

St. Catherine University

**SOPHIA**

---

Masters of Arts in Education Action Research  
Papers

Education

---

12-2021

## **Sustaining Teacher Resilience for Montessori Education**

Rebecca Britt

Follow this and additional works at: <https://sophia.stkate.edu/maed>



Part of the [Early Childhood Education Commons](#)

---

Sustaining Teacher Resilience for Montessori Education

Submitted on December 9, 2021

in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

Rebecca Britt

Saint Catherine University

St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Abstract

The purpose of this action research self-study was to determine the effects of a sustainable self-care practice on the resilience of an unemployed, mid-career Montessori early childhood teacher. This 4-week intervention consisted of twenty 20-minute sessions with meditation, yoga, and/or inspirational readings. Data was measured using a pre- and post-resilience survey, a daily adjective checklist, and a daily reflective journal. An increase in resilience was demonstrated by the resilience survey and self-assessed in journal entries, suggesting that taking time each day for personal self-care can positively impact resilience. Further research should include a larger and diverse study group of full-time teachers, longer or shorter daily intervention times, and a longer intervention period to determine further sustainability of the practice. This research will inform my practice as a teacher both personally and professionally, with consistency of teacher effectiveness being the greatest professional benefit.

*Keywords:* Montessori, teacher resilience, teacher self-care, self-study

The Covid-19 pandemic's effect on education has made it obvious that teachers are critically important to society. Despite this realization, however, little has changed to support teachers in their work. Although teaching can be rewarding, the responsibility to educate and care for children is taxing, even in the best of circumstances. Pressure from parents, administrators, and school districts is high, while professional support and wages remain low, resulting in high teacher turnover rates (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Gu & Day, 2013). To meet job demands, teachers need to be able to maintain their resilience. Resilience, or the ability to recover from adversity, can sustain teachers and increase their efficacy (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2013; Mansfield et al., 2016; Park et al., 2020).

I am a teacher who has felt unsupported by her school administration. This led to my realization that, when experiencing a lack of support, it is important for individual educators to have their own inner resilience to support both their work and their continued growth. The personal nature of this inquiry lends itself well to the self-study. I decided to look within myself to discover what supports my learning, my spiritual and emotional health, and my physical health. What practices, what books, what relationships have contributed to my growth as a Montessori teacher? As Montessori education supports the development of the whole child (Montessori, 1965), the whole teacher also needs support.

The literature leaves a gap regarding sustainability of practice: how can I, as a teacher, continually bolster my resilience? It became apparent in my reading that environment (context) impacts resilience, perhaps more so than our individual tendencies (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019). However, if teachers are unemployed or beginning work in a new environment, what individual supports do they have in place? Knowing that context is critical, how can people

without that context support themselves? While recognizing that schools desperately need to become accountable for their role in supporting teacher wellness, this study seeks to explore ways in which teachers can cultivate sustainable self-care practices to bolster their individual resilience.

Montessori teachers have at their disposal a pedagogy rooted in observation of the child and scientifically supported, evidence-based practice (Lillard, 2007). The preparation of the teacher is paramount to creating a high-fidelity Montessori classroom, but beyond the initial preparation, little is outlined for continuing this practice. Considering this, this self-study took place over four weeks at my home to determine the sustainability of a self-care practice to support my resilience as a mid-career teacher as I complete my master's program and consider next steps in my career as a Montessori educator.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Because I am interested in applying aspects of Montessori philosophy to adult self-care practice, the theoretical framework utilized for this research is from Dr. Maria Montessori's theory. Specifically, three aspects of Dr. Montessori's philosophy will be considered and applied to this study: Spiritual Preparation of the Adult, the Prepared Environment, and the role of choice in education.

#### **Spiritual Preparation of the Adult**

Dr. Montessori called for teachers to look inwardly and work to eliminate personal deficiencies that prevent them from assisting the child (1965). "The first step an intending Montessori teacher must take is to prepare herself" (1995, p. 276). This dovetails easily with another of Dr. Montessori's theories, the Prepared Environment, as "care for one's own person

must form part of the environment in which the child lives; the teacher herself is the most vital part of his world” (Montessori, 1995, p. 277).

### **The Prepared Environment**

Once teachers have considered their own obstacles and worked to correct them, they prepare the physical environment for the child. This environment contains the tools the children need to grow into the adults they will become (Montessori, 1965). The classroom environment begins with furniture that is sized for children; the didactic materials for the corresponding stages of development are available in the classroom on shelves that the children can access easily. Most of the material is not duplicated and must be shared by all the children in turn (Lillard, 2007). This prepared environment offers the children work that will support their learning without distracting them with unnecessary obstacles to their development.

### **The Role of Choice**

Within the prepared environment, Dr. Montessori observed that children are eager to choose work that speaks to them (1965). This tendency was first observed at the Casa dei Bambini, Dr. Montessori’s first school. One day when the teacher arrived late, she discovered that the children had made their own choices for work from a cabinet that had not been locked. They chose work they felt drawn to do and Dr. Montessori took this to mean “that the children now knew the various objects and were able to choose among them” (1965, p. 136). This practice continues today, however as Lillard explains “an abundance of options is not associated with well-being” (2007), hence the limited number of available materials per classroom environment previously mentioned. Dr. Montessori contended that children respond to their instinct, which urges them toward life-giving experiences and learning (1995). In this way, they

develop the freedom required for true learning. Although adults may not be as attuned to this instinct, it is still accessible to them with practice and beneficial to their performance and well-being when engaged (Lillard, 2007). Adults, too, can make choices that contribute to their growth.

This research will apply the principle of the Prepared Environment to a teacher's resilience-building through curation of a variety of activities that are of particular value to the individual. This research will also rely on the importance of choice regarding the teacher's own selection of self-renewal activities as part of this "prepared environment." As these principles of the Prepared Environment and individual choice are applied in Montessori schools for the benefit of children, this research will explore the potential benefits of applying them to a teacher's effort to build resilience as a means of ongoing spiritual preparation.

The following section reviews the literature pertaining to teacher resilience and how it relates to this research regarding creation of a sustainable self-renewal practice for a Montessori teacher.

### **Literature Review**

Research has shown that, for many teachers, working with children and guiding their academic growth contributes positively to teachers' job satisfaction (Arnup & Bowles, 2016). However, with great opportunity comes with great responsibility. The daily mindfulness required to organize learning opportunities for multiple children, redirect some of those same children, communicate clearly with parents, collaborate with colleagues, and satisfy requirements from administration and the school district can be detrimental to teachers' well-being (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019). This professional diminishment has been shown to contribute to a teacher retention crisis in many countries recently (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019;

Arnup & Bowles, 2016). Lower job satisfaction and lower resilience among teachers often predict an increased intention of leaving the teaching profession (Arnup & Bowles, 2016). However, research also suggests that teachers' resilience can bolster their ability to manage challenging aspects of teaching (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Bobek, 2002; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2013; Mansfield et al., 2016; Park et al., 2020).

Resilience is best supported when a teacher has the personal traits and practices to do so while being part of a supportive work community (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019). However, resilience fluctuates depending on many factors. Some of these factors are out of the teacher's control, but others may be cultivated as a buffer for stressful times. The literature reviewed here examines the role of protective factors, both social and personal, to understand how best to support teacher well-being and resilience.

In a Montessori setting, some of the stressors facing teachers in a traditional school may be alleviated. For example, the Montessori method utilizes what is known as the three-year cycle, in which children remain in the same classroom community for three years. Working with the same children for three years in an environment individualized for their needs can be very satisfying (Lillard, 2019). Nevertheless, relationships with parents, staff, administration, and students can remain stressful, even in a healthy environment. To date, there is very little research regarding the resilience of Montessori teachers. With this in mind, this literature review seeks to explore how the creation of a sustainable self-care practice affects the resilience of a Montessori teacher.

### **Resilience Defined**

Resilience develops when difficulties arise (Bobek, 2002). It is the ability to recover from these difficulties, but it is not simply that. Resilience is not a stable construct, nor is it

innate (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Gu & Day, 2013). It is a dynamic state that fluctuates (Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2013; Mansfield et al., 2016) and can be learned (Gu & Day, 2013). Building resilience requires the interaction of both stressors and protective factors (Doney, 2013). Even as resilience fluctuates depending on current life events, building a storehouse of influential factors helps weather these uncertainties (Bobek, 2002). Resilience theory focuses on strengths, not deficits, increasing the probability that interventions build their capacity (Doney, 2013).

### **The Need for Teacher Resilience**

A teacher's work is comprised of many variables from day to day. Gu and Day (2013) found that teachers themselves perceived resilience "as being closely allied to their everyday capacity to sustain their educational purposes and successfully manage the unavoidable uncertainties which are inherent in the practice of being a teacher" (p. 22). These unavoidable uncertainties include student behavior, colleague relationships, relationships with school leaders, parent/teacher communications, district/state testing requirements, and heavy workloads. These, of course, converge with unforeseen life events, often threatening a teacher's ability to work effectively. Or at all. The effects of such stressors on new teachers result in as many as 30-50% leaving the profession within five years (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Gu & Day, 2013). Arnup and Bowles (2016) found that lower resilience and lower job satisfaction often increase teachers' plans to leave the profession. Teachers beginning their careers are particularly reliant on support from colleagues and school administration for career success and self-efficacy. Taken together, these stressors can be more easily managed by teachers with higher resilience

## **Factors Influencing Teacher Resilience**

### ***Social Support***

Researchers generally agree that a strong school community is needed to support teachers (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Doney, 2013; Gu & Day, 2013; Park et al., 2020). A school administration that supports teachers in their daily work and communicates effectively with staff is the basis for a solid community (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019).

Additionally, acknowledging teachers' need for professional development and providing those opportunities supports teachers in their career growth (Bobek, 2002; Gu & Day, 2013; Mansfield et al., 2016). Strong colleague connections also provide grounding during difficult times, both professionally and personally (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Bobek, 2002). Positive feedback from parents regarding their children's development helps teachers feel effective in their efforts (Bobek, 2002). This feedback is critical in constructing solid footing for teachers' self-efficacy. Outside of the school context, familial support and friendships also support teacher resilience (Doney, 2013; Mansfield et al., 2016).

In a 3-year study of 300 primary and secondary teachers in England, 73% maintained their perceived resilience over the three years (Gu & Day, 2013). Two teachers in this study whose resilience remained high throughout this time were interviewed for a closer look at their success. These teachers, one early-career and one mid-career, said that the workplace context contributed the most to their resilience. For the early-career teacher, her positive work environment and high student achievement helped her build self-efficacy for her new work. Having a good relationship with both students and colleagues was also meaningful. For the mid-career teacher, strong staff relationships helped her weather school inspections and a heavy workload. These relationships were particularly helpful as her home responsibilities and

commitments increased over the years, as well. These teachers confirm the importance of a strong social context for resilience.

### *Self-care*

Self-care refers to a person's efforts to maintain health and well-being. The literature reveals that self-care is an essential part of building resilience (Park et al., 2020). Teachers often perceive self-care as selfish "as well as a luxury" (Park et al., 2020, p. 8), but it is necessary for resilience building. A study by Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019) revealed that of the individual factors assessed, self-care was the most critical predictor of wellbeing. Doney refers to individual skills associated with stress reduction, such as "problem solving, maintaining a sense of purpose, having a sense of humor, and maintaining self-efficacy" (2013, p. 654). Bobek contends that new teachers need to "be lifelong learners" (2002, p. 203). The study of 466 childcare teachers by Park et al. (2020) maintains that teachers must care for themselves in order to care for the children in their charge. Teachers often neglect their own needs, believing that considering the needs of the children is more important. However, if these two are not balanced, this self-neglect can affect job performance over time. Teachers need to find work-life balance and to consider their self-renewal part of their job. In a review of literature regarding teacher resilience practices, Mansfield et al., (2016) contend that using wellbeing activities to enhance physical wellness, as well as creating good work-life balance, support teacher resilience.

However, it should be noted: acknowledging the need for self-care does not exempt schools from providing teacher support and resources (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019). Emphasis on teachers' individual resources should not result in overworking teachers while laying the onus for resilience-building on them alone. Teachers may have the most control over their personal

resilience factors, but the social context in which they work should be no less supportive of teacher resilience because of this (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019).

## **Teacher Resilience and Montessori**

### ***The Need for Resilience***

There seems to be a dearth of research regarding the resilience of Montessori teachers. Lillard (2019) found that Montessori teachers report high levels of job satisfaction, even, in some cases, when they do not feel supported by their school administration. The reasons for this include spending three years working with the same students, satisfaction with the method and its student-led environment and feeling that their training prepares them to understand children and their needs. Lillard contends that “it is possible that people who were already predisposed to enjoy teaching more (regardless of type of teaching) might self-select to teach in the Montessori way” (p. 944). However, while this environment is beneficial for adults as well as for children, it is not without its stressors; Montessori teachers face many of the same daily challenges that all teachers face.

### ***Montessori’s Spiritual Preparation***

The Montessori method begins with the “Spiritual Preparation of the Guide,” which creates an initial understanding that the teacher’s honest introspection and commitment to inner preparation for the work set the tone for the whole environment (Montessori, 1965). The teacher’s next job is to prepare this environment for the child’s use. As keepers of the environment, Montessori teachers not only care for the classroom, but for themselves. “So, care for one’s own person must form part of the environment in which the child lives; the teacher herself is the most vital part of his world” (Montessori, 1995, p. 277).

Dr. Montessori was precise on this point. What she referred to as the “spiritual preparation” of the teacher is an inward look at the “obstacles which make the child incomprehensible to him” (1965, p. 116). She calls for teachers to begin by ridding themselves of their deficiencies, particularly anger and pride, and to become humble as they create an environment in which children can begin to become the adults they are meant to be. This requires a calm, grace, and gentleness that is sometimes easier imagined than achieved. Yet beyond Dr. Montessori’s initial instructions for teacher preparation, there is little in the way of continued guidance.

### ***Using Montessori Principles to Build Resilience***

The discovery of the self is a core principle of Montessori education (Montessori, 1965). Wolf (1996) encourages teachers to discover their true selves and then teach from this authentic place. By maintaining a sense of “humility and awe” (p. 36), teachers can be their best as they support students. Wolf questions whether ongoing personal development of Montessori teachers is possible to maintain contact with their true selves and suggests that teachers keep a “spiritual journal” with which to guide their own journeys while also “nurturing the spiritual growth of children in the classroom” (p 38). Therefore, development of introspective self-care seems to be a natural extension for Montessori teachers seeking to continue their personal and professional growth.

Montessori teachers guide children through the prepared environment to become the people they are meant to be (Montessori, 1965). Teachers could employ this same principle the Montessori method espouses for students to prepare their own “environments.” By choosing well-cultivated tools that are personally significant, teachers could create their own

resilience-building practices. These practices should remain dynamic, serving teachers' changing needs throughout different stages of their careers. In turning their attention inward, Montessori teachers could potentially build the necessary resilience required to continue following the child.

### **Conclusion**

Research on teacher resilience suggests that some combination of personal attributes and supportive school context contribute most to high levels of teacher resilience, although the literature varies regarding which of these is of greater value. More research seems necessary to determine which specific attributes contribute the most. The literature proposes that future research could include an investigation of which resources are most important in building teacher resilience (Mansfield, et al., 2016) and ways to nurture resilience (Gu & Day, 2013). While Montessori education focuses a great deal on the spiritual preparation of teachers, little specific information is available to support the continuation of this practice.

Teachers have less control over some contextual factors, but they have more control over their personal attitudes and approaches to their work. Doney suggests that “continuous and varied experiences provide a teacher with a greater repertoire of coping mechanisms” (2013, p. 660). With this in mind, this action research self-study aims to apply Dr. Montessori's educational theories of the Spiritual Preparation of the Adult, the Prepared Environment, and the importance of choice for the individual to discover how creation of such an individualized repertoire affects the sustained resilience of a Montessori teacher.

### **Methodology**

This research was designed as a self-study to determine the impact of a daily self-care practice on my resilience. At the time of this study, I was a 51-year-old unemployed Montessori

primary teacher with 13 years of Montessori teaching experience. I am a White, cisgender female; my family is of upper-middle class means. The research was conducted at my home in the midwestern United States.

The variables that affected this research were not what I originally anticipated. I was unemployed at the time of this study, so my resilience for my work as a Montessori primary teacher was not assessed in the way I had hoped. However, I was focused on next steps in my Montessori career, which required resilience. Personally, my mother was diagnosed with cancer just before I began my data collection; some of my focus, therefore, shifted from professional to personal concerns. As a result, my resilience was tested personally and professionally. These very circumstances surrounding my research illustrate the importance of resilience and our inability as humans to completely separate ourselves from our work.

The organization of this intervention was inspired in part by a video by Dr. John Spencer entitled “How to Own Your Professional Learning” (2020). This video suggests considering professional development more broadly. It refers to content curation of materials that allow critical thinking and celebration of one’s interests (1:21). It considers self-care activities and creative exploration as a means of enhancing professional development (3:21). “Ultimately, professional development is deeply personal and idiosyncratic. There is no single right way to do it” (3:39). This, along with Montessori’s theory of the Prepared Environment, inspired the creation of a dynamic self-care tool kit that would be easy to incorporate into my daily activities and commitments.

Before the intervention began, I chose three self-care options: meditation, yoga, and inspirational readings. These became my Prepared Environment for resilience support for this research. These options were chosen due to my personal interest in them, which I hoped would

enhance my desire to engage with them daily. Research has also shown that daily mindfulness practices, including meditation and yoga help decrease teacher stress (Netz & Rom, 2020; Vitolo, 2018). The purpose of these specific self-care practices was to enhance my personal wellness as well as my professional acuity. Meditation and yoga were chosen due to my affinity for the practices and my desire to incorporate them both into my self-care with more regularity. The inspirational readings were chosen to bolster my efficacy as a teacher by expanding my knowledge in educational philosophy and general self-help.

### **Meditation**

I have practiced meditation intermittently over the last several years; I have taken a meditation class, used guided audio recordings, and meditated individually and in small groups. Although I have found it helpful as a way to stay in the present moment, I have not made it a regular habit. I decided to include it in my research because of its value to me in the past and because of my desire to make it a more regular practice. During meditation, I practiced sitting quietly for up to 20 minutes at a time. I focused on my breathing at a normal breathing rate in order to be aware of the present moment. I did not use any guided meditation recordings.

### **Yoga**

I chose the yoga sequence known as the Sun Salutation. I used a graphic (Appendix A) that demonstrates each pose in this long-practiced yoga sequence, which is done slowly and mindfully and can be repeated as desired. I have had some practice with this yoga sequence, which made it an easy way to incorporate yoga into my practice.

### **Inspirational Readings**

The four books I chose to include as inspirational self-care options are *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown, *Releasing the Imagination* by Maxine Greene, *Teaching to Transgress*

by bell hooks, and *The Secret of Childhood* by Maria Montessori. (These are also listed in Appendix B). I chose these books due to my interest in them as professional development tools. While I have read Dr. Montessori's *The Secret of Childhood* several times, I had not read the other three books before this research study. These books are a combination of Montessori philosophy and educational theories which were new to me, which I was eager to learn more about. I allowed myself the option of choosing to read from whichever book seemed most valuable to me each day. I gravitated toward two books during this intervention, not choosing one of the books at all during the 20 days of data collection and choosing another book only once.

I practiced one or more of these self-care options each weekday (Monday through Friday) from August 15 to September 11, 2021. This resulted in 20 self-care sessions. I engaged with the self-care options of my choosing each day for 20 minutes total. I did not limit myself to a particular time of day in an effort to make the intervention more accessible, although I did complete all 20 minutes at the same time. One or more options were chosen on any given day; the intent of this was to discover if utilization of a variety of self-care options would increase the sustainability of the practice. This was influenced by the Montessori educational theory regarding the benefits of choice in children's educational engagement (Lillard, 2005). In creating a prepared environment of self-care support, I also hoped to employ Dr. Montessori's theory of the Prepared Environment, having tools at the ready to fortify my resilience.

The data collected for this research consisted of both qualitative and quantitative measures. Because this is a self-study, the nature of the research is personal; I wanted to be able to evaluate my impressions of the intervention's impact qualitatively to study any emerging patterns in the data. But I also wanted to analyze the impact of the intervention statistically, so I

employed a resilience survey, as well. A pre- and post-intervention resilience assessment entitled the Resilience Scale™ began and completed the study. A daily intervention method tally sheet (Appendix C), a daily adjective checklist (Appendix D), and a daily reflective journal were utilized to determine my resilience measurement each day, as well as the intervention methods used.

### **Resilience Survey™**

The survey used in this research to determine both baseline and post-intervention data was the Resilience Survey™. I completed this survey the day before beginning my intervention and again the day after completing the research. This 25-question Likert scale measures what it considers 5 foundational characteristics of resilience: purpose, perseverance, equanimity, self-reliance, and existential aloneness, or authenticity. The scale devotes 5 questions to each of these characteristics. Possible scores range from 1 to 7 for each question, with a higher score indicating higher resilience.

Purpose is considered the foundation for the other four characteristics and refers to “a sense of one’s own meaning or purpose in life” (Wagnild, 2009, p. 16). Perseverance is defined as the “determination to keep going despite difficulties, discouragement, and disappointment” (p. 16). Equanimity refers to “having a balanced approach to life” and “avoiding extreme responses” to events (p. 17). “Self-reliance is based on a clear understanding of your capabilities and limitations” (p. 17). Existential aloneness, or authenticity, refers to being comfortable with yourself just as you are and realizing that “(w)e must face alone much of what we face in life” (p. 17).

**Daily Interventions Tally Sheet**

I created a tally sheet (Appendix C) to record which intervention/s were chosen each weekday, as well as the number of minutes spent with each intervention. I allowed myself to spend any number of minutes with any combination of activities each day, limiting the total number of minutes to 20 daily. I chose to work within the 20-minute daily limit to increase the sustainability of the practice.

**Daily Adjective Checklist**

A tool utilized to qualitatively indicate my emotional state during the intervention was the Daily Adjective Checklist (Appendix D). I created this list by choosing 12 emotions with which I identify clearly and distinctly. I felt that these emotions best articulated the variety of emotions I would most likely experience each day. Six of these are considered positive emotions and six are considered negative, and I arranged them in random order on the checklist.

Each day of the intervention, I chose one adjective that I felt best described my emotional state for the day. I did not designate a particular time of day for this activity but relied on my strongest inner feeling that day to guide the selection. Generally, I would select the day's adjective after my intervention, but not always; if a particular emotion was dominating my consciousness on a particular day, I selected it as soon as it registered as such.

**Daily Reflection Journal**

My qualitative research also consisted of journaling to contemplate the effects of events and activities surrounding my feelings of resilience. Journaling took place after I engaged with the intervention materials. This was intended to be a daily practice on weekdays during the intervention period, but in actual practice, I journaled 19 times (I missed two days and journaled twice one day). I concluded the journal with one post-intervention entry written ten days after

the intervention concluded. The contents of this journaling practice will be evaluated later in this section.

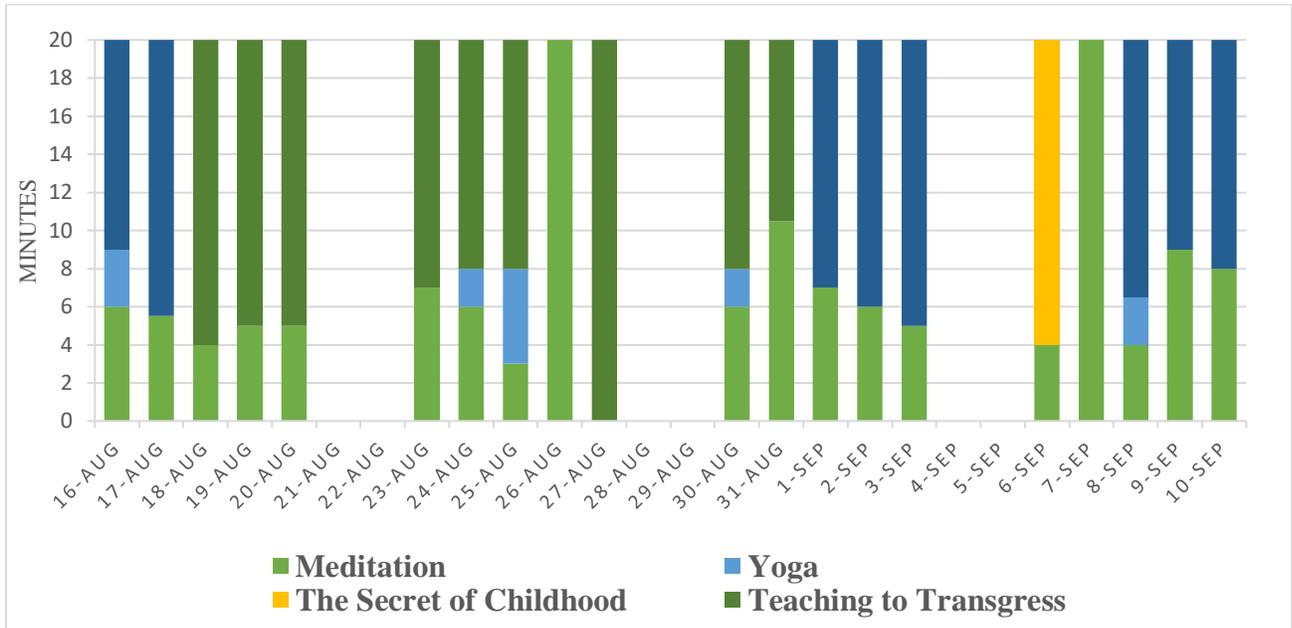
### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of my intervention was to determine how the creation of a sustainable self-care practice would affect my resilience. I organized the intervention to include activities that I find beneficial to my relaxation and focus or that I find intellectually and professionally stimulating. The curation of these tools provided me with a prepared environment (Montessori, 1995) that I could easily use each weekday.

I began my research by taking the Resilience Scale™ (Wagnild, 2009) survey to record a quantitative baseline level of my resilience. During the intervention, I spent 20 minutes each weekday with one or more of the curated activities: meditation, yoga, and inspirational reading. I did not set a particular time to do so each day in an effort to make the intervention as user-friendly as possible; I hoped that flexibility in scheduling and design would provide the greatest likelihood for adherence to the intervention plan. I would then record the number of minutes spent with each intervention that day on an Interventions Tally Sheet (Appendix C). The results of this measurement are shown in Table 1. Of the 20 days recorded, 17 days included two or more intervention selections, while 3 days included one choice (meditation twice and reading once). My utilization of multiple materials in this Prepared Environment (Montessori, 1965) appears to have supported my desire for choice.

**Figure 1**

*Intervention Types Used Each Day*

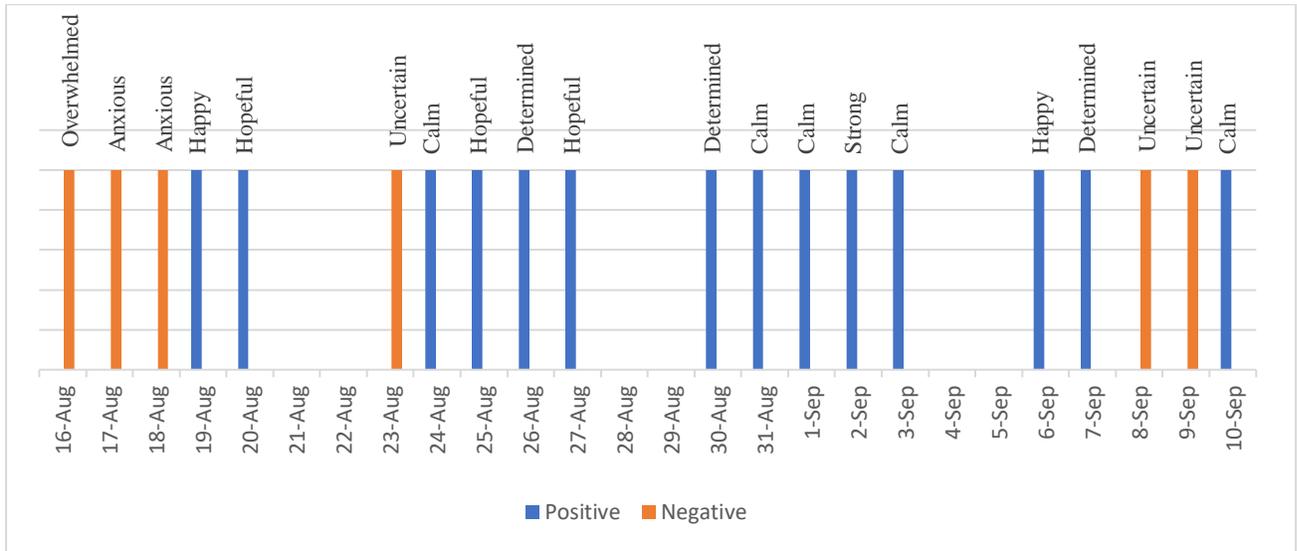


**Daily Adjective Checklist Results**

In evaluating the results of my Daily Adjective Checklist, I found that I chose 8 of 12 possible adjectives throughout the intervention—5 positive and 3 negative emotions. I chose “calm” most frequently—25% of the time—while “determined”, “hopeful”, and “uncertain” were each chosen 15% of the time. “Anxious” and “happy” were chosen 10% of the time and “strong” and “overwhelmed” were each chosen once (5%). Overall, I chose “positive” emotions 70% of the time and “negative” emotions 30% of the time.

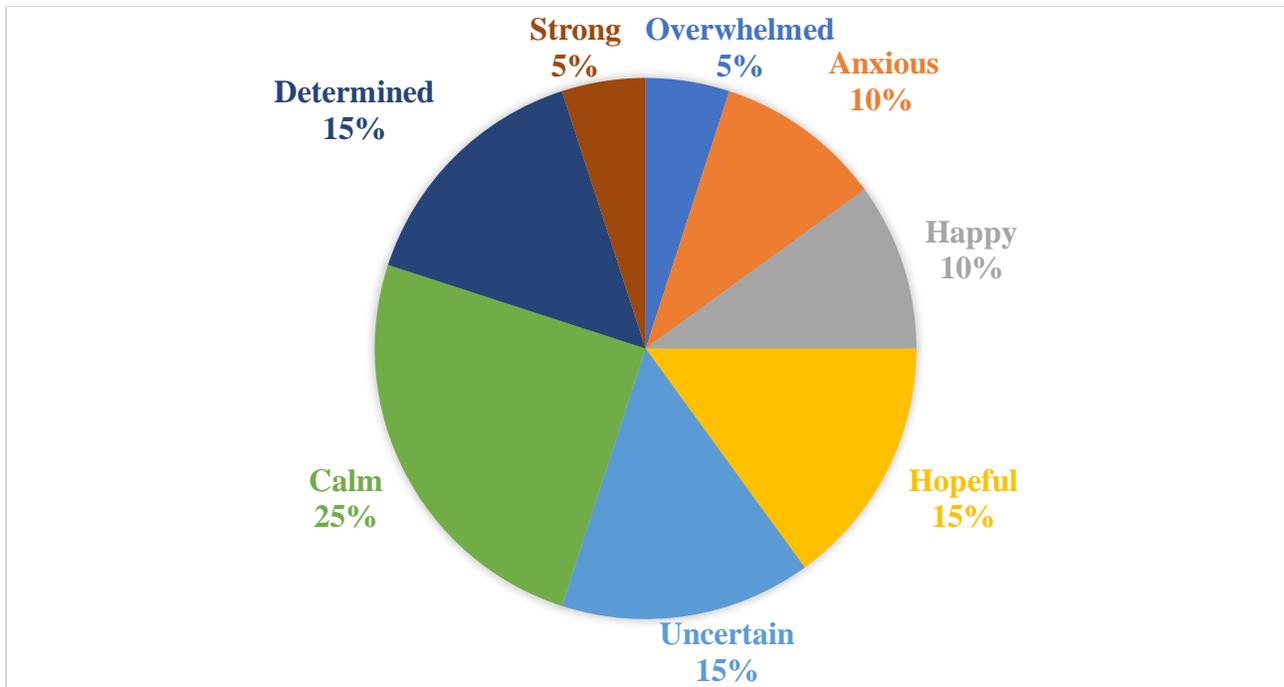
**Figure 2**

*Positive vs. Negative Emotions*



**Figure 3**

*Daily Adjective Checklist Results*



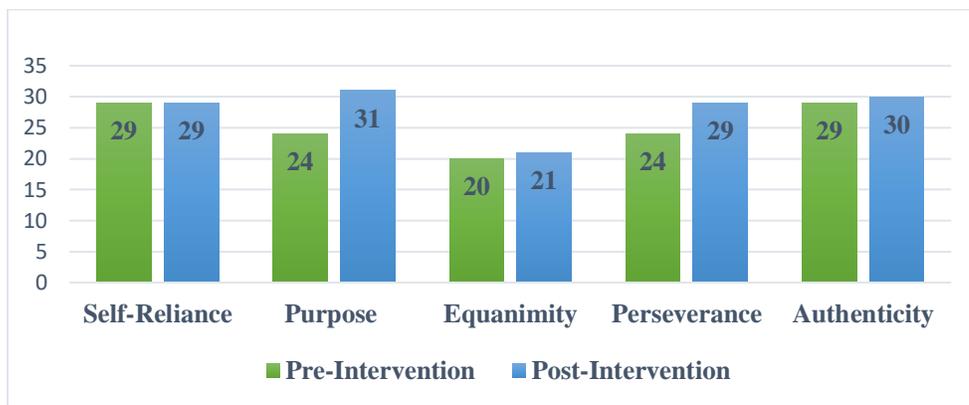
*Note:* Figure 3 represents the frequency of emotions chosen over the 20-day intervention period.

### Resilience Scale™ Results

A comparison of my pre- and post-intervention survey results revealed score increases for the questions regarding purpose (7 points), perseverance (5 points), authenticity (1 point), and equanimity (1 point), while the self-reliance score remained the same (Figure 2). The purpose score difference represents a 20% increase, while the perseverance score increased by 14% over the four-week intervention period. This limited data appears to support the literature's claim that self-care is essential to resilience-building (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Park et al, 2020).

### Figure 4

*Resilience Scale™ Results*



### Journal Results

The journal responses revealed the presence of a few themes in this self-study. Over the course of the 19 journal entries, family was discussed 12 times, work was discussed 7 times, hope was mentioned 6 times, and the concept of accepting change was discussed 4 times. These specifics revealed my mindset and areas of focus, both personally and professionally, at the time of this research. Concerns about my family and my work were prevalent throughout the journal entries, as were feelings of hope and an acknowledgement of my need to accept change more gracefully.

The results of the post-intervention Resilience Scale™ score showed increases in the areas of Purpose and Perseverance. In analyzing journal entries regarding purpose and perseverance, I found several entries that indicate my contemplation of these themes (Table 2).

**Table 1**

Purpose	Perseverance
"I am unemployed which...does nothing to make me feel like an empowered adult or worker."	"I feel encouraged that spending a little time each day for myself--20 minutes-- will help me feel more resilient over time."
"I am navigating my way through...professional questioning...I am learning and considering what comes next professionally."	"I am realizing this morning that my ability to move forward will be bolstered by my ability to accept my mom's life with cancer as the new state of things. The time for 'what if' must be over so that I can not only accept this change, but, hopefully, embrace it as reality in order to see a way forward."
"Right now, I feel a little unmoored because I do not have a job...I miss being surrounded by the buzzy energy of children."	"Today I feel calm.... It isn't necessarily that everything is fine--just that everything is what it is, and I am present with that. This letting go brings me a certain degree of peace in the center of what feels like chaos. But that chaos is as much a part of this life as is the calm.... Today I feel more open to listening to that."
"Today I feel strong, like what I do can make a difference."	"Today I am engaged with not knowing. That is what it is. I am open to uncertainty today."

In Table 1, the first three journal entries in the Purpose column were written on days that I read from bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*. Perhaps reading about teaching practice influenced my examination of my own teaching career on those days more specifically. The last entry in that column was written after reading from *Emergent Strategies* by adrienne maree brown and indicates a more positive reflection of my potential purpose. I meditated on each of

these four days as well and did a few minutes of yoga practice on the day the third entry was written.

The four chronological journal entries quoted in the column entitled Perseverance illustrate a desire to build resilience (first entry) and a consideration of what is necessary for creating this mindset—namely, acceptance of reality (second and third entries). The fourth entry indicates a resolution to accept uncertainty; this last entry was written on Day 18 of the intervention period.

Journal analysis also revealed a change in the way one emotion was considered (Table 2).

**Table 2**

Uncertain as a Negative Emotion	Uncertain as a Positive Emotion
"I am worried and scared about how everything will go."	"I am realizing that uncertain is just that--neither positive nor negative, really, but somewhere where both possibilities exist.... Today I am engaged with not knowing. That is what it is. I am open to uncertainty today."
	"I am considering uncertainty as a positive more all the time.... now I see uncertainty as an openness, which isn't always comfortable to me, but it is becoming more so over time."
	"Today I feel a little more frightened...I feel unsure.... But I can also see the possibility of peace, of happiness even, in this uncertainty, and this brightens my outlook a little."

On August 23 (Day 6 of the study), I chose “Uncertain” as my emotion; my mother received her chemotherapy treatment plan that day and it left me feeling “worried and scared about how

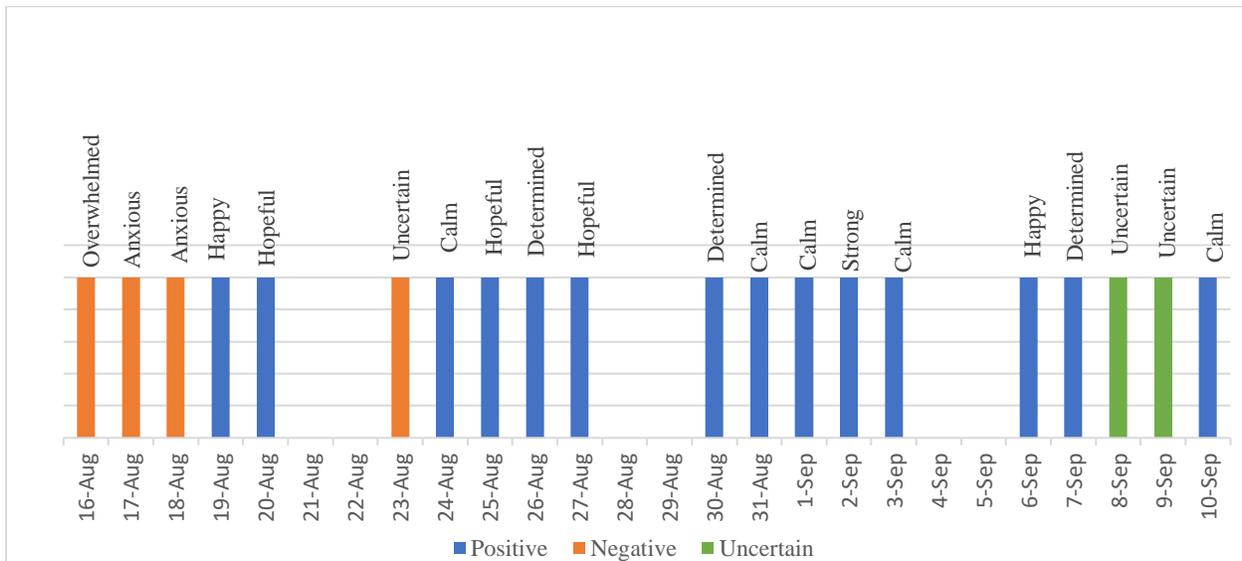
everything will go”. On this day I chose “Uncertain” to represent negative feelings I was having about not knowing the future.

On September 8 and 9 (Days 18 and 19 of the study), I also chose “Uncertain” as the adjective that most spoke to me, but my journal entries reveal a different mindset regarding the word. On Day 18, I journaled, then stopped to read from brown’s *Emergent Strategies*, then resumed journaling. I discussed brown’s description of Margaret Wheatley’s *Leadership and the New Science*; one of the key learnings from this book really spoke to me: “chaos is an essential process that we need to engage” (2017, p. 27). This message tied into the ideas I had been exploring that day regarding uncertainty. On these three days, I engaged in meditation and reading, and one day I also included a brief yoga practice. These larger revelations on days when multiple materials were utilized may support the literature’s claim that “continuous and varied experiences provide a teacher with a greater repertoire of coping mechanisms” (Doney, 2013, p. 660). Exploring a variety of self-care mechanisms over four weeks appear to have enabled me to consider ways to improve my outlook.

During these last days of my research, I also read an excerpt about the concept of uncertainty from *The Tao of Being: A Think and Do Workbook* by Ray Grigg: “Be certain, become confident, and the whole world sets out to teach otherwise. Without certainty, the whole world softens and accommodates. Uncertainty is the softening by which a way is found in everything’s changing” (section 13). This influenced my journal entries on these last days, particularly on Day 19, when I quoted the text. Taking these journal entries into consideration, a shift in consciousness becomes apparent regarding ways in which situations—and their resulting impact—are approached.

**Figure 5**

*Positive vs. Negative Emotions with Uncertain as a Positive*



## Conclusions

The purpose of this research study was to determine the effect of a sustainable self-care practice on the resilience of a mid-career Montessori early childhood teacher. This research does not contribute to teacher support in the way it was originally intended because I was unemployed at the time of the self-study. However, an increase in resilience was demonstrated after a short intervention period.

The findings of this action research suggest that taking time each day for personal self-care can positively impact resilience. This study found a post-intervention increase in the areas of purpose and perseverance as defined by the Resilience Scale™, as well as self-assessed improvement in these areas as reflected in journal entries. This seems to indicate that engaging in activities of self-care and/or professional development results in increased levels of resilience. This research supports previous findings that self-care is critical for wellbeing and that personal

attributes contribute to high levels of resilience. Whether this positive impact is the direct result of the specific interventions or the intention behind the self-care practices remains unknown.

Regarding Montessori education more specifically, this research shows the value of choice and the Prepared Environment in guiding adults as well as children. Further research involving Montessori teachers exploring this basic framework could be advantageous in bolstering teacher resilience, both individually and collectively.

A longer research period would be warranted to discover the sustainability of the self-care practice. A larger—and diverse—research group would be advisable in future studies to determine the broader applicability of the research and its effects. Applying this same research to a full-time teacher's schedule might yield different results; would working full-time make the practice more difficult to sustain? Further study might also include a different intervention period each day; would a 10-minute intervention period have a positive effect? Would 30 minutes be more effective? Variations on this specific factor might provide interesting results. Researching the effects of a daily journaling practice on teacher resilience might also show that practice alone to be beneficial. It was difficult to know if the interventions or the journaling practice were contributing more to my improved resilience.

There is the temptation to research each intervention separately as well, but I don't think this takes the nature of true self-care into account. Although individual interventions could be researched to determine their efficacy in bolstering resilience, an extension of this study, which used Dr. Montessori's philosophy as a framework, would more likely allow a prepared variety of interventions that would serve the shifting needs of the participants. In fact, a longer-term study allowing changes to the curated materials and practices might result in the most interesting

results over the course of the extended research term and remain in line with Montessori philosophy.

### **Benefits of Resilience-Building Practice**

I believe that the impact of these findings on my teaching practice will be positive. Seeing the improvement in my resilience over the 4-week intervention period suggests that ongoing engagement with self-care practices could yield greater results over a longer period. As to the long-term sustainability of such a practice, more research would be required.

I think this research study will inform my practices as a teacher, both in my personal and professional life. I personally feel more inclined to take 20 minutes each day to attend to my self-care; I don't consider it a luxury, but a necessary practice for enhancing my health and my ability to focus on my work as a teacher. This study has also reinforced the importance of journaling as a key to both my personal and professional resilience. I have journaled during various times in my life, using the practice to think through situations and clarify courses of action. I believe that journaling during this research study helped to elucidate the feelings I was having in response to circumstances taking place in my life at that time. As a result, I was able to consider a more positive view of things taking place. Utilizing this practice as a means of contemplation would, I believe, be beneficial to me in the future when difficult situations arise.

Using the Resilience Scale™ to quantify this research also gave me the opportunity to consider five individual qualities that contribute to resilience. This consideration helped me define my strengths and opportunities for further growth in relation to these qualities more specifically. Seeing my strengths (self-reliance and authenticity) gave me a sense of self-efficacy for my work as a teacher, as did seeing my resilience improve throughout the study in the areas of purpose and perseverance. Learning that my equanimity is an area that needs

strengthening has also allowed me to consider specific reactions that I have had in the past and to examine how I might respond differently in the future. These specifics empower me to have a more direct effect on my own resilience in the future, which is very fortifying.

The greatest professional benefit of sustaining a daily self-care practice, I believe, would be consistency of teacher effectiveness. When teachers feel grounded in their ability to weather unknown circumstances each day, this resilience will most likely provide them with protection from adversity; this, in turn, will allow them to provide a consistent, positive level of care and understanding for the children and families they serve. This protection may also extend their teaching careers as they continue to enjoy their work and share their talents with their students. Students, in turn, will inevitably benefit from the guidance of healthy teachers in their lives.

The fact that this research is simple in nature makes it no less important. Simple interventions are often the most sustainable, and sustainability is ultimately required to support teachers in their dynamic work. Resilience is not a condition to be achieved, but a capacity to be cultivated throughout the course of a lifetime.

## References

- Ainsworth, S. & Oldfield, J. (2019). Quantifying teacher resilience: Context matters. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 82, 117-128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.03.012>
- Arnup, J. & Bowles, T. (2016). Should I stay or should I go? Resilience as a protective factor for teachers' intention to leave the teaching profession. *Australian Journal of Education*, 60(3), 229-244. DOI: 10.1177/0004944116667620
- Bobek, B. Teacher resiliency: A key to career longevity. *The Clearing House*, 75(4), 202-205. DOI: 10.1080/00098650209604932
- Doney, P. A. (2013). Fostering resilience: A necessary skill for teacher retention. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 24, 645-664. DOI 10.1007/s10972-012-9324-x
- Gu, Q. & Day, C. (2013). Challenges to teacher resilience: Conditions count. *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(1), 22-44. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24464800>
- Lillard, A. (2007). *Montessori: The science behind the genius*. Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Lillard, A. (2019). Shunned and admired: Montessori, self-determination, and a case for radical school reform. *Educational Psychology Review*, 31, 939-965. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-019-09483-3>
- Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Broadley, T., & Weatherby-Fell, N. (2016). Building resilience in teacher education: An evidenced informed framework. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 54, 77-87. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.11.016>
- Montessori, M. (1995). *The absorbent mind*. Henry Holt and Company.
- Montessori, M. (1965). *The secret of childhood*. Orient Longmans Limited.

Netz, A. & Rom, L. (2020). Effects of mindfulness on teacher stress and self-efficacy. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website:

<https://sophia.stkate.edu/maed/361>

Park, N. S., Song, S. M., & Kim, J. E. (2020). The mediating effect of childcare teachers' resilience on the relationship between social support in the workplace and their self-care.

*International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(22), 1-15.

DOI: 10.3390/ijerph/7228513

Spencer, J. (2020, June 11). *How to own your professional learning* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://youtu.be/pw53uRedr5U>

Vitolo, D. (2018). The effects of a peer-supported mindfulness practice on teacher stress reduction. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website:

<https://sophia.stkate.edu/maed/250>

Wagnild, G. (2009). P.E. Guinn (Ed.), *The resilience scale user's guide for the U.S. English version of the resilience scale and the 14-item resilience scale (RS-14)*. Version 3.33.

(2016). [www.resiliencecenter.com](http://www.resiliencecenter.com)

Wolf, A. D. (1996). *Nurturing the spirit in non-sectarian classrooms*. Parent Child Press.

Appendix A

**Begin and End**  
Stand tall, feet together on ground, hands together at chest.

**10. Inhale**  
Raise torso, extend arms over head, arch back.

**9. Exhale**  
Come up halfway to flat back.

**8. Inhale**  
Feet forward between hands. Slightly bend legs. Fold in.

**7. Exhale**  
Lift tailbone, push back. Keep your back straight, knees slightly bent.

**6. Inhale**  
Straighten legs, hips forward, bend slightly at waist. Lift chest.

**5. Exhale cont.**  
Lower knees, chin, and chest to floor. Hips high and elbows in.

**4. Exhale**  
Both feet back in plank, back straight with shoulders over wrists.

**3. Inhale**  
Come up halfway to flat back.

**2. Exhale**  
Chest forward and knees slightly bent. Fold in.

**1. Inhale**  
Lift arms over head, lean hips forward, arch back.

**SUN SALUTATION**  
While practicing the poses, meditate on expressing gratitude for the sun, which makes all life on earth possible.

#DeStressMonday

**DE STRESS MONDAY**

## Appendix B

## Inspirational Reading Options

Brown, A. M. (2017). *Emergent strategy*. AK Press.

Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*.

Jossey-Bass.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.

Montessori, M. (1965). *The secret of childhood*. Orient Longmans Limited.

## Appendix C

## Daily Interventions Tally Sheet

Date	Meditation	Yoga	The Secret of Childhood	Teaching to Transgress	Emergent Strategies	Releasing the Imagination
8/16/21	6m	3m			11m	
8/17/21	5m 30s				14m 30s	
8/18/21	4m			16m		
8/19/21	5m			15m		
8/20/21	5m			15m		
8/23/21	7m			13m		
8/24/21	6m	2m		12m		
8/25/21	3m	5m		12m		
8/26/21	20m					
8/27/21				20m		
8/30/21	6m	2m		12m		
8/31/21	10m 30s			9m 30s		
9/1/21	7m				13m	
9/2/21	6m				14m	
9/3/21	5m				15m	
9/6/21	4m		16m			
9/7/21	20m					
9/8/21	4m	2m 30s			13m	
9/9/21	9m				11m	
9/10/21	8m				12m	

## Appendix D

## Daily Adjective Checklist

**Daily Adjective Checklist****Date:**

Happy

Anxious

Calm

Overwhelmed

Frustrated

Hopeful

Uncertain

Sad

Strong

Determined

Angry

Confident