St. Catherine University

SOPHIA

A Qualitative Investigation of Mindfulness-Based Practice with K-12th Grade Teachers

Jenna Trumbower
St. Catherine University

Follow this and additional works at: https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers

Part of the Social Work Commons

A Qualitative Investigation of Mindfulness-Based Practice with K-12th

Grade Teachers

by

Jenna Trumbower, B.S

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Committee Members
Laurel Bidwell, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW (Chair)
Elizabeth Hirschman, M. Ed.
Teresa George, MSW, LICSW

Abstract

In the United States, there is an increased awareness and concern regarding K-12th grade teachers' personal and professional well-being. With current teacher turnover rates currently at about 20% compared to 9% in 2009 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014), researchers have turned their attention to stress-reduction interventions and programs for teachers. The following study examines the experiences that seven K-12th grade teachers have had with mindfulness-based practices. This study further explores the impact that mindfulness-based practice has on K-12th grade teachers' personal well-being and professional practice. A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was used to gather information to answer the following research question: What is the impact of mindfulness-based practice on K-12th grade teachers' personal well-being and professional practice? Data were analyzed by using grounded theory principles to uncover themes across the interviews. Indicated by the findings, teachers are overloaded with demands from their profession and stressors in their personal lives. The findings show that teachers are compromising their own personal well-being in order to take on the demands of the teaching profession. Different mindfulness-based practices that teachers utilize in their personal lives were highlighted in the findings. The themes from the data suggest that mindfulness-based practices provide teachers with internal and external resources to combat the day to day stressors inherent in their work. The relation between mindfulness-based practices, teacher well-being and quality of teacher-student relationships are explored, along with implications for school social workers in supporting teachers in their practice.

Keywords: mindfulness-based practice, teachers, social work, well-being

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

A Qualitative Investigation of Mindfulness-Based Practice with K-12th Grade Teachers

Introduction

Teaching is an extremely valuable profession in our society for a multitude of reasons specific to the responsibilities and roles teachers have in educating and caring for the upcoming generation. These teachers, ranging from elementary through high school are often some of the most significant adults reaching student lives outside of the family system. They play a central role in the development of classroom culture, student learning, and social-emotional well-being of the student. A teacher's responsibility in providing education to students during the most formative years in their social, emotional, and academic develop is central to the growth of the upcoming generations (Read Foundation, 2014). During this time of development in the students' lives, the material that is being taught and relationships being developed will most likely stay with the students for their entire life.

There has been a recent heightened awareness regarding teacher well-being in the United States. Excessive drop-out rates, behavioral challenges, academic failures, and socioeconomic factors plaguing our country's students have become primary concerns within the education system. Consequently, over the past decade the media, government, and education system have neglected to address what is happening to our teachers (Hudley, n.d.). There has been minimal research to address the impact these factors have on our teachers' personal well-being and instructional practice.

The causes of teacher stress may include an increase in workload, student behavioral challenges, parent-teacher relationships, staffing conflict, lack of support from administration, and lack of autonomy. In addition, teachers have reported that having to

develop a curriculum around the few resources provided within the school can become an increased burden in their profession. Teachers frequently have to work with outdated or no textbooks, outdated technology, few materials for every subject, and low amounts of college preparatory offerings (Hudley, n.d.). Urban schools have been reported as having large class sizes, overcrowding, unhealthy conditions, and increased student learning or mental health needs (Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins, Torf, & Spencer, 2011). Along with the burden of limited resources, teachers also find themselves acting in a variety of different roles usually in highly complex situations. For example, they execute parenting, counseling, disciplining, stress reduction, special education programming, referring, and behavioral intervening skills (Hudley, n.d).

All of these factors can lead to high levels of stress for teachers which facilitate chronic attrition leading to financial challenges for all educational districts. An example of this is within the Chicago public schools, where the costs associated with teacher turnover have been estimated at an annual $ 76 to $ 128 million dollars to recruit, hire, and train new teachers (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007). Teacher well-being has become an increasingly important issue in the United States with the high demands presented in the education sector.

With the multitude of responsibilities that teachers face on a day to day basis, teachers are reporting an increased amount of chronic stress, and decreased job satisfaction, self-efficacy, autonomy, and resilience. These results lead to teacher stress, emotional exhaustion, burnout, and turnover, which has been an ongoing challenge within the teaching profession. Reports from the National Commission on Teaching America's Future (NCTAF) show that teacher attrition has grown by 50% over the last

fifteen years. Additionally, the national teacher turnover rate is at 16.8% and within urban school areas it can be as high as 20%. It is shocking to find that in certain districts teacher turnover rates can be greater than the student drop-out rate (Carroll, n.d.). This turnover rate is excessive when it comes to new teachers in the profession. With public school teachers, an estimated 23% leave within their first five years and 14% move to a different school (Keigher, 2010). These rates have been triggered by new teachers being employed within high-poverty urban communities, without cultural and behavioral training to handle the stressors that exist. As a result, about half of all new teachers placed in high poverty urban school settings are leaving within their first five years to find employment elsewhere (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007).

The cycle of turnover can exist due to teacher burnout. Teacher burnout can result from long term professional stress, which research has identified as a state of emotional exhaustion, disengagement, and perception of lack of autonomy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Jennett et. al., 2003). Teachers that choose to stay in the profession while experiencing occupational stress and burnout are not able to provide students with appropriate academic and social-emotional support. They will experience frequent lack of connection and efficacy within their classroom. In addition, they are not capable of appropriately addressing and meeting the needs of more challenged students (Kokkinos, Panayiotou, & Davazoglou, 2005).

Research has shown that student achievement is greatly influenced by teacher-student relationships and teacher effectiveness rather than by race, class, previous academic experiences, and attendances. In fact, the achievement gap present in our country's education system can be impacted by students who have effective or non-

effective teachers (Rice, 2003). Findings from America's Promise Alliance in their Every

Child Every Promise poll, shows that nearly a quarter of youth ages 12-17 report having

none or only one teacher that they feel knows them well and truly cares about them

(Marin & Brown, 2008.) Prior research has shown the importance of teacher-student

relationships by finding that adolescents who feel a supportive connection to their school

and teachers are more likely to develop academic motivation and less likely to engage in

negative behaviors, such as drug use, violence, and unsafe sexual activity (Marin &

Brown, 2008). With these increasing challenges, new approaches need to be taken for

new outcomes to occur.

     The practices of mindfulness-informed and mindfulness-based practices are

designed to teach individuals how to become aware of their thoughts and feelings. The

intent is to bring awareness to how daily experiences can influence health and well-being,

learn to take control of personal lived experiences, and develop internal resources for

living, healing, and coping with stress (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, n.d.). One

of the most recognized western definitions of mindfulness comes from Dr. Jon Kabat-

Zinn. He defined mindfulness as, "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the

present moment, and nonjudgmental" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Kabat-Zinn was a central

founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) at the University of

Massachusetts Medical Center in 1979. After the development of MBSR, the practice of

mindfulness has been incorporated into Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT),

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DPT)

(Halliwel, n.d.). The key to mindfulness-informed and mindfulness-based therapies is the

focus on awakening the mind, body, and heart, so that we are present and at ease with

every moment in our lives. With mindfulness practice, deep wisdom, compassion, and intimacy with all things are possible (Common Ground, n.d.)

Over the last decade, mindfulness-based practice has progressively emerged within hospitals, clinics, prisons, corporations, universities, and government agencies. It has been used as an approach to enhance stress reduction, and decrease anxiety and depression. More recently, educational facilities have identified mindfulness practices as a way to improve student attention, social and emotional learning, and academic success. However, with the focus specifically on students, there is a lack of research on the impact mindfulness practices can have on teachers. With the heightened demands in the teaching profession, teachers may benefit from learning about and practicing the process of cultivating awareness through the involvement with mindfulness practice. These strategies provide techniques for teachers to learn how to care for themselves by learning to balance the emotional demands of the profession, administrative pressures, and personal challenges.

Trends and recent discussions including mindfulness have illuminated and lifted many areas of mental health challenges across the country. Current research shows that K-12th grade teachers are experiencing stressors from outside and inside the classroom with minimal resources provided for stress-reduction strategies. Mindfulness-based practices have been shown to enhance mental health, physical health, emotional and behavioral regulation, and overall well-being of an individual (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Using an integrative framework, the current study seeks to understand K-12th grade teachers' experience with mindfulness-based practices. Furthermore, this study examines how mindfulness-based practice impacts the personal well-being of the teachers and how it

has translated into their instructional practice. This qualitative study will attempt to answer the following question: What is the impact of mindfulness-based practice on K-12th grade teachers' personal well-being and professional practice?

Literature Review

This study explores the use of mindfulness-based practice with K-12th grade teachers and the impact the practice has on their personal well-being and perceived professional practice. To begin, the importance of teachers, stressors teachers face, and the impact those stressors have on personal and professional well-being are explored from previous research. A variety of definitions and presentations of mindfulness practice, common outcomes, and populations who benefit from this practice are investigated. Finally, there will be an examination of potential outcomes of mindfulness practice with K-12th grade teachers and how mindfulness pertains to personal well-being and professional practice.

Teacher Importance

Previous research has shown that teachers provide a critical foundation for successful development for social and academic environments as students transition through the formal educational system (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007; Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012; Taylor and Ntoumanis, 2007; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers are very important to this development because students, especially younger children, rely on their teachers to provide them with the support and understanding that will advance their daily interactions in the classroom (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). When it comes to K-12th grade education, research recognizes that teacher-student relationships are the building block for further success in academic

and social achievement (Hamre & Pianta,2001 ; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007; Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012; Taylor and Ntoumanis, 2007; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Davis, 2003).

      Student-teacher relationships. Davis (2003) found that the value of the teacher-student relationship is determined by the teacher's interpersonal skills and instructional practices. Research has found that teachers that have the ability to develop a safe environment, express emotional warmth and acceptance, and are available for the development of these supportive relationships assists in the maintenance of student interest in academic and social activities (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Klassen, Frenzel, and Perry (2012), discovered that for students who believe that teachers are in tune with their basic psychological needs, the student is able to socialize and work on their own while trusting that they can approach their teacher with anything and that their teacher will recognize and respond to their needs (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon & Kaplan, 2007). The benefit to students feeling that their needs are being satisfied can motivate them to seek out new challenges and opportunities to further their learning without a positive reward (Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012). Overall research in the area of teacher-student relationships has found that teachers have the power to determine how a student will develop socially, emotionally, and academically (Davis, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001 ; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007; Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012).

Stressors in the Teaching Profession

      The teaching profession is unique to those of other helping occupations (i.e. medical profession and social work) in that teachers spend nearly the entire day with their

students, whereas other professionals spend less time with their clients and patients

(Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012). However, this also means that the teachers can

encounter a variety of stressors in the workplace specific to their workplace environment.

Dinham and Scott (1998) developed a classification for factors influencing the teaching

profession; intrinsic reward factors, extrinsic to school, and school-based factors. There is

a large amount of research conducted on the intrinsic reward factors and school-based

factors that can impact stressors teachers face in their profession.

       Intrinsic reward factors. Research refers to intrinsic reward factors as

concerning the instructional practice and classroom engagement. These factors are the

motives for individuals entering into the teaching profession which are seen as working

with students, seeing students learn and develop, developing connections, and personal

values as a motivation for teaching. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) and Chang (2009), have

found that teachers develop their own goals for themselves and their students, explicitly

or implicitly, which is driven by their previously set values and internal motivation for

teaching. However, research has found that when there are numerous stressors within the

classroom that can negatively impact teachers' intrinsic reward factors (Klassen, Frenzel,

& Perry, 2012; Geving, 2007; Smith and Ingersoll, 2004; Chang, 2009; Scott, Stone, &

Dinham, 2001; Pines, 2002). One of the main stressors that research has found to impact

teacher motivation for teaching is student behavior (Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012;

Geving, 2007; Supaporn, Dodds, & Griffin, 2003)**.** Lack of effort and discipline problems

in the classroom are two of the leading sources of stress among teachers. Research

conducted by Geving (2007) discovered that lack of effort in the classroom was identified

as the sole stressful student behavior which was a significant predictor of teacher stress.

In contrast, when examining sources of stress in the education profession, Supaporn, Dodds, and Griffin (2003) found that discipline problems had the highest rank of contributing to teacher stress. Intrinsic reward factors are only one area in the teaching profession in which challenges can arise.

School-based factors. One of the largest areas for occupational stressors is found in school-based factors. These factors encompass environmental factors that teachers are interacting with on a day-to-day basis, such as, interactions with colleagues, parents, school administration, time pressure, school location, resources, and school values (Dinham & Scott, 1998; Scott, Stone, & Dinham, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2008; Slaalvik, & Skaalvik, 2011; Hargrevaes, 2003; Lindqvist & Nordanger, 2006; Hughes, 2012 & DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Pines, 2002). When it comes to school-based factors, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2008) examined the relationship between teachers' perception of their school context and found that these factors were discovered to vary from school to school. Specifically, the congruence of teacher values and school values is a significant determinant of teachers' interactions with other school-based factors (Slaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Hughes (2012) and DeAngelis and Presley (2011) surveyed a startling number of teachers in the United States that were subjected to function in low wages, and overcrowded environments. Educational researchers have discovered that within these school-based factors, teachers are experiencing increased workloads, demands for paperwork and documentation, frequent change in curriculums, higher expectations of attendance in meetings, and less time for their students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2008; Slaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Hargrevaes, 2003; Lindqvist & Nordanger, 2006). In contrast,

Pine (2002) determined that teachers working are mostly isolated to the classroom and that teachers have less time to interact with their colleagues and parents. The lack of interaction with parents may influence teachers' sense of belonging in the school and teaching profession (Slaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). There are numerous factors that influence occupational stressors in the teaching profession and each one can have a significant impact on the personal and occupational well-being of teachers.

Impact on Personal and Professional Well-being

Emotional exhaustion. Research has revealed that the working demands placed on teachers has created a movement of increased emotional exhaustion within the teaching profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2008; Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012; Maslach, et al., 2001; Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Veldman et. al, 2013). Emotional exhaustion can be explained as the depletion of one's emotional and physical resources, which result from excessive personal and occupational demands (Maslach, et al., 2001). McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, and Melendres (2009) found that teachers who experienced emotional exhaustion reported higher levels of perceived occupational demands and an imbalance with these demands and the classroom resources available. Furthermore, research presents that the increased working speed and workload that teachers are subjected to increase emotional exhaustion, which is directly linked to reduced job satisfaction and accomplishment (Skaalvik, & Skaalvik, 2008; Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009). In fact, McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, and Melendres (2009) reported from the research that teachers who spent more time in this type of environment were at greater risk for burnout than teachers who

utilized preventative coping strategies and had decreased classroom demands. These demands can be alleviated and improved with the existence of positive teacher-student relationships (McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, and Melendres, 2009; Veldman et. al, 2013; Maslach, et al., 2001). Veldman et. al (2013) investigated the factors that influence teacher job satisfaction and found a positive relation between teachers' job satisfaction and self-reported quality of teacher-student relationships. That being said, the day to day experiences of coping with poor teacher-student relationships will lead to higher levels of anxiety, anger, and emotional exhaustion and decreased levels of engagement and enjoyment, which is directly associated with teacher burnout (Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012).

Burnout. In response to the chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and decreased job satisfaction that teachers face, burnout develops and has been found to lead teachers to leave the profession (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001). Burnout is the term used to describe a potential result of these interconnected psychological and physiological symptoms. Maslach, et al (2001) defines burnout as a condition where teachers' physical and mental energy has been depleted because of the unrealistic expectations set by the educational system, school community, or themselves, with a desire to act in agreement with these social norms at the same time when their basic needs are not being met.

Research has shown that burnout symptoms can present themselves when teachers perceive that there is an imbalance between their occupational demands and the internal and external resources that they have for coping with these demands (McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009;

Maslach, et al., 2001; Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, P. A., 2012). When researching

teacher perceptions of classroom demands and resources as well as teachers' personal

coping resources across 13 schools, McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, and Melendres,

(2009) found that emotional exhaustion suggests that emotional symptoms of burnout are

directly connected to teachers' perceptions of their resources and demands which can

vary from teacher to teacher in the same school setting. Additional research has found

that teachers who continue to stay in the profession while experiencing burnout

symptoms have an increased chance of creating a negative learning environment which

can be harmful for the student's social-emotional and academic development (Jennings &

Greenberg, 2009). These findings highlight the importance for researchers to identify and

address the factors that are leading to teacher burnout and eventually removing

themselves from the profession. Even though emotional exhaustion is directly related to

symptoms of burnout, Maslach, et al. (2001) believes that it is an insufficient criterion

because it only focuses on stress-produced emotions often caused by occupational

demands, but it does not encompass other important and problematic aspects of teacher

experiences.

Impact on Student and Classroom Well-Being

As seen, the stressors teachers are facing are having detrimental effects on their

personal and occupational well-being. These stressors translate into the development of

teacher-student relationships and student academic engagement and achievement. Our

students are at the forefront of the impact these stressors have on our teachers.

Relatedness. Decades' worth of research in social connections has discovered the

universality of the desire to form social connections which is directly related human

psychological functioning. This research has found that the motivation to form interpersonal attachments is directly related to behavior and emotions. However, in the absence of these attachments, the development of psychological and physical challenges can arise (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Similarly, current research has discovered that the psychological need for relatedness and connection can also be referred to as the basic need for belonging (Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012). When teachers are able to attend to this basic need, student motivation for relatedness and engagement increases (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007; Taylor and Ntoumanis, 2007; Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012),

In addition, Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, and Kaplan (2007) and Taylor and Ntoumanis (2007) discovered a feedback loop between engagement in daily work by teachers where certain behaviors are projected onto their students which influences students' social and academic behaviors. Taylor and Ntoumanis (2007) expanded these findings by recognizing that teachers' perceptions of their students' self-determination is associated with the teachers' self-determination to teach those students. This reciprocal process of relatedness and connection with students has a strong association with job satisfaction and work engagement (Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012).

When comparing research conducted by Klassen, Frenzel, and Perry (2012) and Furrer and Skinner (2003), teachers and students have similar emotional and behavioral responses to a strong sense of relatedness with each other. Both teachers and students were found to display an increase in their engagement and presence in the classroom. Teachers that reported higher levels of connectedness influenced lower levels of anxiety, anger, and emotional exhaustion (Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012). Likewise, students

who reported a strong sense of relatedness with their teachers showed an increase in their

positive emotions, performance, and motivation within school and classroom (Furrer and

Skinner, 2003). When this reciprocal relatedness is interrupted by a disconnect between

student and teacher perception of the relationship (Veldman, et. al, 2013), research shows

that fear of school, disengagement, challenging behaviors and academic failure can result

(Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

      Academic engagement and achievement. As the research suggests, having a

teacher who is fully engaged and attune to their students can impact the academic

engagement and success of the student (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2008; Geving, 2007; Furrer

& Skinner, 2003; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Pas, Bradshaw, Hershfeldt, & Leaf,

2010). A study conducted looking at identifying student behaviors associated with

teacher stress and determining the types of teacher behaviors that could influence these

student behaviors, found that teacher classroom behaviors are associated with students

motivation to complete their academic work and come prepared to class (Geving, 2007).

      Research shows that teaching efficacy is a large determinant for student behavior

and academic involvement (Pas, Bradshaw, Hershfeldt, & Leaf, 2010; Skaalvik &

Skaalvik, 2008. Researchers discovered that teachers who reported having low teacher

efficacy and negative beliefs about their ability to teach and form relationships with their

students, resulted in poorer student academic achievement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2008).

Teaching efficacy and burnout were associated with in school suspension and out of

school suspension referrals. However, Pas, Bradshaw, Hershfeldt, and Leaf (2010) found

that students were less likely to experience an out of school suspension when their

teacher reported a high level of burnout. Therefore, indicating that when teachers have

become emotionally exhausted, they are less likely to engage in student behavior

problems and disciple processes.

It is clear from previous research that these working conditions for teachers will

influence daily stress levels, which in turn lead to high burnout, emotional exhaustion,

decreased job satisfaction, and low self-efficacy. These stressors can be seen within face

to face daily interactions and administrative environments which can lead to teachers'

decreased ability to implement and perform social-emotional strategies to reduce their

stress levels. Therefore, with the demanding nature of the teaching profession, teachers

are in need of an integrative and innovative method of training that supports their

personal and professional well-being. Parker and Martin (2009) found that effective

coping methods are seen as interventions used to protect teachers from developing

negative emotions and reactions to the teaching and administrative demands they face on

a day to day basis. There is a decade's worth of research that has analyzed the impact

mindfulness practice, as a stress reduction method, has had on an individual's physical,

psychological, and social experiences.

Background of Mindfulness

The practice of mindfulness is rooted in 2500 year old tradition of Buddhist

psychology (Bishop et. al, 2004; Didonna, 2009; Zimmerman 2000). The English word

"mindfulness" is translated from the Pali word, "sati," which can be interpreted

"awareness, attention, and remembering" (Didonna, 2009). Mindfulness within Buddhist

psychology focuses on cultivating insight on the processes of the mind and patterns in the

material world (Siegel, Germer, & Olendzki, 2008). The practice of mindfulness through

Buddhist mediation teachings aim to understand human experiences, the nature of

suffering, and ways that suffering can be alleviated (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

With the transition of mindfulness into Western contexts, an increasing

awareness is being brought to how this practice is influencing the health and well-being

of individuals. Mindfulness-based practices are receiving mainstream acceptance in the

Western world, as a non-religious way to address a range of behavioral and emotional

challenges, such as chronic pain, anxiety, depression, and substance use (Kabat-Zinn,

1982; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Mendelson et. al, 2010). Jon Kabat-Zinn, the initial

founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), has influenced the mindfulness

movement for the treatment of a wide variety of illnesses. Mindfulness-based practices

have been clinically recognized as an effective way to alleviate chronic stress and pain

(Kabat-Zinn, 1982).

Mindfulness is usually obtained through intentional mental practices, focused on

attention and awareness, which usually involve some form of meditation (Didonna, 2009;

Shapiro, 2009; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). The mindfulness-based interventions

have multiple authoritative translations and the practice is usually altered to perform

appropriately in the given population (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). In fact, preexisting

multifaceted therapies such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT); Mindfulness Based

Cognitive Therapy (MBCT); and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) have

acquired the cultivation of mindfulness as a way to enhance the therapy practice and

client well-being. Research shows that mindfulness-informed trainings and mindfulness-

based interventions are used in a variety of settings as a way to address behavioral and

emotional imbalances, which can include areas of chronic pain, anxiety, depression, and substance use (Kabat-Zinn, 1982).

Definition of Mindfulness

There is a universal acknowledgement within the research that there are an array of interpretations and definitions for mindfulness, however across the board, researchers utilize the ideas that mindfulness is a practice of non-judgmental awareness, consciously paying attention to what is occurring in the mind and body in the present moment, with acceptance and gratitude (Baraz & Alexander, 2010; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Ancona & Mendelson, 2014; Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012; Weiss, 2004). Similarly, Kabat-Zinn (1994) defined mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (p.4). Meditation instructors have referred to the practice of mindfulness as an instinctive and natural human quality, which involves observation, participation, and acceptance of life's moments. This human quality is one that overtime individuals lose because of the fast paced society and quantity driven life (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012).

To further the understanding of mindfulness, Roeser, Skinner, Beers, and Jennings (2012) described mindfulness as involving three interconnected mental skills and characteristics 1) intentionally transferring attention to the present moment; 2) approaching the present moment with clarity, calmness, and openness; and 3) being present with these moments without any judgment or mental reactions. The practice of mindfulness is able to bring awareness to certain qualities that one has to observe, accept,

and regulate how they think, feel, and behave in any given environment (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007).

Focus of Mindfulness-based Practice

Researchers have recognized that there are a variety of ways to practice mindfulness and that it is traditionally taught through contemplative practice where an individual's attention is intentionally on the present moment and focused on the mental experience of attending to bodily sensations, feelings, thoughts, and mental images (Ancona & Mendelson, 2014; Didonna, 2009; Shapiro, et. al., 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 1994, Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012). In addition, mindfulness can also be cultivated through turning attention to daily activities, such as exercising, eating, listening, and speaking (Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012). According to Kabat-Zinn (1994), mindfulness practice can include body scans, where attention is focused on the body, from head to toe, bringing awareness to sensual experiences in the body. Furthermore, meditation on sounds and the breath encourages awareness to be brought to the body, emotions, and thoughts that occur in the present moment (Greenberg and Harris, 2012; Shapiro, et. al., 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Research conducted has found that the most common mindfulness-based practice in the western culture is meditation and yoga (Greenberg and Harris, 2012; Didonna, 2009; Shapiro, et. al., 2009; Ancona & Mendelson, 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012). Meditation incorporates the dimensions of mindfulness through experiential mindfulness, formal meditation, and movement meditation trains the mind by focusing attention on the present practice (Didonna, 2009; Ancona & Mendelson, 2014). Yoga is similar in that it focuses attention on the breath, however it

incorporates body movements to enhance mental and physical training, which have the potential to enhance physical health (Ancona & Mendelson, 2014). Individuals who incorporate mindfulness-based practices into their lives have developed greater awareness and understanding of their emotions and actions, while approaching this awareness with acceptance. This has been found to enhance resilience, decrease negative thinking processes, improve self-esteem, and decrease dependency on external factors for fulfillment (Greenberg and Harris, 2012; Didonna, 2009; Shapiro, et. al., 2009; Ancona & Mendelson, 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012).

Mindfulness with Teachers

Recognizing the positive effects that mindfulness has had in therapeutic practices, the adaptation of mindfulness into educational settings for students have been supported by school social workers and psychologists. With the research on the impact mindfulness can have on student social-emotional development and academic success, Western countries are starting to implement mindfulness-based trainings and interventions for teacher professional development (Flook, Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013; Gold, et. al., 2010; Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013; Pinger, & Davidson, 2013; Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012; Roeser, et. al., 2013; Farahman, 2011).

The focus of wellness is taking a critical role in the educational system. The movement to transform schools into holding a holistic approach to education has adopted a number of intervention programs and strategies that have been used within the health care sector. Mindfulness is one intervention that is frequently being examined and is receiving mainstream acceptance around the world as a way to enhance teacher well-

being (Black, Milam, & Sussman, 2009; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Mendelson et. al, 2010). Albrecht, Albrecht, and Cohen (2012) have found that mindfulness is being translated into teacher wellness programs as a way to reduce stress levels, assist in behavior management, and improve teacher self-esteem. In addition, with increasing research interest in the practice of mindfulness with teachers, practitioners and researchers are focused on developing interventions and programs aimed at recognizing and nurturing teachers compassion, empathy, and forgiveness within their profession and for their students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012). Even though there is minimal evidence-based research in this area, the presented findings have provided reason to believe that mindfulness practice has the ability to improve teacher emotional exhaustion, burnout, emotional functioning, teacher student relationships, and psychological challenges (Black, Milam, & Sussman, 2009; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Mendelson et. al, 2010; Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012). Research that has been conducted thus far has discovered profound benefits to teachers' personal well-being and instructional practice.

Impact of Mindfulness on Teachers

Personal well-being. Given the importance of teacher well-being, research has shown that mindfulness exposure and trainings reduce emotional exhaustion (Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013; Gold, et. al., 2010). Gold (2010) examined the effects of teaching an MBSR course to primary school teachers on levels of anxiety, depression, and stress by offering mindfulness trainings to 11 participants, who were recruited from local suburban schools. The study found that most teachers were suffering

from emotional distress and all of the participants scored above the clinical threshold for depression. Distress was self-reported by participants as impairments in motivation, self-confidence, and concentration. Mindfulness was then used as an intervention to positively impact the effect of stress on emotional exhaustion. Teachers who were high in mindfulness experienced lower emotional exhaustion than teachers low in mindfulness (Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013). After the completion of self-reports by 64 teachers, Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, and Katz (2013) sought to replicate previous research that found that a teacher's practice with mindfulness is directly related to a decrease in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment. From the sample, the researchers found that mindfulness was also related to reduced feelings of low personal accomplishment, sleep impairment, less negative affect, and few daily physical symptoms.

Furthermore, previous research has shown that mindfulness can reduce depersonalization and increase sustained attention with teachers (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2013, Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013; Roeser, et. al., 2013). Additionally, Roeser, et. al. (2013) found that mindfulness was characterized by a reduction in teacher self-judgment, and self-criticism and by an increase in self-acceptance, self-love, and recognition of shared experiences of difficulty and setbacks that all teachers experience. When it comes to anxiety and depression, researchers have found that teachers experience declines in symptoms of stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression when practicing mindfulness (Gold, et.al, 2010; Roeser, et. al., 2013). In fact, teachers experiencing mindfulness reported significantly fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression when surveyed at post program and during a three month

follow up (Roeser, et. al., 2013). Research has shown that mindfulness-based practices have the ability to have a positive impact on many areas of an individual's psychological health.

   Professional well-being. Overall research has found that in the United States, mindfulness practice is an effective intervention technique that can be implemented in schools to enhance teachers' professional well-being (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2013; Roeser, et. al., 2013; Gold, et. al., 2010; Jennings, 2009). Roeser, et. al. (2013) examined the following: mindfulness delivery for professional benefit, teachers' ability to do at home practice, the impact on psychological and physiological indicators for occupation stress and burnout, and the impact on attention and self-compassion. After randomly sampling 58 public school teachers from urban schools in Canada and 55 public school teachers from suburban public schools in the United States, the researchers discovered that on average teachers reported receiving "quite a bit" of professional benefit. From the teachers who went through the mindfulness training, 98% said that they would recommend it to their peers. Similarly, after examining how teachers' perceptions of school climate and social-emotional learning relate to stress, teaching efficacy, and job satisfaction, Jennings & Greenberg (2009) found that teachers are greatly impacted by their perceptions of their working environment, which ultimately influences their professional well-being. The professional benefits such as higher levels of self-accomplishment, job satisfaction, and changed perceptions of school climate, motivation, and teaching efficacy were reported by teachers practicing mindfulness (Roeser, et. al, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). With the increase in professional well-being through

the exposure and training in mindfulness practices, teachers showed a decrease in the number of work absences during a school year (Roeser, et. al., 2013).

      Teaching demands. With the heightened teaching demands, lack of funding, low resources, and poor functioning within the educational system, mindfulness has been found to counteract these barriers to enhance teaching capacities (Burrows, 2011; Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013; Farahman, 2011). In fact, teachers within high poverty urban schools settings have more to gain from exposure and training in MBSR (Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013). Mindfulness can be seen as more feasible, efficacious, and can add more value among ambitious yet overly stressed teachers (Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013; Roeser, et. al., 2013). The research shows that teachers believe mindfulness can foster resilience when facing work-related stressors, as well as better attend to personal and structural aspects of both teaching and learning (Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013; Roeser, et. al., 2013; Burrows, 2011).

      To further teachers' ability to cope with teaching demands, Burrows (2011) sampled eight teachers over a ten week period of six 90 minute sessions. The idea of group mindfulness has been presented, however it is foreign to the greater body of evidence-based research. Burrows (2011) found that experiencing mindfulness in the presence of co-workers assists teachers quicker in observing thoughts and emotions that are present without having to react to them. However, Farahman (2011) found that systemic issues must be taken into consideration when trying to apply mindfulness-based practices into educational settings. While assessing the effectiveness of mental health and behavioral programs on the promotion of positive outcomes for low-income urban youth,

Farahman (2011) found that the presence of systemic stressors can be a barrier to effectively implement mindfulness interventions within the educational facilities. Countering this finding, mindfulness with co-workers was found to help teachers and leaders more successfully address management, teaching, structural barriers, and emotional challenges within the classroom and school environment (Burrows, 2011).

Classroom engagement. Research evaluating the impact teachers' exposure and training with mindfulness can indirectly have on student and classroom outcomes is limited, however existing research shows there is a substantial benefit to implementing mindfulness with teachers (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2013; Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The idea that increased awareness around teachers' social emotional competency and the importance it has on health, teacher-student relationships, classroom management, and healthy classroom culture is the driving force for implementing mindfulness programming for teachers (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Additional research has found that mindfulness is a cost effective intervention given the annual costs associated with teacher burnout, which ultimately negatively impact students' academic performance (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2013). Within schools, this intervention has shown to prevent what Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, and Katz (2013), call the "burnout cascade." This term refers to a decrease in deteriorating classroom culture, student behavioral challenges, emotional exhaustion, and an increase in obtaining a mindful attitude. These outcomes have been found to promote a positive impact on teacher and student well-being (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2013; Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Conceptual Framework

Researchers have been challenged to identify one specific theory that encompasses all the dimensions presented within mindfulness-based practice. The literature related to the use of mindfulness-based practice has presented a variety of theories specific to the field of psychology that influence the way researchers look at this practice. The conceptual framework for this research study focuses on the integration of positive psychology, self-determination theory, and strengths-based perspective as a lens to view the ways that mindfulness-based practices can impact K-12th grade teachers' personal well-being and teaching practice.

The traditional focus in psychology research and practice was on the identification and treatments of mental health challenges, however starting in 1998 there has been a shift away from this focus and more towards what is known as positive psychology. This shift does not ignore the factors of human suffering, but rather embraces this suffering while also examining individuals' positive experiences, traits, and the systems that leads to joy, satisfaction, and contentment (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Sheldon & King, 2001; Cowan, 2000; Duckworth, Steen, & Sheligman, 2005). Positive psychology can be defined as the scientific study of "conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 103). To further this definition of positive psychology, Sheldon and King (2001) state that it is the, "study of ordinary human strengths and virtues that revisit the average person" (pg. 26). Within this lens, there are three central areas that researchers examine. The first understands positive emotions, which encompasses aspects of contentment with the past, joy in the present, and optimism for the future. The second

is looking at positive individual traits, which studies strengths and qualities, for example, resilience, self-regulation, and compassion. The final area understands positive systems that cultivate better communities (Duckworth, Steen, & Sheligman, 2005). These areas acknowledge that individuals who are suffering do not just want relief for their pain, but rather they are searching for new ways to develop happiness within their lives (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Sheldon & King, 2001; Cowan, 2000; Duckworth, Steen, & Sheligman, 2005).

An integral part in the positive psychology movement is self-determination theory (SDT). The focus of SDT is that 1) human development is active; 2) humans are naturally motivated to grow and develop new experiences, and; 3) humans universal basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory is based on the assumption that individuals are born with tendencies that motivate them to grow and develop mentally, master challenges within the environment, and integrate their life experiences into self-perception (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000). In addition, when the basic needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are satisfied, individuals are able to experience a continuing sense of health and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). There are numerous definitions for self-determination, but the one selected for this framework is,

> Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control

of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society (Field,

Martin, Miller, Ward & Wehmeyer, 1998).

Deci and Ryan (1980) go further to mention that the skill of open awareness is essential

in the facilitation of behavior and emotional regulation in line with an individual's needs,

values, interests, and goals.

Building on and utilizing the strengths of an individual is concrete in both positive

psychology and self-determination theory. The strengths-based perspective in social work

practice stems from the work of Saleeby (1996) who determined this lens as a way for

social workers to identify and empower their clients based on their strengths. This

perspective is similar to that of SDT, in that it does not ignore the challenges that

individuals face or try to force the sufferings into strengths. Rather, the strengths-based

perspective focuses on empowering individuals to identify their strengths and utilize

them within their lives. Using a strengths-based perspective in this study identifies that

individuals carry inherent power within themselves and that when individuals utilize their

strengths they are able to discover a better quality of life (Rapp, 2006; Greene, Lee, &

Hoffpauir, 2005; Saleebey, 2006; Miley, et. al, 2011).

This integrative lens has been identified based on the idea that mindfulness-based

practice illustrates the goal of all three lenses with the motivation to enhance an

individual's quality of life. Self-determination theory is saying that these strengths are

already instilled within the teacher and that mindfulness-based practices focus on

bringing awareness to these strengths to enhance personal well-being and instructional

practice. Mindfulness embraces the lens of positive psychology by being used as a way to

not only alleviate suffering, but to provide stress reduction strategies to guide teachers in

joy, contentment, motivation, and life fulfillment. Strengths are an essential piece to the practice of mindfulness, specifically that the practice of mindfulness can enhance teachers' ability to become aware to their own strengths within their personal lives and teaching practice.

Methods

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into K-12th grade teachers' experience with mindfulness practice on their personal well-being and the perceived impact on their professional practice. The research design was qualitative and exploratory in nature. Participants were recruited with the use of a convenience and snowball sampling research design, which resulted in seven semi-structured qualitative interviews. A qualitative design for this study was chosen to add personal experience narratives to the preexisting quantitative research in mindfulness.

Participants

This research study used a convenience and snowball sampling method to recruit participants. Convenience sampling is a nonprobability sampling strategy where participants are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher (Explorable Psychology, 2009). To advance recruitment, the researcher asked the participants to assist the researcher in indentifying other potential participants, which is known as snowball sampling (Institutional Review Board, 2010). In addition, mindfulness organizations and trainings in Minnesota were contacted for potential participants. Initial contacts with existing networks were made through e-mail.

The sample for this study was comprised of seven kindergarten through twelfth (K-12th) grade teachers. Two of the participants were males and five were females. The length that teachers had been teaching also varied from two to 29 years. Out of the seven participants, three of the participants were teachers in urban schools, three were teachers in suburban schools, and one participant was from a rural school setting. All of the participants self-identified as both having practice in mindfulness and have found mindfulness-based practices to be influential to their personal well-being and professional practice. Their experience with mindfulness-based practices ranged from six months to 15 years. Due to the variety of presentations in mindfulness, such as self-help books, center based practice, workshops, and trainings there are no limitations on the sample in regards to the type of mindfulness-based practice that teachers experience, amount of time practicing mindfulness, age, gender, or number of years as a teacher.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of all participants was ensured through the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at St. Catherine University. A Collaborative Institution Training Initiative (CITI) was required prior to the research approval by the IRB. This training focuses on the protection of human subjects and is widely accessed by academic institutions to ensure adequate training. Individuals interested in participating in this research study were provided with background information on the study's focus, description of interview and research procedures, risks and benefits to participating in this study, and protection of confidentiality. This information was presented to participants within a consent form that was first distributed through e-mail then reviewed in person to assure that participation is voluntary and all questions are answered prior to

beginning the interview. All participants had the ability to choose where the interview would be held and at what time. The main interview questions were generally related to the participants practice with mindfulness, professional development, and student success (see Appendix A).

At the start of each interview the researcher and participant reviewed the consent form and each participant was required to provide the researcher with their signature of approval. The participants were instructed that at any time they are free to not participate in the question or end the interview with no consequences. Participants received a $10 coffee shop gift card in appreciation of their time. They received this gift certificate regardless of whether or not they answered all of the interview questions.

Participant's confidentiality was assured by not using any identifying information during the recording and transcription of the interviews. All transcripts and voice recordings were locked on a password protected file on the researcher's personal computer. All audio and transcribed information was destroyed on May 23, 2014.

Procedure

The data was obtained through seven semi-structured, face-to-face interviews which lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interview was recorded with the use of a voice recorder in order to transcribe the data which was used for further data analysis. Prior to the voluntary acceptance of partaking in this research study, the participants were asked whether or not they have found mindfulness practice to benefit their personal well-being and professional practice. Participants were then e-mailed a copy of the consent form for personal review. Participants who agreed to participate in this study were contacted via e-mail and an appointment was scheduled to meet in person for the 60

minute interview. The interviews took place at a location that was convenient for the

researcher and participant and was in a private setting to support the confidentiality of the

participant.

Following the interview, participants were given a $10 gift card to thank them for

their time and for taking part in this study whether or not the participants chose to skip

interview questions or end the interview at any time. The researcher's contact

information was given to the participants for any further questions they may have.

Finally, the researcher asked each participant if they would like to be contacted to see the

final copy of this research study.

Data Analysis

After the transcription of all interviews, the researcher used grounded theory

principles to analyze the data collected from the interviews. Grounded theory has a step

by step process that researchers take to get close to the data yet still remain objective

(Patton, 2002). For this research, the use of grounded theory principles provided an

explanatory framework for understanding the experience of K-12th grade teachers with

the practice of mindfulness. The first step that was completed in the data analysis process

was open-coding, where the data was examined line by line to identify, name, categorize,

and describe what is occurring within the data. Through this process, the researcher tried

to answer the questions, "what is this about" and "what is being referenced here" for each

line (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Axial coding was the second step that was completed in

data analysis process where codes that occurred three or more times were placed into

larger themes. The themes were connected and reconstructed into categories and

subcategories to form concepts that were directly related to the research question for this

study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For the purpose of this study, the researcher was the only person analyzing the data.

Findings

This research sought to address the research question: What is the impact of mindfulness-based practices on K-12th grade teachers' personal well-being and professional practice? Qualitative data revealed that participants focused on six interrelated themes within their interviews. First, participants described stressors that they have experienced within the teaching profession and the impact of stress on personal well-being. Next, participants highlighted mindfulness-based practices that they have utilized and the positive impact that mindfulness has had on their personal well-being. Furthermore, participants addressed the significant transformations that have occurred within their professional practice as a result from improvements in their personal well-being. Finally, participants highlighted barriers that they have experienced to their practice with mindfulness. These six themes and corresponding subthemes will be explored in turn below.

Stressors in the Teaching Profession

Participants in this study described multiple stressors they have experienced within the teaching profession. Six subthemes emerged from the interviews: perfectionism, perceived performance expectations, administrator and colleague relationships, time, workload, student behavior, and student concerns.

1. **Student behavior.** The most common subtheme discussed among teachers was the unpredictability of student behaviors and the significance these behaviors can have on the teachers' ability to maintain tranquility in the

classroom. For instance, five out of seven participants discussed student behavior as a prominent stressor inside the classroom. One participant stated: *… other stressors would be bad kids, kids can make you mad. I have some challenging students for sure.* Another participant described their experience with student behavior by stating: *Mainly this unpredictability stems from my work with one of my students, who demonstrate severe and pervasive behaviors*. Another participant added to that by explaining an experience she had with aggressive behavior.

> *I definitely had apples thrown at my head like literally had apples thrown at my head. They were so sick of me and I think it was just from this place of like stop pretending, stop trying to be someone you're not. They did not like me that first semester I was teaching.*

2. **Student concerns.** Participants described the additional pressures that are placed on them as witness of a multitude of concerns affecting students' learning. In fact, three out of seven described their concern for their student's personal circumstances as being a stressor within the profession. One participant described their concern for their students by stating:

> *I mean just some of the stressors were the families of the kids I dealt with… I saw a lot of really sad hard things. A lot of abuse. A lot of neglect. A lot of just generational poverty. I mean there are a lot things I saw and stories I know that I have yet to be able to put words to because it is just too hard to even remember them… There were a lot of hopeless days of fighting and fighting and fighting and making*

lesson plan after lesson plan and failing test score after failing test

score and realizing that it was just such a tough system for them.

Another participant stated…*all of the baggage that they were bringing in was*

having a mental and emotional toll on me and I was projecting that onto them

when discussing what stressors were occurring in the classroom. Furthermore,

the concern about if the kids are learning was expressed by another participant

by stating: *Are my kids learning? … oh my god this child's not making*

progress or oh my gosh this child is absent all the time or oh my gosh this

child I think has a learning disability you know that kind of like oh my gosh

what do I do. How do I solve that problem?

3. **Perfectionism.** Teachers discussed their own perfectionistic expectations as

   contributing to stressors that they face in their teaching. Four of seven

   participants used the words "perfectionism," "perfectionist," or "Type A."

   which is identified within this subtheme as perfectionist expectations. One

   participant simply stated *I put a lot of undue stress on myself because I want*

   my lesson plans to be meaningful. Another participant expressed *I really am a*

   perfectionist in what I do and I feel I have to…I feel I have to show this

   persona. Like happy and enthusiastic all the time in my classroom, which

   really can get exhausting. Similarly, another participant explained *I have*

   always been a passionate one. I think that I just to have a lot of passion and a

   lot of drive and perfectionism…I just want it to be right. These statements

   were said as a way to emphasize a sense of obligation and pressure that these

teachers put upon themselves which they felt contributed to a sense of self-imposed stress in their work.

4. **Perceived performance expectations.** The constant expectation for teachers to perform their best, at all times, is illustrated by many participants as being incredibly stressful. In fact, four out of seven participants spoke about the way in which the teaching profession is viewed by teachers themselves and by others. They described the teaching profession as one that requires a great deal of advance preparation and a significant amount of time "on stage" in front of the students. One participant described teaching as, *having to be onstage all the time in your job. When you are a teacher you never have a moment to just kind of be blah.* Similarly another participant stated*:*

> It's not the kind of job that you can just punch in and punch out. I
> can't afford to have a bad day. I can't afford to be in a bad mood
> because my bad mood affects every kid in my class and my teammates
> and so this is still that kind of relationship type of job so I got to come,
> I got to be on.

One participant stated, *I am constantly needing to be proactive in my approach with this student rather than being reactive.* Another participant described teaching by stating: *I think a lot of teaching is just survive in advance. Particularly your first few years of teaching is survive in advance.*

5. **Administrator & colleague relationships.** Participants allude to team relationships as a vital aspect of their working environment and professional practice, and, with negative relationship dynamics, stress can increase. For

instance, three out of seven participants mentioned that colleague relationships and "team" connection were related to their stress. One participant stated:

> *The school I worked at was really toxic. The teachers were really negative towards one another they were unnecessarily competitive and backstabbing and just I don't know what they thought they were going to win. Everyone just wanted to be on top. It was just, it was rough.*

Another participant emphasized the team dynamic by stating: *I'm on a great team but I've had other years where I've had major colleague stressors. Where one colleague doesn't do what everyone else is doing or you know it becomes very problematic in that way.* Similarly, another participant addressed the administrator relationship by stating:

> *…a lot of systemic challenges with principals being really frustrating. I haven't worked under a principal that is organized or that kind of sees the big picture and is able to guide these massive ships towards a big goal. All of the principals that I have worked under take kind of a shot gun approach.*

6. **Workload and time.** The acknowledgement of limited time to complete professional responsibilities while working in an environment with extensive workload requirements is discussed by many participants. In fact, four out of seven participants specifically mentioned that time is a stressor in the teaching profession. *I have no time to take a break and I'm creating all my resources from scratch.* One participant simply stated *deadlines* when responding to the experienced stressors in the teaching profession. Another participant summed

this up by stating: *what's unfortunate is that teachers feel that time crunch all the time you know throughout the day so when do you make time for yourself?* Another participant described *Every single lesson and I teach let's see one, two, about seven different subjects everyday so it takes me a good eight to ten hours to get those done and that's my weekend time. In addition the prep time to get it all read.*

All participants referred to hours worked, lesson planning, lack of resources, or paperwork when asked to talk about stressors within the teaching profession. One participant summed these up in one word *workload*. Another participant described their workload by stating: *I would put in 70 hours a week my first three years teaching just so I could have a shitty lesson plan because I didn't have any sources.* One participant added to this by stating: *I didn't have a book, I didn't have a curriculum, so I had to design and create everything from scratch. Which is exhausting for sure.* In addition, one participant discussed the amount of time to prepare lessons by trying to fit the needs of the students.

> *I spend a lot of time before school and after school preparing the curriculum and modifying it to the individual needs of each of my students. Another stressor is the amount of paperwork that I am trying to manage for each of my students.*

Impact of Experienced Stressors

The second theme that participants spoke about was the personal impact of the stressors presented above. Seven out of seven participants spoke about a negative impact

that stress had on their personal well-being. Two subthemes emerged from the interviews: mental health and sleep challenges and exhaustion.

1. **Mental health and sleep challenges**. The high levels of stress that teachers are facing can have a significant impact on their mental health, which seemingly influences sleep disturbances. When participants were asked to talk about what led each participant to mindfulness, five out of seven participants addressed concerns with mental health and sleep challenges by referring to anxiety, depression, feeling low, or needing to de-stress. One participant stated *I have had serious lows in my life … with an active mind. Just lows… I understand that it is a very real thing and it sucks to feel crappy all the time. It sucks to struggle through life and I've been there…*Similarly, another participant discussed personal challenges outside and inside the classroom by stating *… all those things* [stressors] *were all combining to make me extremely depressed and I was having panic attacks, I was having anxiety attacks…* Another participant when discussing a work related situation she had experienced this year stated

   > *It was really interesting and the school psychologist and I have had a couple conversations about it and you know like there was one point where we were talking and she said you were experiencing physical symptoms of like PTSD…*

   In addition to mental health struggles, participants spoke of sleep challenges. One participant stated *… I could not sleep and I was just exhausted all of the time and I can remember distinctly where I finally said*

enough is enough when talking about their experience with panic attacks. Another participant related challenges with sleep to student success and anxiety by stating *I just have anxiety and I want things to be good… students passing their state test which led to many sleepless nights.* Another participant referred to her work as impacting her sleep by expressing *…Because my work is hard. You know I don't sleep. I'm tossing and turning like this. My work will just affect me…*

2. **Exhaustion.** The participants illustrated how the stress of teaching can lead to emotional and physical exhaustion**.** Throughout the interviews five of the seven participants used words like, "losing myself," "burnout," "defeated," or "zapped" when discussing how stress from the teaching profession has impacted their lives. These terms have been analyzed in connection to experiences of exhaustion. One participant described their experience of exhaustion and the physical impact it had on her life.

> *My first year I thought I was doing so great but I was just investing every ounce of my being into that classroom and into the kids and not really thinking about myself in any way, which seems stupid but to the extent of like I had pimples all over my face and my hair was a hot mess and I was like, "It doesn't matter my kids have to pass their state test." It is just bizarre. That is what I thought was good at the time but I realized that in losing myself I had lost what I could bring to my kids… I was barely surviving.*

Later on, this same participant stated, *it's so easy when you're teaching to feel like you are drowning because everything feels like a big deal and at the same time you're never feel like you're moving the needle and so it's like trying to save the titanic with Dixie cups.* In addition, another participant stated …*yeah when you're feeling low, oh my gosh you're just zapped and it's really hard to be on stage all the time*.

Participants talked about over commitment as leading to exhaustion by stating: *I realized that busyness, stress, and anxiety are often choices that I choose to make…This has led me to seasons of burnout where I am overcommitted.* Another participant addressed that "bad students" is what led to exhaustion by stating *My freshman and sophomores… ruined me. I was defeated every single day I was defeated.*

Mindfulness-Based Practices Utilized

The third theme that participants spoke about was the differing forms and techniques that they have used in their personal mindfulness practice. Two subthemes emerged from the different ideas and approaches discussed by all participants in this study. The subthemes are: mind-body practices and integration into life activities.

1. **Mind-body practices.** When participants were asked to discuss their experience with mindfulness, participants stated that meditation, breathing, and yoga were included in their mindfulness-based practices. One participant described their practice with meditation by stating *I'll take my iPad and you can just YouTube mindful meditations and we have a small office over there and I go over there I close the door lay on the floor and put my headphones in*

and I just do a nice 10 to 15 minute mindful meditation. Another participant

referred to their breathing practice.

> *It is just easiest for me to do the breath. So saying inhale, exhale. Like*
>
> *that kind of stuff. It's just easy… It's mostly just inhale exhale and then*
>
> *when my mind begins to wander just saying, "Oh hey you're thinking*
>
> *about that right now, let's go back to the inhale"… the best one to*
>
> *help me in the moment is doing the breathing.*

Adding to the breathing practice, another participant stated *I was like well*

even just breathing and stopping and realizing I realized was a really simple

thing I could do in my car. I could do in front my class and they wouldn't

think I'm crazy, I could do with my class… there's nothing that stops me from

just stopping and taking a deep breath. Participants described their practice

with different forms of yoga as, "body flow," "Kundalini," and "CorePower."

One participant explained their practice with yoga by stating

> *I started with I would say yoga. You have to be present or you don't*
>
> *have to be but the instructors are constantly queuing you to be present*
>
> *which is really awesome… the whole rest of the world is moving 2000*
>
> *miles per hour and this is where I can move zero miles per hour so*
>
> *that's why it keeps me going to yoga.*

> Another participant described yoga as… *It's just a chance to slow*

down… just moving from position to position slowly and at my own pace and

then just being really aware of my limit.

2. **Integration into life activities**. As participants discussed the different techniques used in their mindfulness practice, seven out of seven participants discussed how mindfulness translates into daily activities. Participants described how they incorporate mindfulness teachings and techniques with prayer, music, pottery, photography, birding, gardening, foam rolling, hiking, nature, and exercising. One participant stated … *there is relaxation music that I put on at night when I'm going to sleep and that helps me a lot.* Another participant discussed being mindful with photography by stating *I love taking pictures and using that to like stop a moment and then look at that moment and reflect on it and see its beauty and its brokenness.* While exercising, one participant stated *When I work out, I don't chat when I workout. I don't listen to music while I workout. I'm just very focused on my body and how I feel in my mind.* Another participant described birding as a meditative practice by stating *I've taken up birding which is very meditative …you find your sit spot and you sit there and you're quiet and you see what you can see and you listen to what you can listen to.* One participant discussed prayer and centering one's mind and soul on God as part of their practice with mindfulness. This participant stated

> *Each morning I spend a quiet time with the Lord to center my mind and soul on Him… Then I usually pray over the day and any other requests. Lately, I have been practicing being quiet and trying to allow my mind to stay focused on God rather than let my mind race with many other topics and questions.*

Transformation in Personal Well-being

All participants in this study discussed different ways that their practice with mindfulness has impacted their personal well-being. From the subjective experiences of the participants, four subthemes were developed to describe the overall impact this practice has had on K-12th grade teachers. The subthemes are: becoming whole, alleviation of mental health challenges, awareness of self and environment, and developing a new mindset.

1. **Becoming whole.** Participants in this study described a relationship between wholeness and effective practice, which impacts both the teachers and students. Three out of the seven participants directly stated that their practice with mindfulness has moved them to experience a sense of wholeness. One participant described what happens when we are not feeling whole:

    If you're not whole then you're trying to fill yourself up in some sense…Like you're trying to find wholeness and a lot of times you do that by drawing from other people so you're seeking that validation either from your students and when you don't get it its devastating. So then you call your mom and seek that validation from her or the other people in your life so instead of being this whole person that is able to give and receive in relationships equally. You're constantly trying to find a way to be full.

    Participants discussed the importance of being able *to fill our cups so that we can then give to others* and that *anytime that you can bring more of your whole self to whatever it is that you are doing you're going to do it better.*

One participant discussed the condition of their soul by stating: *If my soul is healthy, then my entire life is healthy. If my soul is unhealthy, then this leads to disintegration.*

2. **Alleviation of mental health challenges.** The findings in this subtheme draw upon the positive effects of utilizing mindfulness-based practices to reduce mental health symptoms. For instance, four out of the seven participants in this study stated that mindfulness has alleviated some of their mental health challenges with anxiety, racing thoughts, and feeling low. One participant discussed the impact mindfulness has on their anxiety by stating … *definitely reduced anxiety and I think it comes to the ability to determine what's life or death and what's just not and I realized just nothing. I'm not a paramedic* and *I was able to deescalate the anxiety attack. I have them but I have far less frequently.* Another participant discussed her experience with other's when she is feeling good. *I do know that during my times where I've been mediating I feel better. You can certainly see the results in your life.* Another participant stated:

> *I have always had a lot going on in my head and it's been really hard to articulate at times because especially in times of agitation there's so many things that I want to say…I've seen the value of stopping. I'm able to just take a moment and just you know and think about it.*

3. **Awareness of self and environment.** The benefits of increased awareness to self and environment were described by all of the participants**.** One participant stated … *this has led me to a greater awareness of the well-being of my soul*

and their environment … *The awesome things you just don't even notice that are happening right next to you*. Another participant was aware that *…before, it was scary for me to ask how my soul was doing. I did not want to be quiet, sit, and reflect on the condition of my soul. Now, I see the value in this.* One participant discussed the ability to become aware of where the anxiety attacks were in the body by stating

> *It was impressive to me that when I would have anxiety attacks that I would be able to say to myself, "Okay you can feel it in your stomach, you're having an anxiety attack, what's causing the anxiety, okay so let's localize it and I was able to self talk myself through an anxiety attack.*

As the participants elaborated on the impact their mindfulness-based practices have had on their personal well-being, all participants discussed greater awareness of when to slow down and take a moment to breathe. During those times where you take a moment to breathe, one participant stated: *You feel better. You're breathing slows down. Your heart rate slows down I'm sure when you are just calm and relaxed and right here.*

In addition to participants' awareness of self and environment, three out of seven participants added that mindfulness works against the *American way of life* by allowing the participants to slow down. One participant stated:

> *…the American way of life which is centered on fast paced busyness. Our incessant need for busyness has led to much damage and destruction to our individual selves, but also society at large… we*

have been encouraged and challenged to stop, slow down, and reflect

on the health of our souls..

Another participant adds to this by stating…*just the way that I am built, the*

way that our society is...We all live in the what's next…What if I'm happy

where I am? Is there such a thing? We have to make it a thing.

4. **Developing a new mindset.** Developing a new mindset appears to strengthen

teachers' ability to relieve stress and stay positive. Six of the seven

participants referred to a shift in their outlook on life. One participant

stated…*seeing my world and being able to say it's not a big deal*…Another

participant realized that mindfulness *has helped me. It's given me tools to say,*

okay, take a moment. It's not that big of a deal… being mindful and taking

time to breathe and really just taking time to say to yourself, this isn't really

that big of a deal has been really helpful. Participants talked about how

mindfulness has taught them that *having your mind right here versus what's*

going to happen in 20 minutes or what just happened a half an hour ago is

very important to their professional well-being. One participant stated *I don't*

worry so much about how things are going to work out... I tend to trust that

things are just going to work out. I have not been worried about the how

everything's going to be next year really at all and I think that is because of

mindfulness and just your outlook on life. Furthermore, another participant

talked about checking in with herself about what she is doing and

recognizing… *that I am doing great things right here right now. Not what's so*

hectic about tomorrow.

Impact on Professional Practice

The fifth theme that participants addressed within the interviews was how mindfulness-based practices have improved their personal well-being which has positively impacted their professional practice. The following four subthemes emerged from the data: slowing down and gaining patience, student-teacher connection, changed classroom environment, and tools to utilize in the classroom.

1. **Slowing down and gaining patience.** When participants were asked about the impact their mindfulness-based practices have had on their professional practice and well-being, seven out of seven participants mentioned that mindfulness has allowed them to slow down and become more patient in the classroom with students. One participant stated *I am far more patient with myself, students, and with people in general… I'm far more patient this year than I even was last year even 2-3 years ago… I am far more patient in my classroom.* Another discussed the benefits of slowing down by stating *Yeah definitely it was nice to like slow myself down for a second cause you only have like 45 minutes to teach a lot of content to a class… It definitely gives me a chance to slow down and to ground myself in the big things.* Adding to this theme, another participant discussed how others have noticed an increase of patience in the them…*My special education director told some parents at a meeting that I am "obnoxiously patient" and that she envied my amount of patience that I have… Lately I have been extremely calm and patient.* Another participant talked about what can occur when they slow down… *I calm myself down in my classroom. It makes me stop and be like look at what is*

happening. All these things are happening in my classroom. More like celebrate what is happening. These quotes explain that mindfulness-based practices have a direct impact on one's ability to slow down in their day to day endeavors.

2. **Student-teacher connection.** The relationship between teacher and students was described as being strongly related to the teachers' energy and emotional state, which can be enhanced with mindfulness-based practices. All of the participants mentioned that they have seen a positive impact on their connection to students because of their practice with mindfulness. One participant stated

> *Gosh I had some incredibly close relationships where we were able to talk about really deep and personal things… it's about building those relationships and like having time to stop and make sure I'm healthy enough to be healthy in those relationships. Kids totally react to that. When you're real and when you genuinely care about them.*

Another participant added to this theme by stating

> *I have just taken better care of my mental health so that engaging with my students is not always combative where it used to be… think about students that don't connect with their teachers and the reason they don't connect with their teachers is because they don't feel like their teachers understand them.*

Another participant verbalized the connection that occurs when teachers are happy. *In terms of like happy teacher, happy kids. If I'm knowing what I'm*

doing is good for them, they're going to know that and they're going to feel that too.

Adding to the idea that if teachers are happy then kids are happy, another participant stated

> *…they pick up on my moods and you know I'm very expressive with my face. I know that and I know I have to be really careful about it...I mean they're so intuitive they get it… I see now that they are so much happier because I'm so much happier and it's kind of amazing. Oh my gosh it feels wonderful.*

3. **Changed classroom environment.** Participants indicated a direct relationship between mindfulness practice and class environment; when teachers experience calm, the classroom climate is positive**.** Six of the seven participants discussed the impact their mindfulness practice has had on the classroom environment. This subtheme developed with the accumulation of terms like, "atmosphere," "environment," and "classroom climate." All participants mentioned that their classrooms were calmer - *my classroom is much more calm when I am calm*, fun - *I was able to have fun with them and smile and laugh and my creativity was able to come out in my lessons*, and positive - *so in terms of that the classroom climate can be changed really fast in terms of the positive change*. One participant stated:

> *…when you are happy and kind things really I fall into place… The kids are well behaved because and the kids are happy. The kids are happy when you've created an environment of positivity …I don't*

really have very many discipline problems in my room. When I do I am

better able to cope with them.

Later on, this same participant added that *being mindful has allowed me to create that atmosphere of kindness and positivity and so I'm a really successful teacher.* Another participant described her experience with feeling that her class is now in control by stating *I don't feel like, "Oh my God my class is out of control." I don't have that feeling very often.*

4. **Tools to utilize in the classroom.** The findings in this subtheme demonstrate how mindfulness-based practices can be incorporated into the teaching profession. Throughout the interviews, seven out of seven participants discussed how their practice with mindfulness has given them tools to utilize directly or indirectly in the classroom within a variety of situations. Participants discussed using breathing practices for themselves and their students, as well as yoga techniques within the classroom. One participant stated …*so mindfulness has helped me in the classroom be positive and kind. I stress to my students positivity and kindness.* Another participant stated … *you just don't need to get worked up and I can say to a kid, I just need a minute to breathe right now so I can think clearly about what we are going to do next…*Another participant added to this by stating that the breathing practice in the classroom *started out totally for me* but was used as a teaching tool and as a way to calm down the classroom.

> *I was like okay well so my students now we just breathe together…I verbalize what we are doing and why we're doing it and they're*

starting to understand that like oh we need to take a breath and that's how they verbalize it. They're like oh we need to stop and breathe.

Furthermore, throughout the interviews, participants mentioned the importance of teachers having their own practice with mindfulness before implementing techniques into the classroom. For instance, one participant stated: *Asking teachers to do some sort of mindfulness practice with their students in class is really a lost cause if the teachers don't practice mindfulness themselves and you know if they're not grounded and calm themselves and…so they understand the science behind it and they can buy into.* Another participant directly stated: *You have to want to try it. I don't think anybody can make you do it. Cause if you are not true and real, your kids aren't going to believe you.*

Barriers to Mindfulness Practice

The final theme that was highlighted throughout the interviews focused on barriers that teachers have experienced with their mindfulness practice. All of the participants in this study discussed the amount of time, money, and others' perceptions as a barrier to their practice with mindfulness. One participant stated: *We need time. Teachers never have enough time. Teaching is a profession that is never done. Ever. It's never done... It's always really challenging because it's like but I have 12 other things on my to-do list that I could be doing.* Another participant discussed: *I would love to go to more classes….then in the summer I'll do more yoga but it's expensive. I don't have all the money to do as much as I would like to do.* In addition, one participant stated …*some people just think people who mediate or practice mindfulness are weird. They're hippies*

you know. Which is so silly because it is so powerful and so helpful for your state of well-being. Another participant discussed colleague opinions as a barrier. *The only barrier I have seen is my co-workers making sarcastic comments about my patience. I often hear, you are so patient. I could never do what you're doing…sometimes there seems to be some negativity and envy behind their comments.*

The identified themes among the seven participants reflect the strong similarities of experienced stressors in the teaching profession, impact of these stressors on mental health and exhaustion levels, and the mindfulness-based practice techniques that were used. In addition, the findings show the parallels between participants' responses to their transformation in personal-wellbeing, impact on their professional practice, and barriers to practicing mindfulness. The findings are also consistent with the findings in the literature. The following section will discuss the findings and the impact for future research as well as implications to social work practice.

Discussion

This study explored how K-12th grade teachers' personal experience with mindfulness-based practices impact their personal well-being and instructional practice. The research sought to understand the stressors that teachers are experiencing within the profession and what has led them to mindfulness-based practices, and mindfulness techniques utilized. In addition, the research investigated the impact of these techniques on the teachers' personal well-being and instructional practice, and barriers that teachers have faced with their practice. The discussion will focus on integrating the six themes that were identified from this study's findings with the previous literature that has been reviewed.

Current findings are in line with previous research on perceived stress in the teaching profession (Klassen, Frenzel, Perry, 2012; Geving, 2007; Supaporn, Dodds &Griffin, 2003; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2008; Slaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Hargrevaes, 2003). In this study, participants described experiencing an excessive amount of stressors in their daily work. Participants focused on three different categories of stressors: self-imposed, interpersonal, and those associated with the growing expectations of their professional practice. Participants specifically discussed the role of their own *perfectionism and desire to do well*, *complications that arise in relationships with colleagues and administration*, the feeling that there is never enough *time* to get a great amount of work done, and the stress associated with managing students with complex social and emotional challenges.

For participants in this study, the multiple stressors led to a variety of *mental health challenges, trouble with sleep*, and *exhaustion*. They described personal experiences with anxiety, depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from challenges they were experiencing in their personal lives as well as within the teaching profession. The discussion of feeling "burnt out," "defeated," and "zapped out," was prominent within this study's findings. These findings suggest that teachers can get to a place in their teaching where they have depleted all internal resources and are no longer able to effectively be present within the school and classroom. These findings are also consistent with previous research (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2008; Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012; Maslach, et al., 2001; Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Veldman, et. al, 2013). As the participants in this study discussed it was important for them to find a way to decrease or eliminate their

mental health symptoms, improve their sleep, and decrease their exhaustion which have developed from the extensive demands experienced on a day to day basis.

Due to the high level of stress, burn-out, and compromised mental health, participants discussed the need to find a way to care for their challenged mental health and persistent exhaustion. In addition, the desire to live a more meaningful and happy life has led the participants to explore mindfulness-based practices. Each one of the participants said that they were attracted to mindfulness practice as a way to care for their mind, body, and soul. Within the study, participants reflected on the different techniques of mindfulness-based practices that they have implemented. Techniques discussed most often were mind-body practices, such as *breathing*, *mediation*, and *yoga*. Interestingly, previous research revealed similar results in that meditation and yoga are the most common mindfulness-based practices with the western culture (Greenberg and Harris, 2012; Didonna, 2009; Shapiro, et. al., 2009; Ancona & Mendelson, 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012). Breathing was discussed as something that is cost effective, easy, and can be accessed anywhere, whereas, meditation and yoga are practices which require a larger portion of time and dedication.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that mindfulness techniques can be integrated into one's life activities, such as prayer, music, pottery, photography, nature, exercise, foam rolling, birding, and gardening. Participants discussed that in the moment where they were practicing mindfulness within these different activities, the purpose was to learn how to be present within the moment, aware of their surroundings, and using their practice as a way to slow down and become more reflective.

The final area that participants identified their mindfulness-practice techniques was within their *spirituality*. These participants were driven to mindfulness based on their intimate connection to discovering a deeper meaning for life. Participants went into detail about how they become aware and present within the moment during each of these activities. The findings suggest that becoming mindful and aware in the present moment without judgment can be put into practice in a variety of areas in one's life with great impact on their personal well-being.

Transformation in Personal Well-being

One of the most powerful themes and the main focus of the research is that mindfulness created a *transformation in personal well-being* for all of the participants interviewed**.** These findings support the idea that all humans are in search of ways that one can experience wholeness. Participants in this study frequently discussed ways that mindfulness-based practices provide the resources to move inward and learn to reflect on themselves rather than moving externally to seek fulfillment from other areas of their lives. This is consistent with previous mindfulness research (Greenberg and Harris, 2012; Didonna, 2009; Shapiro, et. al., 2009; Ancona & Mendelson, 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012). Findings resulting from this study, however, expand on the previous research by suggesting that in order for teachers to have the capability and resources to give to others, they need to first find ways to *fill their own cup*. Participants recognized that when they are able to feel fulfilled and whole, they are able to be consistently present and aware in all areas of their lives.

Specifically, the current findings show that teachers who have a personal practice with mindfulness have experienced *alleviation of mental health challenges*, specific to

the reduction with the severity of their anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms. Additionally, this study's findings suggest that mindfulness provides the tools to combat the racing thoughts and serious lows that one may experience from persistent mental health challenges. The idea that emerged is when teachers are able to experience mindfulness they will begin to feel better and experience benefits within their own lives. This is in line with previous mindfulness research (Gold, et.al, 2010; Roeser, et. al., 2013).

Additionally, all participants in this study recognized an increase in their awareness surrounding their mind, body, and soul. Mindfulness provides these teachers with the ability to recognize when they need to step back from what is occurring and take a moment to *check-in* with themselves. Mindfulness allows one to become aware of what is taking place in the present moment. Participants in this study reported that mindfulness has given them the ability to become attuned to what their mind, body, and soul needs at any given time. They discussed their ability to localize panic and anxiety within their body, to recognize when they need to take a moment, and reflecting on the well-being of their whole self. This study shows that the participant's practice with mindfulness is congruent with the definition of mindfulness in that it is a practice of non-judgmental awareness, while constantly paying attention to what is occurring with the mind and body within the present moment (Baraz & Alexander, 2010; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Ancona & Mendelson, 2014; Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012; Weiss, 2004). The practice of mindfulness also has the power through awareness of self and environment to strengthen teachers' confidence in what they are doing inside and outside of the classroom.

The findings also suggest that as teachers develop awareness for themselves and their environments, they will be able to recognize when they need to physically and mentally slow down. Participants discussed that the practice of slowing down can be very challenging, especially when subjected to increasing demands in the workplace and the speed of the American culture. The findings acknowledge that our society in America is moving at a very high pace, which offers little time or acceptance for one to stop, think, and slow down. Mindfulness-based practices compete against this society implemented pressure by showing others the importance that slowing down can have on their mental and physical health. This study's findings present the idea that mindfulness shows one how to slow down, be present, and become more aware. In addition, participants in this study shared that through the process of slowing down; they are able to find calm, contentment, and greater productivity in many different circumstances within their lives.

Transformation in personal well-being leads to transformation in professional well-being. Mindfulness-based practices have a direct impact on teachers' personal well-being, which leads to a positive impact on their professional practice and well-being. When teachers are feeling healthy, happy, and whole it directly translates into their professional practice and well-being. Mindfulness has shown to improve one's awareness of self and environment, which influences a teacher's ability to become aware with what is taking place within their own classroom and school. The study's findings suggest that teachers become aware of how their connections with students and classroom environment are greatly impacted by their practice with mindfulness.

Through this process of developing a practice with mindfulness, participants in this study presented the idea that there has been a shift in their outlook on life by

developing a new mindset. The findings of this study show that a teacher's mindset can shift from everything being a *big deal* in their personal and professional lives to recognizing that a lot of what is presented is an impermanent, ever-changing, thought or experience. Mindfulness-based practices seems to shift one's perspective from fear of tomorrow to *things are going to work out.* This practice has the power to lead others into the realization of what is taking place in the present moment, right in front of you, without concern for what will come next. Participants share that mindfulness has been helpful when dealing with many stressors presented in the teaching profession. In fact, the findings can suggest that this newly developed mindset can be used to combat one's excessive need for perfection (*perfectionism*). Mindfulness transforms the perfectionist perspective into becoming less future focused and content with what is taking place in the present moment. Previously reviewed research does not indicate a shift in teachers' mindset or outlook on life; therefore this study's findings offer new discoveries to the field of mindfulness-based practices.

With the number of stressors that are experienced in the teaching profession, mindfulness-based practices have provided teachers in this study with specific tools to improve their mental health, gain greater awareness of self and their environment, slow down, and become a whole person. In addition, these tools have influenced student-teacher connections, the classroom environment, teacher approach, while gaining patience and developing a less future focused mindset. As heard through the voices of the participants, their stories describe the impact that their practice with mindfulness has had on their personal well-being. This impact ultimately translates into their teaching profession by having a positive impact on their professional practice.

Transition into the Teaching Profession

The idea that mindfulness can give teachers the resources to recognize the importance of slowing down amidst the chaos throughout the day is presented within the research findings. In addition, through the practice of mindfulness, teachers are able to take time to reflect on what is taking place around them while having the ability to check-in with their own mental and physical well-being. Jennings and Greenberg's, (2009) research complements this study's findings by previously reporting that mindfulness can increase the awareness surrounding teachers' social emotional competency, and highlights the importance it has on their health as well as improvement in classroom management. Similarly, this study's findings show that through the practice of mindfulness, teachers are able to experience greater patience within the classroom and are able to handle student behavior challenges in a more effective manner, while not allowing for the student behavior to manifest within one's own sense of self.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that students are very *intuitive* and are able to use their senses to understand and comprehend the mood and approachability of their teachers and vice versa. Participants presented the idea that when teachers are happy their students are happy. Specifically, when teachers experience improvements to their personal well-being, they are able to give more time, energy, and whole self to the students. These findings highlight the occurrence of personal parallel processing as it takes place within the classroom. Parallel processing can be defined as

> When two or more systems – whether these consist of individuals groups or
> organizations – have significant relationships with one another, they tend to
> develop similar affects, cognition, and behaviors. Parallel processes can be set in

motion in many ways and once initiated leave no one immune from their

influence (Smith, Simmons, & Thames, 1989, p. 13).

The belief that parallel processing takes place within the student-teacher relationship is

highlighted by the idea that both the teacher and the student are experiencing their

relationship and classroom environment in a similar way. This infers that the complex

interactions within the classroom between stressed teachers and their students have a

significant impact on how students will respond and interact with their teachers. This

study's findings suggest that when teachers feel happy, healthy, and whole, students and

teachers are able to connect on a deeper level. Furthermore, when students behave a

certain way or express their dislike for their teacher, this will influence a teacher's sense

of self within the classroom.

Through the process of developing deeper and more meaningful connections with

their students, participants reported that they are able to identify that the classroom

climate has changed in a positive way. More concretely, the findings suggest that because

of mindfulness, teachers can develop the capability to interact with students in a way that

creates a more positive, fun, and calm environment. In line with previous research

conducted by Jennings and Greenberg (2009), mindfulness-based practices have

increased teachers' abilities to develop a healthy classroom culture. Furthermore,

participants in this study acknowledged the idea that when teachers are happy they are

able to develop an environment where their students can become engaged, receptive, and

kind. Previous research adds to this idea by reporting that mindfulness is used as an

intervention to prevent "burnout cascade" (Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, &

Katz, 2013).This looks at mindfulness as a way to decrease the deterioration of a positive

classroom culture, improve student behavior, and decrease teacher emotional exhaustion. This study's findings show that with the use of mindfulness-based practices, teachers no longer feel that they have a loss of control within the classroom.

As teachers develop the foundation of their mindfulness practice in their daily lives, teachers learn the importance of slowing down and gaining patience, while becoming aware of the improvements to their relationships with students and the change within the classroom culture. Through their experience with mindfulness-based practices, teachers recognize their accumulation of new *tools to utilize in the classroom* that they have gained within their own practice. The findings suggest that teachers implement breathing, guided meditation, and yoga practices into their classrooms. In addition, mindfulness-based practices allow teachers to develop a less reactive approach within the classroom which allows teachers to become transparent with their class. Specifically, from the research, the idea emerged that teachers are able to realize the importance of sharing with their students when they need to breathe or take a moment is significant. Teachers are then better equipped to develop a space where students and teachers can practice mindfulness together. Previous research has discovered that there are positive benefits of mindfulness-based practices which arise in both the teacher and student well-being (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2013; Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris, & Katz, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Furthermore, this study expands on the ways that teachers are using learned techniques from their own practice with mindfulness and implementing them into the classroom.

This study's findings present new information to the previous research conducted on mindfulness-based practices with students and teachers. Results from this study

suggest that teachers may benefit from having their own practice with mindfulness before implementing any strategies or techniques into the classroom. Similar to the notion of happy teacher happy students, there are potential benefits for the teacher in experiencing mindfulness themselves before teaching their students to use this practice. More concretely, teachers benefit from experiencing what it means to slow down, become aware, be present in the moment, and develop a sense of personal wholeness. As participants mentioned within this study, students are able to tell if teachers are being authentic in their beliefs and practice with mindfulness, therefore it is important for teachers to wholeheartedly experience, understand, and believe in the benefits of this practice.

Barriers to Mindfulness Practice

Teachers in this study have experienced different barriers to developing a foundation for mindfulness practice. The idea that time and money are significant barriers to teachers practicing mindfulness has been presented through this research. Teachers have found that with the excessive workload they are experiencing, it is very challenging to find the time to develop a concrete practice with mindfulness. Teachers in this study highlighted the fact that there is little time during the school day for them to implement different techniques with their students as a way to enhance the classroom environment. Furthermore, teachers discussed the cost of attending yoga classes and mindfulness trainings. The expense of attending these workshops, classes, conferences, and retreats has limited the number of teachers that are able to afford these experiences.

Finally, unique among this study's participants' comments, were the reactions that some participants encountered from their colleagues. The findings show that the

colleagues' reactions are mirror opposites of what the teachers have experienced with mindfulness-based practices. Some colleagues noticed the degree of patience a given teacher displayed with their students. Conversely, other colleagues regarded mindfulness-based practices as a very atypical skill, seemingly doubting its validity. The range of reactions by the participants colleagues speaks to the impact an environment can have on attempting to sustain a practice with mindfulness. This seems to identify further barriers from receiving support to continue their practice or even introduce the concept of mindfulness-based practices to their students. Mindfulness-based practices are seen as a resource to create an environment within the classroom that facilitates positive student growth; however it can be regarded by other colleagues as being a form of religion, hokey, and for hippies. These perceptions can have the power to distance people from developing their own practice with mindfulness.

Overall, the findings in this study imply that teachers are overloaded with demands from their profession and stressors that exist within their personal lives. They are compromising their own personal well-being in order to take on the demands of the teaching profession while trying to develop an effective teaching environment. What has been discovered is that when teachers are experiencing chronic stress, they can develop mental health and sleep challenges. Shown in this study, mindfulness provides teachers with the internal and external resources to combat the day to day stressors they are faced with, which can have a direct positive impact on their relationships with students and the classroom environment. Mindfulness also provides teachers with techniques that can be utilized within the classroom by themselves or in conjunction with their students.

Furthermore, mindfulness provides a guide to shift one's perspective on their lives while challenging their previous thinking patterns.

Strengths and Limitations

It is essential to note the strengths and limitations of this study. The strengths are that the qualitative research design provides an in depth analysis of the impact that mindfulness-based practices can have on K-12th grade teachers and their experience of personal well-being and professional practice. If a quantitative research design was taken, there would be a loss of individual perspectives and comprehensive understanding of each participant's experience.

The current research allows for the voices and subjective experiences to be heard from all participants. Additionally, the consistency of findings among participants with a wide range in the number of years teaching strengthens the study's findings. This research has added to previous research by presenting more specified benefits and information in regards to the practice of mindfulness with K-12th grade teachers. There are, however, limitations to this study.

The first limitation to the study is that it has a small sample size, with seven participants and the convenience sample recruitment design; this research cannot be generalized to the greater population. It is important to note, however, that the participants of this study worked in multiple schools across rural, suburban, and urban school settings. Although the sample size is small, the diversity of the sample adds a level of credibility to the findings.

An additional limitation of the study is that the researcher (as with all qualitative research) has a particular lens while interpreting the results of the interviews. In this case,

the researcher has personal practice with mindfulness and is partial to the techniques used

in mindfulness-based practices. The interpretation of the study's findings could lead to a

more positive viewpoint than would be found through another lens. Additionally, the

questions asked in this study limit the range of responses from the participants. Although

the questions were semi-structured and allowed for a great deal of variation in responses,

the themes that emerged could have been highly influenced by the questions asked. These

strengths and limitations should be considered when addressing future research avenues.

Implications for Future Research

This qualitative research investigated the topic of mindfulness-based practices and

the impact K-12th grade teachers can experience in their personal well-being and

professional practice. This research highlighted the importance of teachers' happiness,

health, and wholeness and how that directly plays into the well-being of their students.

Furthermore, it addressed the unconscious personal parallel that is taking place within the

classroom. These findings could be translated into other professions, such as the social

work profession. Future research would benefit from gaining further understanding about

how a social worker's personal well-being can implicitly influence their client's well-

being and success in therapy.

Some of the mindfulness techniques that were mentioned in this study could be

expanded upon in future research. Specifically, this research introduced the concepts of

artistic and active mindfulness. This study focused on what it was that K-12th grade

teachers were using for mindfulness-based techniques, however it did not further explore

how others may integrate mindfulness into daily activities. Future research could explore

how these practices are in line with the definition of mindfulness. Specifically, how may

these techniques be used differently than meditation, yoga, and breathing practices? Additional studies on the comparison of the how an individual's practice with artistic and active mindfulness could impact their lives differently than that of breathing, yoga and meditation practices.

This study highlights the idea that teachers benefit most by having their own experience with mindfulness before implementing any techniques within the classroom. The research indicates that in order to be effective when using mindfulness with others one should first consider experiencing the benefits and techniques for themselves. Future research should look at how other professionals could benefit from these findings. For example, there are social workers who are providing mindfulness-based interventions with clients on a day to day basis as a way to improve the client's mental health. However, future research should explore how client outcomes may differ with social workers who practice mindfulness and implement the techniques in therapy versus social workers who have no experience with mindfulness. This addresses the idea that a greater connection can be developed by those who have been through similar experiences which can lead to greater well-being in one's personal life and professional practice.

Furthermore, participants in this study had practiced mindfulness for differing lengths of time with a varied commitment to the practice in effort and time spent per month. The participants with more years in the teaching profession were able to provide more specific examples of experienced stressors, techniques used, transformation in personal well-being, and impact on professional practice, whereas those more recent to the practice of mindfulness did not provide as much detailed information. This finding

suggests the need for future research to explore the effects of timing and intensity of mindfulness-based practices on teaching practice.

Finally, the study findings highlight that mindfulness is able to give others a sense of wholeness. The ideas that when we feel healthy, happy, and whole, we are better equipped and have greater desire to give to others in a kind, positive, and effective way. Further research in this area of wholeness could advance the knowledge on the impact that mindfulness-based practices can have on one's sense of self-fulfillment.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This study's findings are significant when it comes to the role that school social workers have within the school setting. School social workers are responsible for providing specific services to students, families, school employees, school-community, and the district. A large amount of school social worker's time is spent on addressing student challenges inside and outside of the school. However, school social workers are also responsible for providing direct support to staff members within the school (School Social Worker's, 2010). It is important that school social workers are advocating for the mental health of their teachers by educating teachers and administrators on the impact these working conditions can have on the teachers and students. Indirectly, as this study's findings suggest, advocating for the teacher's well-being is in turn advocating for positive student-teacher relationships, healthy classroom environment, and impactful techniques that can be used within the classroom. From these research findings, it is clear that teachers are experiencing a great deal of stress in their work that is directly impacting their well-being and therefore their teaching practice. School social workers are well positioned to play a unique role in supporting teachers. School social workers may help

to support teachers in identifying their level of stress, how it is impacting their teaching

practice and what options exist to help support teacher well-being. In the current study, a

practice with mindfulness was explored as a viable option for teachers to use.

Social workers are guided by values and ethics that support the notion of acting as

a resource, not only to students but to teachers themselves. "Social workers strive to

ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and

meaningful participation in decision making for all people" (National Association of

Social Workers, 1996). Further on in the Code of Ethics when it comes to Ethical

Standards of Social Work, section 3.09 (g) , "Social workers should be diligent stewards

of the resources of their employing organizations, wisely conserving funds where

appropriate and never misappropriating funds or using them for unintended purposes"

(National Association of Social Workers, 1996). The role of the school social worker is to

be responsible stewards of the ever tightening budget resources. Considering the impact

of mindfulness-based practices as described by this study's participants, against the cost

of implementing such practices, provides a clear direction. Consistent with social work

practice, advocating for mindfulness-based practices would offer the type of fiscally

conservative request which would appear to yield a rather comprehensive impact. This

research supports the findings in previous research that indicates that students and

teachers alike can benefit from mindfulness-based practices, a low cost resource with

high benefits.

It is important for the school social work community to become aware and

thoughtful about ways in which they can support teachers so that both the teachers and

students can benefit and have an improved educational experience. This research

indicates that school social workers should become more aware of what teachers are experiencing within the school environment and the different ways that mindfulness-based practices can be used as a feasible practice to improve the mental health and professional practice of teachers. This specifically addresses the Person-in Environment social work perspective by recognizing that mindfulness-based practices can strongly influence teachers' personal and professional lives. In addition, the participants in this study acknowledged that the classroom environment can be positively impacted by the teacher's practice with mindfulness and tools utilized in the classroom. Providing teachers with resources and education on ways for teachers to enhance their personal well-being is advocating not only for the teachers, but for the school community as a whole.

School social workers should become aware of the practice of mindfulness, stressors that some teachers are facing within the field, and the impact those stressors have on their well-being. The role of school social workers is critical, yet they often experience the similar stressors to those that teachers face on a day to day basis. For example, school social workers reported that there was a lack of time to complete job responsibilities, heavy workloads, few resources, long work hours, low salary, and difficult clients (Arrington, 2008). Similar to teachers, school social workers can take the information discussed within the study findings and develop their own practice with mindfulness as a way to improve their own personal well-being and their work with students, parents, teachers, administration and their district. Expanding beyond the educational system, there are implications that mindfulness-based practices could be

transformative and beneficial for anyone who is experiencing a wide range of stressors in their personal and professional lives.

Ultimately, these findings emphasize the need for advocating for teachers when it comes to the extreme amount of stress they are facing and how those stressors can impact their personal and professional well-being. The findings then assist in educating others on the practice of mindfulness and how the use of mindfulness-based practices can have positive benefits to teachers' well-being. Finally, this study acknowledges that when one's personal well-being is improved, this can directly impact professional practice. Though this study focused solely on the impacts in the school environment, these results can be applied to multiple settings to combat professional stressors while enhancing one's personal and professional well-being.

References

Abenavoli, R. M., Jennings, P. A., Greenberg, M. T., Harris, A. R., & Katz, D. A. (2013).

The protective effects of mindfulness against burnout among educators. *The Psychology of Education Review*, 37 (2), 57-69. Retrieved from: Google Scholar

Albrecht, N. J., Albrecht, P.M., & Cohen, M. (2012). Mindfully teaching in the

classroom: a literature review. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37 (12), 1-14. doi:10.14221/ajte.2012v37n12.2

Alliance for Excellent Education. (2014). *On the path to equity: Improving the effectiveness of beginning teachers*. Retrieved from http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/PathToEquity.pdf

Ancona, M.R. & Mendelson, T. (2014). Feasibility and preliminary outcomes of a yoga

and mindfulness intervention for school teachers. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 7 (3), 156-170. doi: 10.1080/1754730X.2014.920135

Arrington, P. (2008). *Stress at work: How do social workers cope? NASW Membership Workforce Study*. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers.

Baraz, J. & Alexander, S. (2010). *Awakening joy: 10 steps that will put you on the road to real happiness.* New York, New York: Bantam Dell.

Barnes, G., Crowe, E., & Schaefer, B. (2007). The cost of teacher turnover in five school

districts: A pilot study. *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future*, 1-97. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/?id=ED497176

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal

attachments as a fundamental motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497-529. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Bishop, S. R., Lau, M., Shapiro, S., Carlson, L., Anderson, N., Carmody, J. (2004). Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice,* 11, 230–241. doi: 10.1093/clipsy.bph077

Black, D. S., Milam, J., & Sussman, S. (2009). Sitting-meditation interventions among youth: A review of treatment efficacy. *Pediatrics*, *124*(3), 532-541. doi: 10.1542/peds.2008-3434

Brown, K.W., & Ryan, R. M. (2004). Perils and promise in defining and measuring mindfulness: Observations from experience. *Clinical Psychology: Science & Practice,* 11 (3), 242. doi: 10.1093/clipsy.bph078

Brown, K. W., Ryan, R. M., & Creswell, J. D. (2007). Mindfulness: Theoretical foundations and evidence for its salutary effects. *Psychology Inquiry*, 18 (4), 211-237. doi: 10.1080/10478400701598298

Burrows, L. (2011). Relational mindfulness in education. *Encounter*, 24 (4), 24-29. Retrieved from: Google Scholar

Carroll, T. G. (n.d.). Policy brief: The high cost of teacher turnover. *National Commission on Teaching America's Future*. Retrieved from http://nctaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/NCTAF-Cost-of-Teacher-Turnover-2007-policy-brief.pdf

Cowan, E. (2000). Psychological wellness: Some hopes for the future. *Child Welfare League of America Press.* Washington, D.C, 477-503. Retrieved from http://psycnet.apa.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/psycinfo/2001-00169-016

Davis, D. M. & Hayes, J. A. (2011). What are the benefits of mindfulness? A practice

    review of psychotherapy-related research. *Psychotherapy*, 48 (2), 98-208. doi:

    10.1037/a0022062

Davis, H. A. (2003) Conceptualizing the role and influence of student-teacher

    relationships on children's social and cognitive development. *Educational*

    Psychologist, 38, 201-234. doi: 10.1207/S15326985EP3804_2

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). The general causality orientations scale: Self-

    determination in personality. *Journal of research in personality*, *19*(2), 109-134.

    doi:10.1016/0092-6566(85)90023-6

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1980). The empirical exploration of intrinsic motivational

    processes. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, *13*, 39-80.

    doi:10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60130-6

Didonna, F. (2009). Mindfulness-based interventions in an inpatient setting. *Clinical*

    Handbook of Mindfulness, 447-462. doi: 10.1007/978-0-387-09593-6_25

Duckworth, A., Steen, T. A., & Seligman, M. E. (2005). Positive psychology in clinical

    practice. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychol*ogy, 1, 629-651.

    doi: 10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.1.102803.144154

Common Ground Meditation Center (n.d.). Retrieved from

    http://commongroundmeditation.org/

Explorable Psychology Experiments. (2009). *Convenience sampling*. Retrieved from

    https://explorable.com/convenience-sampling

Farahman, F. K., Grant, K.E., Polo, A. J., & Duffy, S. N. (2011). School-based mental

    health and behavioral programs for low-income, urban youth: A systematic and

meta-analytic review. *American psychological Association*, 18 (4), 372-390.

doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2850.2011.01265.x

Field, S., Martin, J., Miller, R., Ward, & Wehmeyer, M. (1998). Self-determination for

persons with disabilities: A position statement of the Division on Career

Development and Transition. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*,

21, 113–128. doi: 10.1177/088572889802100202

Flook, L., Goldberg, S. B., Pinger, L., Bonus, K., & Davidson, R. J. (2013). Mindfulness

for teachers: A pilot study to assess effects on stress, burnout, and teaching

efficacy. *Mind Brain Education*, 7 (3), 1-22. doi: 10.1111/mbe.12026

Furrer, C., & Skinner, E. (2003). Sense of relatedness as a factor in children's academic

engagement and performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95, 148-162.

doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.95.1.148

Gable, S. L., & Haidt, J. (2005). What (and why) is positive psychology? *Review of*

General Psychology, 9 (2), 103-110. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.103

Glaser, B. G., Strauss, A. L., & Strutzel, E. (1968). The discovery of grounded theory;

strategies for qualitative research. *Nursing Research*, *17*(4), 364. Retrieved from

http://journals.lww.com/nursingresearchonline/Citation/1968/07000/The_Discove

ry_of_Grounded_Theory__Strategies_for.14.aspx

Geving, A. M. (2007). Identifying the types of student and teacher behaviors associated

with teacher stress. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23, 624-640.

doi:10.1016/j.tate.2007.02.006

Gold, E., Smith, A., Hopper, I., Herne, D., Tansey, G., & Hulland, C. (2010).

    Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) for primary school teachers. *Journal*

    of Child and Family Studies, 19(2), 184-189. doi: 10.1007/s10826-009-9344-0

Greenberg, M. T., & Harris, A. R. (2012). Nurturing mindfulness in children and youth:

    Current state of research. *Child Development Perspectives*, *6*(2), 161-166.

    doi: 10.1111/j.1750-8606.2011.00215.x

Greene, G. J., Lee, M. Y., & Hoffpauir, S. (2005). The languages of empowerment and

    strengths in clinical social work: A constructivist perspective. *Families in Society*,

    86(2), 267-277. Retrieved from

    http://familiesinsocietyjournal.org/doi/pdf/10.1606/1044-3894.2465

Halliwel, E. (n.d.). *Mindfulness report*. Retrieved from

    http://www.livingmindfully.co.uk/downloads/Mindfulness_Report.pdf

Hamre, B. K. and Pianta, R. C. (2001), Early Teacher–Child Relationships and the

    Trajectory of Children's School Outcomes through Eighth Grade. *Child*

    Development, 72: 625–638. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00301

Hudley, C. (n.d.). Education and urban schools. *American Psychological Association*.

    Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/indicator/2013/05/urban-

    schools.aspx

Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational

    analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38, 499-534.

    doi: 10.3102/00028312038003499

Institutional Review Board (2010). *Snowball sampling*. Oregon State University.

    Retrieved from http://oregonstate.edu/research/irb/snowball-sampling

Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to child and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79, 491–525. doi: 10.3102/0034654308325693

Jennett, H. K., Harris, S. L., & Mesibov, G. B. (2003). Commitment to philosophy, teacher efficacy, and burnout among teachers of children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 33, 583-593. doi: 10.1023/B:JADD.0000005996.19417.57

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1982). An outpatient program in behavioral medicine for chronic pain patients based on the practice of mindfulness meditation: Theoretical considerations and preliminary results. *General hospital psychiatry*, 4(1), 33-47. doi:10.1016/0163-8343(82)90026-3

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hyperion.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: past, present, and future. *Clinical psychology*: *Science and practice*, 10(2), 144-156. doi: 10.1093/clipsy.bpg016

Keigher A. Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the 2008 – 09 Teacher Follow-up Survey. (2010) *U.S. Department of Education*; Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch.

Klassen, R. M., Frenzel, A. C., & Perry, N. E. (2012). Teachers' relatedness with students: An underemphasized component of teachers' basic psychological needs. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104 (1), 150-165. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1037/a0026253

Kokkinos, C., Panayiotou, G., & Davazoglou, A. (2005). Correlates of teacher appraisals of student behaviors. *Psychology in Schools*, 42, 79 – 89. doi: 10.1002/pits.20031

Lindqvist, P., & Nordanger, U. K. (2006). Who dares to disconnect in the age of uncertainty? Teachers' recesses and 'off-the-clock' work. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 12 (6), 623. doi**:** 10.1080/13540600601029637

Marin, P., & Brown, B. (2008). The school environment and adolescent well-being: Beyond academics. *National Adolescent Health Information Center*. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/J/Downloads/child_trends-2008_11_14_rb_schoolenviron.pdf

Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Leiter, M. P. (1986). *Maslach Burnout Inventory*. Palo Alto. Retrieved from: Google Scholar

Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 397-422. doi: 10.114/annurev.psych.52.1.397

McCarthy, C. J., Lambert, R. G., O'Donnell, M., & Melendres, L. T. (2009). The relation of elementary teachers' experience, stress, and coping resources to burnout symptoms. *The Elementary School Journal*, 109 (3), 282-300. doi: 10.1086/592308

Miley, K. K., 1942, O'Melia, M., & DuBois, B. (2011). *Generalist social work practice: An empowering approach*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. Retrieved from Google Scholar

Mindfulness based stress reduction (n.d.) *Center for Spirituality & Healing*. Retrieved from http://www.csh.umn.edu/workshops-and-lectures/mindfulness-based-stress-reduction/index.htm

National Association of Social Workers. (1996). *Code of ethics of the national*

association of social workers. Retrieved from

http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp

Parker, P.D., & Martin, A. J. (2009). Coping and buoyancy in the workplace:

Understanding their effects on teachers' work-related well-being and engagement.

Teaching and Teacher Education, 25, 68-75. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2008.06.009

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Variety in qualitative inquiry: theoretical orientation. *Qualitative*

research and evaluation methods, *3*, 75-142. Retrieved from

http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~admagana/CMaps/ResearchMethods/3theoretical_orie

ntations.pdf

Pas, E. T., Bradshaw, C. P., & Hershfeldt, P. A. (2012). Teacher-and school-level

predictors of teacher efficacy and burnout: Identifying potential areas for

support. *Journal of school Psychology*, 50(1), 129-145.

doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2011.07.003

Rapp, R. C. (2006). *Strengths-based case management: Enhancing treatment for persons*

with substance abuse problems. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc. Retrieved from:

Google Scholar

Read Foundation. (2014). *The importance of teachers in our society*. Retrieved from

http://www.readfoundation.org.uk/blog/importance-teachers-our-society

Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings (2012).Mindfulness training and teachers'

professional development: An emerging area of research and practice. *Child*

Development Perspective, 6(2), 167-173. doi: 10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00238.x

Roeser, R.W., Jha, A., Wallace, L., Wilensky, R., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Cullen, M.,

 Oberle, E., & Thomson, K. (2013). Mindfulness training and reductions in teacher

 stress and burnout: Results from two randomized, waitlist-control field trials.

 Journal of Educational Psychology, 105 (3), 787-804). Retrieved from

 http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1037/a0032093

Rice, J. K. (2003). Teacher quality: Understanding the effectiveness of teacher attributes.

 Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from

 http://www.epi.org/publication/books_teacher_quality_execsum_intro/

Roth, G., Assor, A., Kanat-Maymon, Y., & Kaplan, H. (2007). Autonomous motivation

 for teaching: How self-determined teaching may lead to self-determined learning.

 Journal of Educational Psychology, 99,761–774. Retrieved from

 http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1037/0022-0663.99.4.761

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of

 intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American*

 psychologist, *55*(1), 68. Retrieved from

  http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68

Saleebey, D. (1996). The strengths perspective in social work practice: Extensions and

 cautions. *Social Work*, 41, 296-305. doi: 10.1093/sw/41.3.296

Saleebey, D. (2006). *The strengths perspective in social work practice (4th ed.).* Boston:

 Pearson Education, Inc. Retrieved from: Google Scholar

School Social Worker's Role. (2010). *School Social Work Association of America*.

 Retrieved from http://www.sswaa.org/?page=721

Shapiro, S. L., Astin, J. A., Bishop, S. R., & Cordova, M. (2005). Mindfulness-based

      stress reduction for health care professionals: results from a randomized

      trial. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 12(2), 164. Retrieved from

      http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1037/1072-5245.12.2.164

Shapiro, S. L. (2009). The integration of mindfulness and psychology. *Journal of clinical*

      psychology, 65(6), 555-560. doi: 10.1002/jclp.20602

Sheldon, K. M., & King, L. (2001). Why positive psychology is necessary. *American*

      Psychologist, 56, 216-217. Retrieved from

      http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.216

Shernoff, E. S., Mehta, T., Atkins, M. S., Torf, R., & Spencer, J. (2011). A qualitative

      study of the sources and impact of stress among urban teachers. *School Mental*

      Health. 3, 59–69. doi: 10.1007/s12310-011-9051-z

Siegel, R. D., Germer, C. K., & Olendzki, A. (2008). Mindfulness: What it is? Where

      does it come from? *The National Institute for the Clinical Application of*

      Behavioral Medicine. Retrieved from

      http://www.mindfulselfcompassion.org/articles/nicamb_mindfulness.pdf

Skaalvik, E. M., & Slaalvik, S. (2007). Dimensions of teacher self-efficacy and relations

      with strain factors, perveived collective teacher efficacy, and teacher burnout.

      Journal of Educational Psychology, 99, 611-625. Retrieved from

      http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1037/0022-0663.99.3.611

Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2008). Teacher self-efficacy: Conceptual analysis and

      relations with teacher burnout and perceived school context. *Self-processes,*

      learning, and enabling human potential, 223-247. Retrieved from Google Scholar

Smith, K. K., Simmons, V. M., & Thames, R. B. (1989). "Fix the women": An intervention into an organizational conflict based on parallel process thinking. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 25 (1), 11-29. doi: 10.1177/0021886389251002

Taylor, I. M., & Ntoumanis, N. (2007). Teacher motivational strategies and student self-determination in physical education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99, 747–760. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/10.1037/0022-0663.99.4.747

Vago, D. R. & Silbersweig, D. A. (2012). Self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence (S-ART): A framework for understanding the neurobiological mechanisms of mindfulness. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 6, 1-30. doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2012.00296

Veldman, I., Tarwijk, J. V., Brekelmans, M., & Wubbels, T. (2013). Job satisfaction and teacher-student relationships across the teaching career: Four case studies. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 32, 55-65. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2013.01.005

Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory into practice*, *41*(2), 64-70. doi:10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2

Appendix A

Qualitative Interview Questions

Initial Questions

- What grade(s) do you teach?
- What are the demographics of the students you teach? (Age, race, socioeconomic levels)
- How many years have you been teaching?
- What are some stressors that you have experienced in teaching profession?
- How long have you been practicing mindfulness?

Experience with Mindfulness

1) Just to start off, I am curious to know about your experience with mindfulness, could you briefly describe your practice with mindfulness?
   o What form and/or techniques do you use? (i.e, breathing meditation, walking mediation, speaking)
2) It is fascinating to learn about how people become involved in mindfulness practices. What was it that led you to the practice of mindfulness? Why is it important to you?
3) Where have you seen positive change in your personal well-being because of your practice with mindfulness?
4) So, you previously addressed the stressors that you have experienced in the teaching profession and I am interested to learn how your practice with mindfulness has, if at all, alleviated some of these stressors?
5) Are there other stress reduction practices that you used that would be important for me to learn about? How have those impacted practices impacted your life?
   o Including mindfulness in these practices, how would you rank these for most effective in stress reduction?
6) When you talk about the personal benefits of mindfulness and how mindfulness has decreased stressors in your profession, research suggests that these benefits can translate in the classroom setting and teaching practice. How have you seen your practice with mindfulness influence your relationships with students?
   o Has there been a transition in the classroom climate? If so, what does that look like and what has contributed to this transition?
   o Have you seen any benefits in student behavior and academic achievement? If so, in what ways have these benefits presented themselves?
7) What type of resistance have you experienced with your practice with mindfulness?
   o Please give examples of any internal & external barriers you have encountered.