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The Impact of Mindfulness Activities on Teacher Stress and Student Behavior in a Second Grade Classroom

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Classroom

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Abstract

Teachers experience high levels of stress due to the demands of their profession. The purpose of this study is to determine how engaging in ten minutes of mindfulness each day can affect teacher stress and student behavior in a. The researcher-participant was a female teacher in a private, suburban school. Five days a week for six week, the participant engaged in at least ten minutes of mindfulness per day, recording her stress levels before and after the intervention each day and weekly through different means of data collection. The study used pre-, mid-, and post-intervention questionnaires, daily journals, weekly questionnaires, and behavior frequency tracking charts to track stress levels and student behavior. The intervention findings show an overall decrease in teacher stress resulting from student misbehavior and a decrease in the frequency of three common student misbehaviors. Future research should consider tracking common student misbehaviors during morning and afternoon instruction to notice how the time of day also affects student behavior.

Keywords: mindfulness, teacher stress, student behavior

Teachers and educators have an ever-increasing number of tasks being added to their plate (Jennings et al., 2017; Jennings & DeMauro, 2017; Kyte, 2016; Oberle et al., 2020; Travers, 2017). Schools emphasize the importance of creating well-rounded individuals, but often this task falls on the backs of the teachers. Not only are teachers expected to teach their students academics, but also support them physically and emotionally, taking on more of a paternal presence in the everyday lives of their students. While teacher preparation programs attempt to prepare teachers for the needs their future students might have, no amount of reading or classroom management theories can prepare teachers for the reality they might find in their own classrooms.

Given the instability in their lives during the pandemic, student needs have only increased as students are lacking foundational learning skills, increasing negative behaviors and leaving teachers harder-pressed to find classroom management strategies that are effective. Frustration begins to build from both teachers and students, leaving everyone emotionally and physically exhausted by the end of each day. Younger students in particular can tell when teachers are frustrated or upset, adding additional stress and tension to the classroom (Aldrup et al., 2020; Oberle et al., 2020). This stress and tension can lead to students making more poor behavior choices as they are lacking skills needed to make positive behavior choices consistently, perpetuating the cycle of frustration and exhaustion from both teachers and students.

While teachers are doing their best to support their students and give them what they need, the teachers themselves are left to pick up the pieces they have left and carry on from day to day, while also caring for the needs of their own families. While administrators might advise teachers to focus on their mental health and do things to "fill their cup," teachers are lacking the time and energy to effectively do so. By the time the school week is over, teachers are left feeling

downhearted and exhausted, only to head home and be with their families, leaving them with a minimal amount of time to rest and reset before walking back into the classroom the following week (Rodriguez et al., 2020; Vitolo, 2018). With demands increasing and very minimal time and help in sight, teachers are burning out and leaving the profession altogether at alarming rates (Chang, 2009; Jennings, 2011; Jennings & DeMauro, 2017; Oberle et al., 2020; Travers, 2017).

The present study looks at how engaging in mindfulness activities five days per week for six weeks affects teacher stress levels and three commonly seen student misbehaviors in the classroom. It aims to identify what effects mindfulness activities have on teacher social-emotional competence and student behavior in an elementary school classroom.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that best aligns this study stems from Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. In this theory, Bandura coins the term "self-efficacy," which is one's beliefs in their capabilities of success at a given task (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1994; Lopez-Garrido, 2020). These beliefs are founded upon 4 main principles: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1997; Lopez-Garrido, 2020). First, being successful with a task helps to build a sense of self-efficacy, while failures tend to undermine the ability to carry out a task (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy is also built through the vicarious experience of others who model the effects of their own actions (Bandura, 1994). Seeing others able to succeed at similar tasks through sustained efforts helps to convince others that they can successfully manage the task as well (Bandura, 1994). Third, people are searching for feedback regarding their abilities to navigate various tasks. If positively reinforced, people are more likely to engage in tasks that are difficult than if they are negatively reinforced, further perpetuating the cycle of self-doubt (Bandura, 1994). Finally, people's beliefs in their

coping skills can lead to the regulation or dysregulation of their emotional state, opening the door to stress and depression (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1994; Bandura, 2012). The higher the person's sense of self-efficacy is, the more likely they are to set high goals for themselves and remain persistent when facing adverse situations inhibiting them from reaching these goals.

The realm of education is no exception in its need for self-efficacy. Skaalvik and Skaalvik define teacher self-efficacy as "a teachers' beliefs in their ability to influence valued student outcomes" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017, p. 103). These beliefs may stem from their ability to plan, organize, and implement activities aimed at achieving an educational goal (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). As Skaalvik & Skaalvik postulate, a major source of self-efficacy stems from prior experiences dealing with successful or less successful teaching experiences, classroom management, instruction, and motivating students, and working with parents and colleagues (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Overall, research has shown that there is some negative correlation between teacher stress and self-efficacy, which leads to poor decision-making skills and less confidence in their teaching ability (Bandura, 1994; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

The current study focuses on self-efficacy as it relates to teacher burnout and stress and how that relates to student behaviors in the classroom. Per the social cognitive theory, the teacher included in this study was feeling stressed and burnt out due to poor student behaviors and comparing her teaching style to that of others in her building. The goal of the research was to determine how mindfulness techniques could help reduce teacher stress, therefore increasing teacher self-efficacy while also improving student behaviors in the classroom.

Review of Literature

Teaching is a profession where teachers must have a solid grip on their own emotions and emotional reactions to serve their learners best. Physical and emotional stress are common

among K-12 teachers worldwide, particularly in the United States (Buchanan, 2017; Jennings & DeMauro, 2017). However, if teachers cannot control their own emotions, and they act out of places of anger, frustration, and sadness, that, in turn, can affect the learning environment they create for their students. Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd (2013) explain that students who remember their most influential teachers are more likely to recall social-emotional qualities like empathy, listening skills, and recognizing the good in all students. Teachers can strengthen these qualities to promote a better classroom environment. Mindfulness techniques can help teachers build up their social-emotional competence, thereby helping to regulate their emotions and prevent early burnout and additional teacher stress, which positively affects the classroom environment (Benn, Akiva, Arel, & Roeser, 2012; Gold et al., 2009; Kyte, 2016; Roeser et al., 2013; Vitolo, 2018). This literature review looks at what teacher social-emotional competence (SEC) is, how a lack of teacher SEC can lead to stress and burnout, and how those factors combine to affect the students and their emotional and academic environments. Mindfulness is then discussed as a way teachers can improve their SEC and improve student behavior and performance.

The Concepts of Teacher Social-Emotional Competence, Stress, and Burnout

SEC encompasses awareness, self-regulation, and coping strategies. SEC is generally described as an awareness of emotional states and the ability to regulate emotions effectively (Fiorilli, Albanese, Gabola, & Pepe, 2017; Jennings et al., 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2020). Some researchers specify areas of emotional regulation that converge to form SEC, including social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Jennings, 2011; Maior, Dobrean, & Păsărelu, 2020; Oberle, Gist, Cooray, & Pinto, 2020). Also included within the SEC domain are coping strategies for emotions (Fiorilli et al., 2017) and the

knowledge of, skills, and motivation to control social and emotional situations (Aldrup, Carstensen, Köller, & Klusmann, 2020). If a teacher does not have solid control over their own SEC, their chances of stress and burnout increase dramatically.

Teacher stress is defined as "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher" (Kyriacou, 2011, p. 28, as cited in Travers, 2017, p. 25). Stress can arise from an imbalance in situation demands at work and how well a person can respond to these demands (Travers, 2017). Stress is likely to occur if control, autonomy, and decision-making are low (Travers, 2017). Teachers constantly are dealing with diverse situations which arise unexpectedly. With many students watching their reactions and modeling, teachers have the additional stress of setting a good example in any given case. This stress leads to what researchers have coined teacher burnout.

Teacher burnout includes emotional exhaustion, inability to separate from the work environment, and lack of downtime. Burnout is a "by-product of prolonged stress, whereby individuals experience emotional, physical, and attitudinal exhaustion" (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998; Motseke, 1998; Van der Lin de, van der Westhuizen, & Wissing, 1999; Wisniewski & Garigulio, 1997, as cited in Travers, 2017, p. 26). Kyte (2016) also adds that burnout is work-related in three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Teacher burnout can come in the form of classroom management, student motivation, increased list of responsibilities, lack of autonomy, work/home balance, and continuous accountability for student success (Jennings et al., 2017; Jennings & DeMauro, 2017; Kyte, 2016; Oberle et al., 2020; Travers, 2017 According to Fiorilli et al. (2017), burnout occurs when an imbalance between resources and workload leads to eventual unfeasible working

conditions. For example, teachers have decreased downtime to physically detach themselves from their work environment (Rodriguez et al., 2020) and emotionally separate themselves from the environment and students (Vitolo, 2018). The inability to unwind and recenter themselves allows teacher stress to compound over time (Fiorilli et al., 2017) to a point where teachers become so stressed, they burn out more quickly than ever before (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013; Travers, 2017).

Burnout and stress lead to decreased job satisfaction. In 2008, Jennings et al. (2017) said that 62% of teachers surveyed felt satisfied in their jobs. By 2012, this level dropped to just 39% (Jennings et al., 2017). Furthermore, the MetLife Survey of American Teachers in 2013 found high levels of stress and job dissatisfaction, with over half of these reporting high stress levels several days per week (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013. In just four years, teacher job satisfaction dropped by 27%. With increased stress levels and decreased job satisfaction, more teachers are beginning to move to other professional fields.

The increased stress and lack of autonomy in the classroom (Schonert-Reichl, 2017) lead to more teachers burning out and fewer teachers being trained to replace them. Multiple studies and surveys report that 33%-50% of teachers leave teaching within the first five years of their career due to increased stress and burnout (Chang, 2009; Jennings, 2011; Jennings & DeMauro, 2017; Oberle et al., 2020; Travers, 2017). Many reasons are given by teachers who are leaving, including problems with classroom management, a lack of student motivation, too many responsibilities, lack of autonomy, an imbalance between work and home, and continuous accountability for student success (Jennings et al., 2017; Oberle et al., 2020). The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (2015, as cited in Travers, 2017) reported that the number

of students entering teacher preparation programs in California dropped more than 55% from 2008 to 2012.

According to Maior et al. (2020), Schonert-Reichl (2017), Hülsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, and Lang (2013), the less job satisfaction a teacher has, the more stress they feel and the more negative emotions they display. Oberle et al. (2020) confirm this by adding that the lower tolerance teachers have for dealing with their emotions, the more likely they are to experience burnout and negatively display their emotions in the classroom (Rodriguez et al., 2020). These emotions can come through in the classroom as fatigue, cynicism and ineffectiveness, higher attrition, teacher absenteeism, and poor health (Travers, 2017). However, with emotions constantly in an ebb and flow, most teachers have inconsistent manifestations of burnout and stress in the classroom (Chang, 2009). Not only does burnout manifest itself in teachers, but in the students they serve as well.

Effects of Low Teacher Social-Emotional Competence and Burnout on Students

There is no escaping the reality of stress and burnout in teachers and having lower amounts of social-emotional competence only compounds the struggles teachers face daily. "Social and emotional competencies influence everything from teacher-student relationships to classroom management to effective instruction to teacher burnout" (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013, p. 62). The relationships between students and teachers often struggle with lower teacher SEC because students are susceptible to their teachers' emotions and can typically tell when negative emotions are present, even if the teacher is trying to hide them (Aldrup et al., 2020; Oberle et al., 2020). This perception of negative emotions can also lead to teacher-student disconnect (Oberle et al., 2020) where students are less likely to come to a teacher in times of need (Aldrup et al., 2020). Poor teacher-student relationships lead to an increase in negative

behaviors in the classroom. Negative behaviors on the part of the student lead to teachers becoming defensive (Jennings & DeMauro, 2017) and enacting more punitive means of consequences (Jennings, 2011; Oberle et al., 2020; Travers, 2017). Furthermore, poor relationships and negative emotions affect academic instruction as well. Maior et al. (2020) and Jennings et al. (2017) note that teachers make better educational decisions when their emotions are better regulated. Rodriguez et al. (2020) confirm that teachers are better able to explain the "how" and "why" behind their instructional decisions.

Mindfulness and Its Effects on Teacher SEC and Students

Mindfulness, or the practice of actively and openly paying attention to your surroundings and the goings-on of any particular moment (Buchanan, 2017; Hülsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013; Jennings et al., 2017; Jennings & DeMauro, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Vitolo, 2018), has been shown through many studies as being an effective means of increasing teacher SEC and lowering feelings of burnout in the classroom. Mindfulness is a secular concept helpful in managing stress, improving attention, and self-regulation (Buchanan, 2017; Hülsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013; Jennings & DeMauro, 2017). Mindfulness enables a person to shut off inner dialogue and notice what is happening around them without judgment. Mindfulness allows people to observe stressful situations more objectively without taking a given situation personally (Hülsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013), allowing the person to make better and more rational decisions. The overall goal of mindfulness is for a person engaging in this practice to become less reactive and more reflective, responsive, and flexible (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013, p. 64). Studies have shown that mindfulness is a successful way to reduce stress and regulate emotions (Vitolo, 2018).

Mindfulness can help reduce stress, depression, and anxiety, as shown by a study

completed by Gold et al. (2009). This team conducted a study in which nine educators and two

teaching assistants completed an 8-week intervention with a 5-hour silent retreat taught by a

mindfulness-based stress reduction teacher. At the beginning of the study, the research team

noted that participants completed the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales, and eight participants

scored above the clinical cut-off in at least 2 of these areas. However, after engaging in the

intervention, only four participants scored within the clinical range (Gold et al., 2009), showing

that the mindfulness training positively affected participant scores in depression, anxiety, and

stress.

Benn, Akiva, Arel, and Roeser (2012) add to the list of studies completed on the effects

of mindfulness on stress reduction in education. They dove into the effectiveness of stress

management and relaxation techniques (SMART) in education. This study, conducted using an

experimental group of 16 parents and 19 teachers and a control group with the same number of

parents and educators, examined how engaging in a 36-hour program on mindfulness could

affect stress and anxiety (Benn et al., 2012). Participants were guided through a series of lessons

on concentration on thoughts or breathing and homework assignments that allowed them to focus

on emotional responses. The study found that participants who received training through the

SMART program experienced decreased stress and anxiety while promoting skills like

compassion, personal growth, empathy, and forgiveness (Benn et al., 2012).

These findings align with a study completed by Roeser et al. (2013), who conducted

research using the same SMART strategy as Benn et al. (2012). Roeser et al. (2013, as cited in

Jennings & DeMauro, 2017, p. 330) note, "[t]eachers who received SMART reported significant

increases in mindfulness and occupational self-compassion and significant reductions in

occupational stress and burnout." This study included participants from the United States and

Canada, with teachers from the United States showing higher reductions in anxiety and

depression following the intervention (Roeser et al., 2013). Moreso, reductions in occupational

stress and burnout remained constant at a 3-month follow-up with the participants (Roeser et al.,

2013). Roeser et al. (2013) also note that participants who engaged in independent mindfulness

practices outside of the SMART intervention led to consistently better benefits after the

intervention was completed. Teachers who completed the study noticed less reactivity and a

better awareness of their actions and the reasons behind those actions (Roeser et al., 2013). This

decrease in reactivity can allow teachers to handle stress more effectively within the classroom.

     Kyte (2016) follows Roeser et al. (2013) by writing of the constant influx of

responsibilities teachers face and how they have minimal ways to combat the increasing stress.

Kyte (2016) gathered data from two teachers engaged in the Mindfulness Schoolteacher Program

for four years at their school. This program was voluntary and offered after school hours.

Yolanda and Sharon, discuss their successes within the mindfulness program, noting that

mindfulness allows them to separate themselves from their work and focus on their inner

thoughts and feelings (Kyte, 2016). Yolanda specifically notes that when engaging in the

mindfulness program, she has a better sense of awareness, which allows her to be more aware of

the needs of her students (Kyte, 2016). Sharon, the second participant interviewed in Kyte's

(2016) study, acknowledged the sense of peacefulness she experienced after a mindfulness

session and even went so far as to say that she would be a calmer person if she could practice

mindfulness each day. More abstractly, Yolanda told Kyte (2016) that these feelings of

peacefulness stemming from mindfulness activities allows her to look at the positives in a crisis.

In terms of sustainability, both participants echoed that they can better control their emotions

because they have a heightened ability not to take situations personally (Kyte, 2016). This thicker skin allows teachers, Yolanda and Sharon included, to form better relationships with students that exhibit the most negative behaviors and need positive relationships the most.

Regulating emotions reduces stress, provides additional patience and energy (Gold et al., 2009; Jennings et al., 2017; Kyte, 2016), and promotes a stronger sense of serenity at school (Vitolo, 2018). Vitolo (2018) conducted a study to show the effects of peer-supported mindfulness practices in a Montessori setting. The nine participants completed one mindfulness activity daily. They had the choice of engaging in the body scan, sitting meditation, yoga, and mandala coloring. Participants also attended weekly meetings with peers also completing the study (Vitolo, 2018). After the study, results showed that 6 out of 7 teachers showed stress reduction, and 67% of the participants showed an increase in positive attitude following the intervention (Vitolo, 2018). The nine teachers also had the chance to reflect on their daily mindfulness activity, with several noting the feelings of relaxation, overall calmness, and a sense of relief. Vitolo (2018) also notes that those who engaged in the activity early in the day expressed having more focus and being more present for the students, which resulted in the students being more focused and peaceful.

Discussion

Overall, teacher SEC affects their instruction, classroom management, student-teacher relationships, and quality of life. If teachers have their needs met, they can better serve their students (Maior et al., 2020). Teachers understand that working with and for students can be stressful, but with increasing demands and less downtime, teachers struggle to find a way to regulate and control their emotions outside of the classroom. Research shows that teachers who have higher levels of SEC are better able to serve their students than those who have lower SEC.

Lower SEC contributes to burnout in teachers and overall teacher turnover rates. Better SEC allows teachers to form better relationships with their students, which positively affects the other aspects of students' daily life. Mindfulness enables teachers to increase their SEC while acknowledging and addressing their inner thoughts and emotions without judgment and navigating their stress (Buchanan, 2017). With a teacher shortage and teachers burning out and leaving the profession at alarming rates, it is up to current teachers to find ways to manage their own emotions without taking away copious amounts of precious "off time."

Minimal research has been conducted on the effects of teacher SEC on student outcomes beyond an increase in student-teacher relationships and classroom management. Teachers with higher SEC can provide a positive learning environment, which can help student academics, but there is little empirical evidence to support this. An added difficulty in researching this topic is that the ability to test for knowledge of teacher SEC is quite difficult. Chang (2009) notes that only a small amount of research is conducted on emotional aspects of teaching within the context of teacher burnout. To provide more clear empirical data, there need to be more tests with increased accuracy, which is problematic given that SEC is highly subjective at this current point. The purpose of this study is to determine how daily mindfulness practices might positively influence teacher SEC and student behaviors in the classroom.

Methodology

The researcher who developed and carried out this study was a second grade teacher serving students at a private Catholic elementary school in the rural Midwest. The researcher had three years of teaching experience in second grade, a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, and was working towards her Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The population of students involved in this study were seven or eight years old at the time of implementation. Out

of the twenty students in the whole class, data was only collected from nineteen students as one student's family opted out of the study. Of these nineteen students, nine of the students were male and ten were female.

This study used a disciplined inquiry design. In addition, classroom observations, student opinions, and teacher attitudes were leveraged in data analysis. During a six-week period, the researcher spent at least ten minutes each day engaged in a mindfulness activity. When preparing this intervention, the research did note the rather large time commitment involved in carrying out this study. However, the researcher deemed it necessary to engage in these more time-consuming tasks to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

The researcher designated a mindfulness application titled "Smiling Mind" to be used during the study. The researcher then chose an activity each day that was at least ten minutes long. As a participant in the study, the researcher self-reported her stress levels before and after each activity using the Daily Mindfulness Journal (see Appendix A), noting the main stressor(s) she experienced prior to the mindfulness activity, the length of the activity itself, and her stress levels after engaging in the mindfulness activity. Major variables in this intervention included the participant's ability to choose any mindfulness activity, so long as it was ten minutes or more, and the time of day the activity took place. However, these variables were considered necessary to allow the participant the freedom and flexibility to choose a mindfulness activity that best suited their needs. The dependent variables were the participant's stress level after each mindfulness activity and any long-term effects on stress and student behavior.

The researcher began the study by administering out loud a pre-intervention questionnaire to the students in her classroom (see Appendix B). Students were asked to answer whether they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding their feelings of safety and security

in the classroom, the researcher's knowledge of them as individuals, how teacher emotions can affect them and their ability to regulate their own emotions, and how the teacher's emotions can affect their ability to make positive behavioral choices. Students were given this questionnaire at the beginning of the intervention period, at the completion of week three of the intervention, and after the six-week study was completed. The data was used to note changes in student opinions before, during, and after the researcher began engaging in mindfulness activities.

Each day the researcher-participant chose a mindfulness exercise from the Smiling Minds application downloaded on her phone. She used her Daily Mindfulness Journal (see Appendix A) to record the date, time, and name of the activity as well as their stress level before and after the mindfulness activity. The journal also included a place to note the main stressor(s) of the day, the length of time the activity lasted, and their feelings about how the activity helped or worsened their perceived stress level.

Two days per week during the student, the researcher collected data on the frequency of three common student misbehaviors during a one-hour block of their morning instruction (see Appendix C). The behaviors included blurting, reminders to focus, and reminders to follow directions. The research then analyzed the data to notice trends or patterns in the frequency of student misbehaviors during the six-week study. The students were aware that the researcher was collecting data but did not know what the researcher was looking for specifically, as the researcher deemed it was necessary to withhold the behaviors she was observing to preserve the validity of the data.

At the end of the week, the researcher completed the Weekly Check-In Form (see Appendix D). This form monitored if the participant was able to engage in a mindfulness activity for at least ten minutes per day, student behaviors for the week, self-assessed patience levels and

what effects, if any, the mindfulness activities had on the participant's stress levels. This form helped to track the average ability to complete ten minutes of mindfulness activities per day, student behaviors during the study, the average patience level of the participant, the added stress (or lack thereof) stemming from student misbehavior, and if the participant felt that the mindfulness activities she engaged in helped her to better navigate student behaviors.

Each data tool had significance in analyzing the effectiveness of the intervention. The Daily Mindfulness Journal helped to determine how much of an effect the mindfulness activities chosen had on the participant's stress levels each day, monitoring the main stressor(s) experienced by the participant, and the trends of the stress levels experienced by the participant. The Weekly Check-In Form showed how quickly changes in student behavior were realized and how student behaviors affected the participant's stress and patience levels during the week, along with the participant's feelings on whether or not the mindfulness activities were beneficial when dealing with student behaviors. The Pre-, Mid-, and Post-Intervention Questionnaires taken by the students showed whether the participant's stress levels affected the student's perception of their relationship with the participant, the level of care the participant had for the students, and how the participant's stress and behaviors affected the students abilities to regulate their own emotions over the course of six weeks.

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**Analysis of the Data**

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Perceived Teacher Stress Levels

The researcher used the Daily Mindfulness Journal (see Appendix A) to track their mindfulness activity each day, as well as their perceived stress levels before and after engaging in the mindfulness activity. Figure 1 shows the participant's perceived stress level each day before engaging in the mindfulness activity of her choice. A red frowning face (considered level

four), meant that the participant felt extremely stressed, whereas a smiling green face (considered

level one) meant the participant was minimally stressed. Before engaging in the mindfulness

Figure 1
*Stress Level Before Mindfulness Activity*
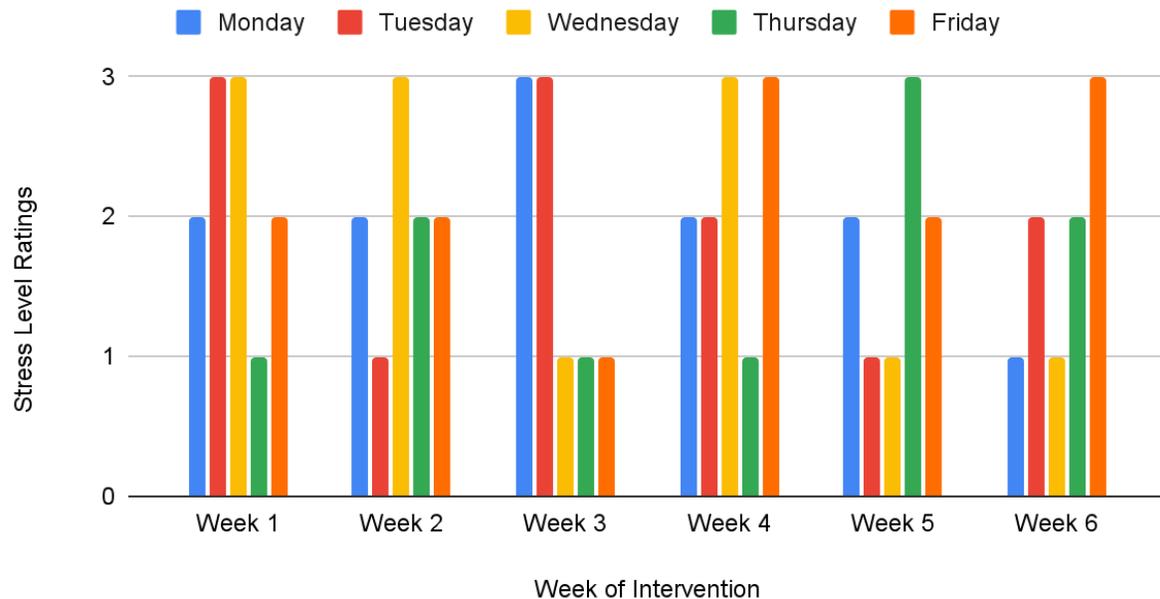
activities, on average Tuesdays and Wednesdays tended to be the most stressful days of the week

during the first four weeks of the intervention, whereas by weeks five and six the most stressful

days of the week switched towards Thursdays and Fridays. Mondays remained relatively

consistent, with the participant noting average stress levels during four of the six week period.

Figure 2 shows the participant's perceived stress levels after engaging in the mindfulness

activity. Each day after the mindfulness activity, the participant noted a decrease in or no change

to her perceived stress levels. As opposed to the beforehand levels of perceived stress, Fridays

tended to be the days the participant felt the most lingering stress after engaging in the

mindfulness activity. For 70% of the intervention days, the participant noted that stress levels

decreased or remained at one, meaning she felt minimal stress after completing the activity.

During week three of the intervention, the participant recorded feeling no stress at all after

completing the mindfulness activity, noting that she "loved the ocean sounds they played toward

the end…So calming and soothing!" (Participant, January 19, 2022).

Figure 2

Stress Level After Mindfulness Activity
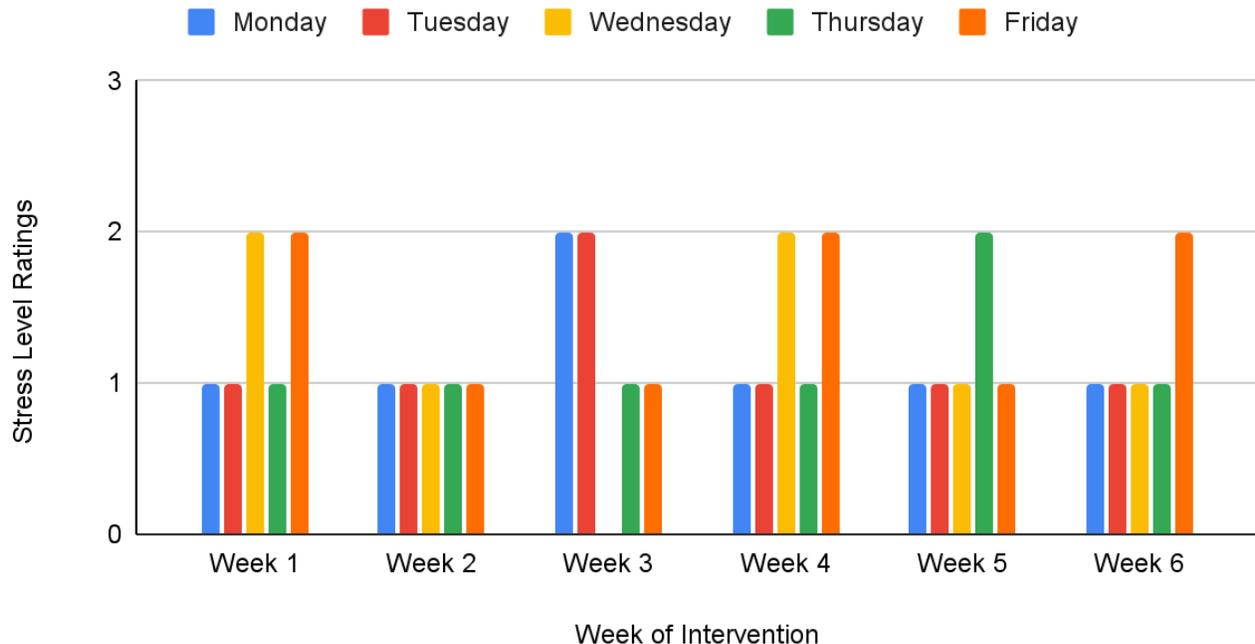
Using the Weekly Check-In form (see Appendix D), the participant was able to track her

ability to complete at least ten minutes of mindfulness activities per day throughout the course of

the study. Figure 3 shows the participant's ability to complete at least ten minutes of mindfulness

each day for 100% of the intervention time. The Weekly Check-In form also gave the participant

a means of recording perceived additional stress due to student misbehavior, which is noted in

Figure 4. 50% of the time, the participant felt as though student misbehavior caused her to be a

little more stressed, 33.3% of the time the participant felt neither more stressed or less stressed

due to student misbehavior, and 16.7% of the time the teacher felt minimally stressed by student

misbehavior in the classroom.

Figure 3
Ability to Complete Mindfulness Activities Each Week

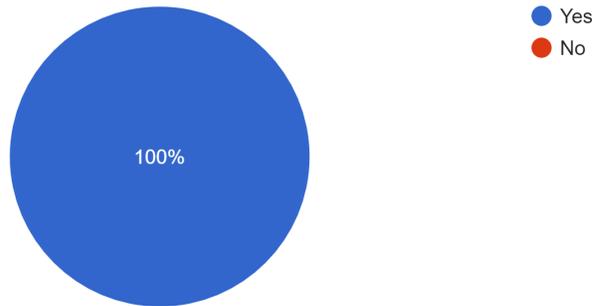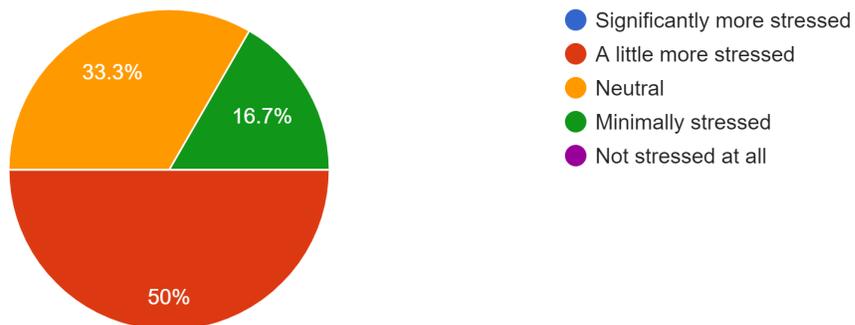Were you able to complete at least 10 minutes of mindful activities each day this week?
6 responses

Figure 4
Added Stress Due to Student Misbehavior

When students exhibited poor behavior choices this week, how stressed did you feel?
6 responses

Additionally, Table 1 compares the overall student behavior rating, overall patience level with student behavior, and additional stress related to student behavior observed during each of the six weeks of intervention using the Behavior Frequency Chart (see Appendix C). During weeks one and two, the participant felt that fair and not great behavior exhibited by the students during the week caused a little more stress for her. However, during week three, the student

behavior level remained the same at a level four (not great), but the participant noted that they felt sometimes patient with the students, while the not so great behavior did not cause any additional stress nor took away any stress. During week four when the overall student behavior rating was poor, the participant felt she was able to remain mostly patient with the students while only experiencing a little more stress as a result of the poor behavior.

Table 1

Comparison Between Student Behavior Rating, Patience Levels, and Additional Stress

Week Number	Overall Student Behavior Rating	Patience Level with Student Behavior	Additional Stress Related to Student Misbehavior
1	3 (Fair)	Mostly patient	A little more stressed
2	4 (Not great)	Sometimes patient	A little more stressed
3	4 (Not great)	Sometimes patient	Neutral
4	5 (Poor)	Mostly patient	A little more stressed
5	3 (Fair)	Mostly patient	Neutral
6	2 (Pretty good)	Mostly patient	Minimally stressed

Student Behavior

The participant provided her students with a pre-, mid-, and post-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix B), asking about their opinions on their classroom environment, perceived teacher stress, and how that perceived stress affects their ability to make positive behavioral choices. Table 2 shows the results of those questionnaires. The researcher saw a decrease in the number of students who felt their teacher cared about them, which went from 100% of the students feeling as though their teacher cared at the beginning of the intervention to just 78% of students feeling as though their teacher cares about them by the end of the six-week period. Additionally, there was an increase in students who felt that when the teacher is upset, they become more upset. From the beginning of the intervention to the middle and end, there was

a 15.8% increase in the number of students who felt that their teacher being upset made them become upset.

However, an increase occurred in the students' response to the statement, "If my teacher is happy, I'm able to make better behavior choices." At the beginning of the intervention, 78.9% of the students agreed that when the teacher is happy they can make better behavior choices. By the end of the six-week period, 89.4% of the students agreed that having a happy teacher allowed them to make better behavioral choices. There was also an increase in students believing their teacher enjoyed teaching from the beginning to the end of the intervention. The total number of students believing their teacher enjoyed teaching grew from 16 students at the start of the intervention to 17 students by the middle and end of the intervention.

Table 2
Pre-, Mid-, and Post-Intervention Questionnaire Statements

Questionnaire Statements	Pre Agree	Pre Disagree	Mid Agree	Mid Disagree	Post Agree	Post Disagree
I feel comfortable in this class.	16	3	15	4	15	4
My teacher cares about me.	19	0	17	2	15	4
My teacher knows what I like and what I don't like.	12	7	11	8	12	7
I can tell when my teacher is upset.	18	1	16	3	18	1
When my teacher is upset, it makes me upset.	13	6	16	3	16	3
When my teacher is upset, he/she has less patience with students.	15	4	16	3	16	3
When my teacher has less patience, I have less patience.	13	6	15	4	12	7
If my teacher is happy, I'm able to make better behavior choices.	15	4	18	1	17	2

I think that my teacher likes teaching.	16	3	17	2	17	2

The data collected by the Behavior Frequency Chart (see Appendix C), showed a significant decrease in the number of misbehaviors exhibited during a one-hour period of morning instructional time throughout the course of the intervention. Figure 5 shows the number of misbehaviors observed by the teacher during the first three weeks of the intervention per student. Blurting out was the behavior most commonly observed during the first three weeks of intervention, followed by reminders to focus and reminders to follow directions. Blurting out was observed over twenty times by eight different students, while only one student was needing 20 or more reminders to focus during the six observation periods. Direction reminders were the least commonly needed.

Figure 5

Behavior Frequency Weeks 1 to 3
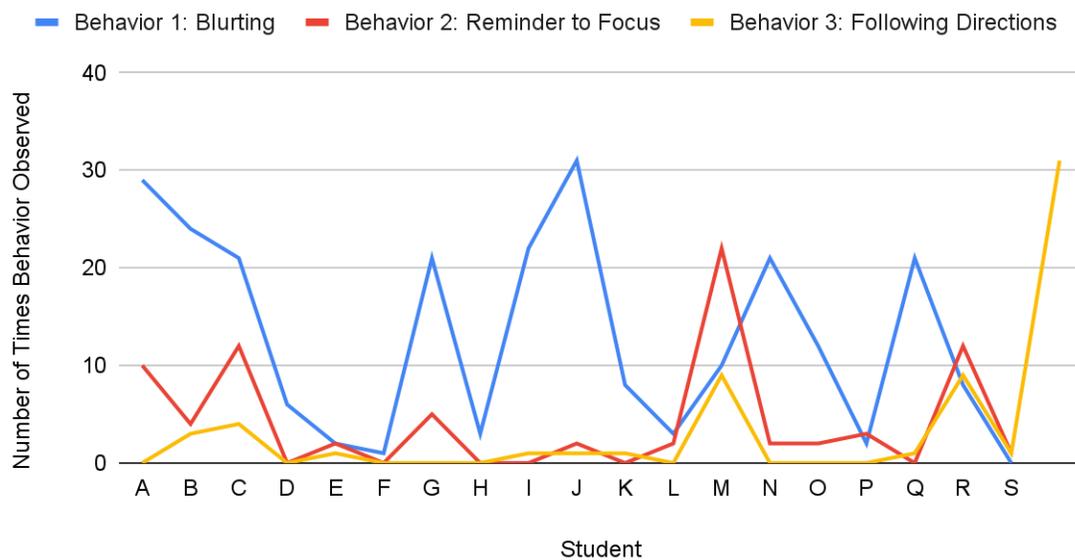
However, as Figure 6 demonstrates, the number of blurting occurrences, reminders to focus, and directional reminders decreased during the remaining six weeks of the intervention

period. Only two students blurted more than ten times, while only two students needed reminders to focus five or more times. The overall number of occurrences in directional reminders also significantly decreased from thirty-one occurrences during the first three weeks of the intervention to just six occurrences during the last three weeks of the intervention.

Figure 6
Behavior Frequency Weeks 4 to 6
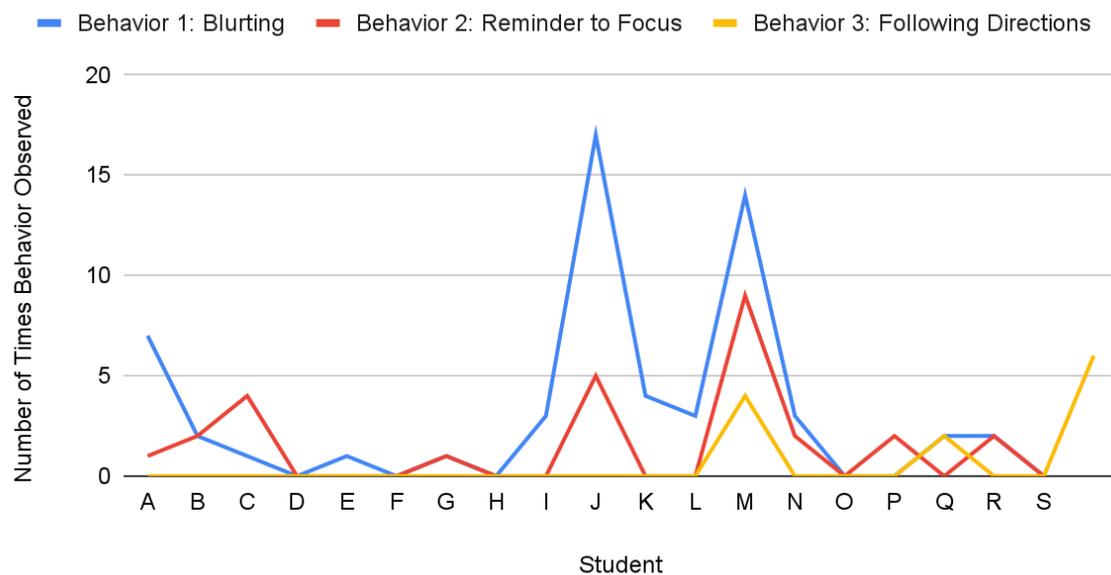
Finally, Figure 7 shows how often during the six week intervention the participant felt as though mindfulness activities helped her to more effectively handle student misbehavior. Four times out of six, or 66.7% of the time, the participant felt as though engaging in mindfulness activities throughout the week helped her to more effectively manage student misbehavior. The other two weeks, or 33.3% of the time, the participant thought that the mindfulness activities possibly helped her to effectively handle student misbehavior. During no time throughout the intervention period did the participant feel as though engaging in mindfulness activities did not help her to effectively handle student misbehavior.

Figure 7

Effect of Mindfulness Activities on Reactions to Student Misbehavior

Do you believe that engaging in mindfulness activities for at least 10 minutes per day this week helped you to more effectively handle student misbehavior?

6 responses
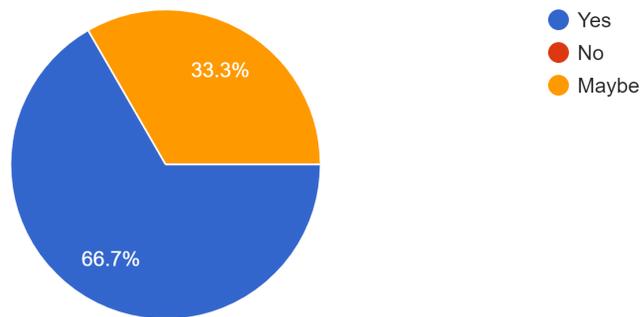
In conclusion, the aforementioned data shows that engaging in mindfulness activities for at least ten minutes each day for six weeks can help teachers reduce their stress levels, and increase their patience levels with students, helping the students to make more positive behavior choices. The following section outlines how the data supports the hypothesis that teachers engaging in mindfulness activities can improve themselves and their students.

Action Plan

The purpose of this action research project was to determine the effectiveness of mindfulness activities on teacher stress and student behavior. It was hypothesized that if teachers could lower their stress levels and feelings of burnout that student behavior would also improve. As outlined above, the teacher engaging in at least ten minutes of mindfulness activities each day helped to lower her stress levels throughout the course of the six-week study and the frequency of three common student misbehaviors (blurting, reminders to focus, directional reminders) also decreased. With teachers already having overwhelming workloads, the worthiness of the intervention must be considered in light of time requirements. Engaging in this intervention was

a worthwhile effort on the part of the teacher as it had a positive effect on the teacher's stress levels and their patience in dealing with student misbehavior.

As mentioned in the previous section, the teacher was able to significantly reduce her stress levels after completing the mindfulness activity each day. While the time commitment was relatively short, the longer-term effects of engaging in the practice proved to be worthwhile. Being consistent with engaging in the mindfulness activities also helped the teacher to fall into a routine, making the practice of mindfulness seem more normal than just something she was doing as part of a study. Towards the end of the intervention period, the teacher actually looked forward to the mindfulness activities at the end of the day to help re-center herself before joining her students in class the next day. By doing so, the teacher was able to reset herself and leave the stress of the previous day, to some degree, behind her so she could start fresh with her students.

As the weeks progressed, the teacher noted that her patience levels with students increased, or at the very least she was able to remain patient longer with student misbehavior than she had at the onset of the study. Additionally, she noted that student misbehavior caused her to feel decreasingly stressed the longer she participated in the intervention. This, combined with less student misbehavior allowed the teacher to further develop relationships with her students as she was able to look past the misbehavior more and dig deeper into the roots of the problem behaviors. An interesting note, though, was that there was a drop in the percentage of students who felt their teacher cared about them. With the decrease in time spent dealing with student misbehaviors, it was presumed that students would feel more cared about by their teacher because there was additional time taken to understand what the student was feeling and how those feelings could be rectified. However, given the young age of the students, it is quite possible that something that happened on the specific day of the post-intervention survey that

had them in a foul mood which, in turn, clouded their judgment when answering the survey questions.

Not so surprisingly, there was an increase in the number of students who felt that when their teacher is happy, they are able to make better behavior choices. As noted in the reduction of stress levels, the teacher was happier in class, which was apparently noticed by the students as they recognized their ability to make better behavioral decisions when their teacher was in a better mood, as can be seen in the behavior frequency data (see Figures 5 and 6). This happiness resonated with the students, as there was an increase in the number of students who felt their teacher enjoyed teaching. This enjoyment of teaching combined with more outward signs of happiness helped to reduce the teacher's stress level, helping the students to make better choices, and hopefully, increase their learning.

In relation to student learning, the decrease in three common student misbehaviors also supports that teachers engaging in mindfulness activities can help with student learning. The more time a teacher spends correcting behavior, students are missing out on instructional time. Given the data collected from the last three weeks of the intervention compared to the first three weeks, more time was being spent learning than correcting misbehaviors during the observation period. With the teacher able to focus less on correcting students, more time is spent engaging in learning opportunities. What might be interesting in a further study, though, is to note the differences in student misbehaviors during afternoon instruction as opposed to morning instruction, as the students in this room, as noted by the teacher, are better able to focus and maintain control over their behaviors in the morning rather than the afternoon.

Possibly the most important finding that coincided with the hypothesis was that the teacher felt that engaging in the mindfulness activities helped her more effectively manage the

student misbehavior that did come up in the classroom. She was able to take the time, as mentioned previously, to develop a better relationship with the students and dive deeper into the misbehaviors and what could be done to remedy those situations. If the teacher's stress levels would have remained the same or increased, the less likely it would have been that her patience levels increased when dealing with student misbehavior. This would have perpetuated the cycle of teacher stress due to student misbehavior and decreased patience levels with students.

Overall, this action research project confirmed that engaging in daily mindfulness activities can decrease teacher stress levels, allowing them to be more present and patient with their students and when dealing with student misbehavior. The students also noticed a positive trend in their teacher, recognizing that when their teacher is happy, they are better able to control their behaviors. Current and even pre-service teachers should strongly consider engaging in some sort of mindfulness activities each day to help manage their stress levels and maximize their interactions with students while minimizing the impacts of stress on the part of the teacher and students.

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Appendix A

Daily Mindfulness Journal for Week # _____ (Six weeks total)

Choose a mindfulness exercise from the Smiling Mind app and practice it for at least 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.

| **Monday**

Date: _____/_____

Time of practice:

_____ | **Stress level before practice:**

😣 🙁 😐 🙂 😃
- _____ +

Activity Chosen:

_____

Stress level after practice:

😣 🙁 😐 🙂 😃
- _____ + | **Journal/Notes:** |
| **Tuesday**

Date: _____/_____

Time of practice:

_____ | **Stress level before practice:**

😣 🙁 😐 🙂 😃
- _____ +

Activity Chosen:

_____

Stress level after practice:

😣 🙁 😐 🙂 😃
- _____ + | **Journal/Notes:** |

Wednesday **Date:** _____/_____ **Time of practice:** _____	**Stress level before practice:** **-** ━━━━━━━━━ **+** **Activity Chosen:** _____ **Stress level after practice:** **-** ━━━━━━━━━ **+**	**Journal/Notes:**
Thursday **Date:** _____/_____ **Time of practice:** _____	**Stress level before practice:** **-** ━━━━━━━━━ **+** **Activity Chosen:** _____ **Stress level after practice:** **-** ━━━━━━━━━ **+**	**Journal/Notes:**
Friday **Date:** _____/_____ **Time of practice:** _____	**Stress level before practice:** **-** ━━━━━━━━━ **+** **Activity Chosen:** _____ **Stress level after practice:** **-** ━━━━━━━━━ **+**	**Journal/Notes:**

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Appendix B
Pre/Post Feedback Form

Please be honest in your responses and circle the emoji that best describes your feelings about each statement.

	Yes/Agree	No/Disagree
I feel comfortable in this class.	😁	🙁
My teacher cares about me.	😁	🙁
My teacher knows what I like and what I don't like.	😁	🙁
I can tell when my teacher is upset.	😁	🙁
When my teacher is upset, it makes me upset.	😁	🙁
When my teacher is upset, he/she has less patience with students.	😁	🙁
When my teacher has less patience, I have less patience.	😁	🙁
If my teacher is happy, I'm able to make better behavior choices.	😁	🙁
I think that my teacher likes teaching.	😁	🙁

Stang, L., Wells, A. (2021) The effects of social-emotional learning strategies on promoting positive behavior on elementary students. Retrieved from Sofia, the St. Catherine University repository website: https://sophia.stkate.edu/maed250

Appendix C

Date: _____

Behavior Frequency Chart

Place a tally mark in the box under the appropriate behavior witnessed during a one-hour period in your morning instruction.

Student	Behavior 1: Blurting	Behavior 2: Reminder to Focus	Behavior 3: Following Directions
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			
16.			
17.			
18.			
19.			
20.			

Definition of Behaviors:

- Blurting- Students shout out answers without being called on.
- Reminder to focus- Students need reminders to catch up on work, complete work, or follow along with the teacher.

- Following directions- Students need 2 or more reminders to follow directions. Students need directions repeated in order to complete them.

Stang, L., Wells, A. (2021) The effects of social-emotional learning strategies on promoting positive behavior on elementary students. Retrieved from Sofia, the St. Catherine University repository website: https://sophia.stkate.edu/maed250

Appendix D

Friday Check-In

Please answer a few brief questions regarding student behaviors this week.

🚫 _____ (not shared) Switch account   ☁

* Required

Were you able to complete at least 10 minutes of mindful activities each day this week? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your students' behavior for the week. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Great behavior! Students were active participants in their learning with few behavioral struggles.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Poor behavior. Students were not engaged in their learning this week and there were many behavioral struggles.

How would you rate your patience level with your students this week? *

◯ Extremely patient

◯ Mostly patient

◯ Sometimes patient

◯ Mostly impatient

◯ Very impatient

When students exhibited poor behavior choices this week, how stressed did you feel? *

○ Significantly more stressed

○ A little more stressed

○ Neutral

○ Minimally stressed

○ Not stressed at all

Do you believe that engaging in mindfulness activities for at least 10 minutes per day this week helped you to more effectively handle student misbehavior? *

○ Yes

○ No

○ Maybe

Submit   Page 1 of 1   Clear form

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