1 began actively using breathing and meditation strategies when in stressful situations with students. This information demonstrates that, for these two teachers, mindfulness was effective in managing stress and relationships with students. Both participants recorded that their stress levels either stayed the same or improved immediately after every mindfulness practice for the duration of the intervention. On average, stress improved by about half of a level as indicated on the Daily Mindfulness Journal (Appendix D) after each mindfulness practice. The stress improvement shows that mindfulness had a positive impact on decreasing stress on a short-term basis. However, based on the average stress level reported before each daily mindfulness activity, baseline stress did not improve throughout the intervention; in fact, weeks 1 and 3 showed slightly lower pre-activity stress levels than weeks 2 and 4. This particular result brings into question the potential long-term benefits of mindfulness practice.

The Pre- and Post-Intervention Questionnaire included statements regarding teacher self-efficacy. Based on these statements, Teacher 1’s self-efficacy improved significantly; five out of six statements improved and one stayed the same; but Teacher 2’s self-efficacy diminished; two out of six statements improved and four stayed the same. This indicates that the effect of mindfulness on self-efficacy might vary by individual. However, based on two weekly questions
Overall, the results of this research project indicate that, after only four weeks, mindfulness positively influences teacher stress, specifically concerning relationships with students. The impact on teacher self-efficacy is somewhat positive but inconclusive. Current teachers of students ages 3-12 should strongly consider implementing a mindfulness practice into their daily routine to maximize their interactions with children and minimize the impacts of teacher stress.

**Implications for Future Research**

There are many aspects of this research project that could be expanded in future research. First, a more numerous and varied participant base should be included to test whether there would be similar findings to this study. A broader range of participants would give a more expansive view of the effects of stress reduction and teacher self-efficacy. A longitudinal study could offer more insight about the long-term effects of mindfulness practices on teacher stress and self-efficacy. In addition to a larger experimental group and longer time frame, a control group could be added to the study. The experimental group would receive the intervention while the control group would record their pre and post-intervention stress levels without participating in any of the interventions. Involving a control and experimental group would give researchers an idea of the effectiveness of the intervention.

Second, if researchers collected more specific details about the length of practice, or regulated the duration of practice in some way, they would be able to determine whether the duration of daily mindfulness practice influences stress levels in different ways. The five suggested mindfulness activities could be decreased to four if meditation and breathing were
combined, because many of the meditation activities were related to breathing. Also, the activities provided could be limited to two or three choices in future studies. Limiting the choices would provide researchers with a more conclusive explanation of the effects of each activity and their effectiveness in reducing stress. The majority of activities during this study were practiced for an average of eight minutes a day. Future studies could require participants to engage in stress-reducing activities for 10 to 15 minutes a day to determine if the length of the activity changes the stress levels.

Third, future researchers should also consider the amount of time required of participants during this study. If the quality of data collected and the number of questionnaires were optimized, more teachers might be willing to participate in the research of this type. Another potential improvement is the method of collecting data from the participants. Two additional teachers initially volunteered to participate but did not return their data packets, and a more straightforward process of data collection may have resolved this disconnect. In this study, all questionnaires and surveys were given in a paper-copy format. Teacher 1 indicated that the questionnaires would be more easily completed if offered as an online option, and Teacher 2 preferred to fill out the questionnaires on paper. Future researchers could consider offering both paper and digital options, and email reminders with the digital options included could be set up at the beginning of the study using scheduled emails with most email services.

Although this was a small exploratory study, the results show that mindfulness practice improves teacher stress and has potential to improve teacher self-efficacy. Because teachers experience high levels of stress due to a variety of work associated factors, it would be beneficial and a cost-effective solution to encourage teachers to participate in daily mindfulness activities.
References


https://sophia stkate edu/maed/250
Appendix A
Daily Mindfulness Exercises

You may choose from any of these resources for your daily mindfulness activity. If you have questions or need more resources, please contact the researchers:

April Netz alnetz392@stkate.edu
Lauren Rom lrrom290@stkate.edu

Yoga
1. Yoga with Adrienne on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/user/yogawithadriene
2. Five minute video: https://youtu.be/4C-gxOE0j7s
4. 30 minute video for teachers: https://youtu.be/zRDQqJEuRcw

Meditation:
1. Headspace (free app): available on Android and Apple products
2. Headspace also available at https://www.headspace.com/

Mindfulness
1. Mindful Eating: Think about how the foods texture feels in your hands. What does it smell like? What does it look like? How does it feel in your mouth? Is it soft or crunchy? Is it loud to chew or quiet? Is it cold or warm? Is it spicy, sweet, bitter, or salty?
2. Mindful Breathing: Find a comfortable, relaxed place to sit. Notice your body’s weight, posture, and shape of your body. You may close your eyes if you’d like. Relax your body. Relax any areas of tension or tightness. Tune into your natural breathing. Do you breathe in your chest or abdomen? Notice if your mind starts to wander. Gently redirect your mind back to your natural breathing. After a few minutes check back in with your body. Are there areas of tension or is your body becoming more relaxed? Allow yourself to relax more deeply. Take a few more breaths and slowly open your eyes.

Breathing
1. Square breathing: Breathe in for 3 seconds while going up the square, hold for 3 seconds while going over to the right, let out the breath for 3 seconds while going down, hold for 3 seconds while going to the left back to the beginning corner.
2. Abdomen breathing: Sit in a comfortable chair or lie on the floor with a pillow beneath your knees and head. Place one hand under your ribcage and one hand over your heart. Inhale and exhale through your nose. Notice if you breathe from your abdomen or chest. Practice breathing through your nose and using your abdomen.

Body Scan
1. Sitting or laying flat, close your eyes, focus on breathing in and out slowly, and notice what parts of your body touch the floor or seat. Choose a part of the body to investigate. Focus on the sensations you feel and hear. Be open and nonjudgmental to your observations. Each time you notice your mind wandering, gently refocus it. When you are ready, choose another part of your body to investigate. You may choose to do a few body parts or go through your whole body! At the end of this exploration of bodily sensations, spend a few moments to expand your attention to feeling your entire body breathing freely. Open your eyes if they have been closed. Move mindfully into this moment.
2. 3 Minute Body Scan: https://elishagoldstein.com/videos/3-minute-body-scan/
3. 3 Minute Body Scan Meditation: https://soundcloud.com/mindfulmagazine/3-minute-body-scan-meditation

Journaling
1. Journal five successes in your life or 5 things you are grateful for.
2. Journal three ways you can take care of your body.
3. Journal three positive character traits of yours.
4. Journal one good thing that happened today or yesterday.
5. Finish the thought (choose one): “I feel proud of myself when…” “I forgive myself for…” “Today I accomplished…” “I have the most incredible…”

Appendix B

January 17, 2020

Dear Teacher,

You are invited to participate in a research study to determine the effects of a daily mindfulness routine on teacher stress and self-efficacy. Teacher stress is very common among teachers in every type of school, community, age group, and experience level. Stress can negatively impact collaboration and relationships, emotional stability, and even student outcomes. Mindfulness has been shown to improve emotional regulation, and this research project is designed to observe the impact mindfulness has on teacher stress.

April Netz and Lauren Rom are conducting this research project as part of their Master of Montessori Education degree from St. Catherine University. This project was carefully designed NOT to add stress to the workload of an average teacher, and as a self-directed study you can expect to spend about 10 minutes each weekday as a participant in this study.

The aggregate results of this project will be published through the St. Catherine library. Only the researchers, their advisor, and a project coach will have access to identifiable data for this study. The goal of sharing the final research report is to help other teachers and researchers to improve the well-being of teachers and the educational community. Please note: you will not receive individual feedback or results of your intervention. Your information will be kept confidential; please contact the researchers with questions if this is a concern (information below).

Procedures:
As a participant you will be asked to:
• Participate in a short mindfulness activity on each school day (five days per week) for four weeks. You may choose between yoga, meditation, body scan, breathing or journaling for 3-10 minutes, after which you will document and reflect on your daily mindfulness practices in an easy-to-use journal that will include guided prompts and questions.
• Complete a 5-minute weekly assessment.
• Fill out a pre-assessment assessment and a post-intervention assessment which will help measure the effectiveness of the mindfulness intervention.

This study is voluntary. If you decide you do want to be a participant and have all your data (daily journal and all assessments) included in the study you must sign this form below and return it to April or Lauren by Monday, January 27, 2020.

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 the researchers and your data will be removed. If you decide now that you do not want to participate in this study, you do not need to do anything. There is no penalty for not participating.
If you have any questions, please use the contact information below. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April Netz</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>765/586-3355 <a href="mailto:alnetz392@stkate.edu">alnetz392@stkate.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren Rom</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>907/317-3091 <a href="mailto:llrom290@stkate.edu">llrom290@stkate.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Project Coach</td>
<td>612/695-9922 <a href="mailto:esjohnson5@gmail.com">esjohnson5@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liv</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>651/690-6219 <a href="mailto:otchristensen@stkate.edu">otchristensen@stkate.edu</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

**Opt In**

Your signature below indicates your agreement to both participate in this study and have your data included in the final published report.

______________________________   ________________
Signature of Participant in Research   Date

______________________________   ________________
Signature of Researcher    Date

Appendix C

Pre-Intervention Questionnaire

Name ________________________________

Years of teaching experience ________________________________

Your highest level of education ________________________________

Grade/age level ________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students (circle)</th>
<th>More than 25</th>
<th>Behaviors (requiring intervention)</th>
<th>IEPs</th>
<th>ELL/ESL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School (circle)</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Public Charter</td>
<td>Private Charter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you think mindfulness will be an effective strategy for stress reduction in adults (teachers)? Explain.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

The questions in this survey are directed toward your feelings and thoughts about school and stress during the last month. Your responses are confidential.

How often do you experience each feeling or event?

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

1. How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life _______
2. How often have you felt nervous or stressed _______
3. How often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do _______
4. How often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them _______
5. How often do you suffer from headaches, stomach pains, and/or high blood pressure _______
6. How often have you felt irritated or impatient with students _______
Do you agree or disagree with each statement?
D = Disagree
SD = Somewhat Disagree
N = Neutral
SA = Somewhat Agree
A = Agree

7. I am satisfied with my teaching job ______
8. I am not as idealistic and enthusiastic about teaching as I once was ______
9. I feel overwhelmed with what is expected of me as a teacher ______
10. I have doubts about my ability to make a difference in students’ lives ______
11. I see stress as a problem to be solved, and I believe that I can succeed ______
12. My professional opinion as a teacher counts in the school community ______

Indicate to what degree each of the following aspects of teaching causes you stress.
0 = No stress
1 = Slight stress
2 = Some stress
3 = Moderate stress
4 = Extreme stress

13. Needy students, student behavior, or discipline problems ______
14. Difficult or needy parents ______
15. Lesson planning ______
16. Time to complete all of your duties and responsibilities ______
17. Feeling like you are isolated or like you do not have enough time to work with your colleagues ______
18. Taking work home ______
19. Testing and curriculum ______


Appendix D

**Daily Mindfulness Journal for Week # __________ (Four weeks total)**

Choose a mindfulness activity and practice it for at least 3-10 minutes (or more) before or after school, during breaks, etc. In the box on the right, describe the following:
- Your main cause of stress today (if any)
- How many minutes you practiced mindfulness today
- Reflect on how you liked this practice and if it helped your stress level today.

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<tr>
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<th>Journal/Notes:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>_<em><strong>/</strong></em></td>
<td>Stress level after practice?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Time of practice</td>
<td>Practice: (choose one)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>__ Body Scan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>__ Meditation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>__ Yoga</td>
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<td></td>
<td>__ Journaling</td>
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<td></td>
<td>__ Other (specify) _________</td>
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<td>_<em><strong>/</strong></em></td>
<td>Stress level after practice?</td>
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<td>Time of practice</td>
<td>Practice: (choose one)</td>
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<td>__ Body Scan</td>
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<td>__ Other (specify) _________</td>
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<td>Stress level before practice?</td>
<td><strong>Journal/Notes:</strong></td>
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<td>Practice: (choose one)</td>
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<td>___ Journaling</td>
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<td>Practice: (choose one)</td>
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<td>Stress level after practice?</td>
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Appendix E
Weekly Check-in Questionnaire, available on paper and as a Google Form

1. Stress level at this moment.

2. Average stress level during the past week.

3. My stress this week feels ______ last week.
   more than   less than   the same as

4. My classroom planning and organization strategies are effective.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Disagree    Agree

5. I teach lessons and activities that help my students reach their educational goals.
   1  2  3  4  5
   Disagree    Agree

6. (optional short answer) 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?

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

7. (optional short answer) How is mindfulness affecting your stress and confidence as a teacher?

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

8. Were there any major personal/external factors that overly influenced your stress this week? (circle one)
   Yes       No
Appendix F

Post-Intervention Questionnaire

Name ______________________________________

Is mindfulness an effective strategy for stress reduction? Explain.
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

The questions in this survey are directed toward your feelings and thoughts about school and stress during the last month. Your responses are confidential.

How often do you experience each feeling or event?
0 = Never
1 = Almost Never
2 = Sometimes
3 = Fairly Often
4 = Very Often

1. How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life _______
2. How often have you felt nervous or stressed _______
3. How often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do _______
4. How often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them _______
5. How often do you suffer from headaches, stomach pains, and/or high blood pressure _______
6. How often have you felt irritated or impatient with students _______
Do you agree or disagree with each statement?
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7. I am satisfied with my teaching job _______
8. I am not as idealistic and enthusiastic about teaching as I once was _______
9. I feel overwhelmed with what is expected of me as a teacher _______
10. I have doubts about my ability to make a difference in students’ lives _______
11. I see stress as a problem to be solved, and I believe that I can succeed _______
12. My professional opinion as a teacher counts in the school community _______

Indicate to what degree each aspect of teaching causes you stress.
0 = No stress
1 = Slight stress
2 = Some stress
3 = Moderate stress
4 = Extreme stress

13. Needy students, student behavior, or discipline problems _______
14. Difficult or needy parents _______
15. Lesson planning _______
16. Time to complete all of your duties and responsibilities _______
17. Feeling like you are isolated or like you do not have enough time to work with your colleagues _______
18. Taking work home _______
19. Testing and curriculum _______

Appendix G

Researcher Reflection Guide
As participants in this intervention, April Netz and Lauren Rom (lead researchers) will complete an in-depth reflection regarding the effectiveness of the four-week mindfulness intervention. April and Lauren will make notes based on these guiding questions each week, then complete a thorough reflection once they complete the intervention. In writing this reflection the researchers will respond to the following guiding questions.

- How did practicing mindfulness affect or change you experiences each day?
- Did you notice any change in your emotions and reactions toward students, peers, or administration?
- Do you feel that mindfulness affected your mental or physiological (in the body) responses to stressful situations or pressures?
- Does mindfulness affect your confidence level or self-efficacy as an effective teacher in the classroom?
- What could have made mindfulness or this intervention more enjoyable?
- Has mindfulness improved your stress level over the course of this intervention?