VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

Mindfulness: A Self-Study for Professional Learning

by

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We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard.

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Abstract

This study addressed the problem of special educator burnout and stress by first researching the benefits of mindfulness training and its effects on educators and then, applying that to a self-study research thesis. This study involved the researcher, myself, taking an educator mindfulness course and then researching the effects of the mindfulness strategies upon my teaching practice with the lens of professional growth. By utilizing self-study methodology, I was able to reflexively analyse my teaching practice and determine how mindfulness practices could be applied to better understand what constitutes teachers’ professional knowledge, and; therefore, add to the growing body of mindfulness research in education by making it available to other educators. What resulted was an in-depth analysis of my practice where I found that mindfulness helped with decreasing symptoms of stress and burnout while simultaneously increasing my self-efficacy. Increased well-being, empathy, compassion, social intelligence, and emotional regulation were also noted. By gaining increased self-awareness, I was better able to respond to situations, particularly ones involving students. Greater clarity from mindfulness practices resulted in professional insights regarding self-advocacy and boundary setting. Since the practice of teaching is often implicit, this in-depth case study that utilizes the vehicle of self-study design provides a simple, yet profound, resource of how mindfulness can transform how educators teach, lead, and learn.

Keywords: mindfulness, special educators, professional growth, self-efficacy, emotional regulation.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of Special Education in BC and a short synopsis of what is required to work as a special educator. Mindfulness is then defined and a brief summary of the potential benefits for educators follows. A description of the researcher context is then provided, followed by a statement of my own struggles with well-being, stress, and symptoms of burnout in my current role as a special educator. The significance and potential impact of this self-study is then elaborated upon and key terms are defined. I end this chapter with a brief overview of this self-study research.

Overview of Special Education

Special Education is a service designed to meet the needs of students with exceptionalities within our education system. A student with special needs is defined in the BC Ministry of Education Special Education Policy Manual as “a student who has a disability of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioural nature, has a learning disability, or has special gifts and talents” (British Columbia Ministry of Education [BC MOE], 2016, p.1). In Special Education, specially trained educators utilize interventions and strategies in efforts to provide something ‘extra’ or ‘different’ to meet the lagging or often discrepant needs of these students’ challenges. These students require specific instructional supports to monitor their success throughout their educational journey as many students within special education experience emotional, academic, and social deficits (Kynaston, 2017). Hockenbury, Kaufmann and Hallahan (2000) found that instructional practices such as direct instruction, self-monitoring, mnemonic instruction, strategy training, curriculum-based measurement, applied behaviour analysis, and functional assessment are effective techniques used in special education. While
these techniques are effective on all students, what makes them truly effective and unique for students with special needs is the delivery of instruction and individualization that can be provided by the educator (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003; Zigmond, 2003).

Since the very nature of special needs service is reliant on the educator and their delivery and approach, then it is of fundamental importance for special educators to be well versed and practiced in strategies to promote self efficacy, emotional regulation, and effective communication. In fact, Kynaston (2017) enthuses that “for students to experience academic and behavioural success, the classroom teacher must act as a guide and mentor” (p.1) and this is pivotal for special educators as well. Unfortunately, many special educators experience high levels of stress and low-self efficacy when assisting these students to overcome their cognitive, emotional, and behavioural deficiencies (Burrows, 2011). Teaching and managing the demands of the inclusive and diverse composition of our classrooms can be taxing and stressful. Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, (2013) assert that while “teachers play a central role in the classroom climate that fosters student learning and social-emotional well being” (p.182), there is a necessity to provide resources to increase teacher efficacy and reduce the emotional exhaustion and psychological distress associated with burnout (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Roeser et al, 2013; Garner, Bender & Fedor, 2018). Even though teacher stress and burnout have been an ongoing challenge in education, Flook et al. (2013) posit “there are few efforts to address stress and burnout among teachers” or promote teacher well-being (p.182). Providing effective evidence-based resources to support special educators, classroom teachers, and paraprofessionals can be of enormous benefit to the students, teachers, staff, and entire school community. One such resource is the practice of mindfulness.
Mindfulness

**What is mindfulness?** “There has never been as much interest in mindfulness and meditation as there is now” (Gunatillake, 2017, p. 5). There is a growing body of scientific research that is proclaiming substantial evidence for its benefits and effects. Mindfulness is surfacing in leading companies as a tool for employees to manage stress and elite athletes are using it to remain calm and perform under pressure (Gunatillake, 2017). The all-pervasive nature of this practice is also appearing across many disciplines ranging from counselling, therapy, medicine, yoga and meditation centres, and education. Mindfulness educator and researcher, Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) defines mindfulness as, “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (p. 1). The term mindfulness originally comes from the Pali word, *sati*, and it is defined as having awareness, attention, and remembering (Bodhi, 2000). Mindfulness can also be defined as “moment-to-moment” awareness (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005, p.6) or “a state of psychological freedom that occurs when attention remains quiet and limber, without attachment to any particular point of view” (Martin, 1997, p. 291). It is having the ability to bring full attention, awareness, and focus to a particular point, such as body sensation, the breath, or mantra, and having a non-judgmental attitude towards what we experience as it arises (Holas & Jankowski, 2013). Since the very nature of teaching is often based on moment-to-moment decisions and interactions, it is crucial for educators to have high levels of self-awareness and self-regulation. The development of self-awareness and self-regulation can be products of a mindfulness practice (Davis & Hayes, 2012; Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

**Mindfulness and educators.** Special educators who work with students that have significant deficits across learning, emotional, and behavioural domains have benefited from the
mindfulness. Benefits of utilizing mindfulness as a strategy to promote educator well-being include: a reduction in ego related awareness and an increase in self-regulation, a change in awareness of personal experiences, and an empathetic feeling towards oneself (Holas & Jankowski, 2013). In their practical review of psychotherapy related research regarding mindfulness, Davis and Hayes (2012) found the benefits of a mindfulness practice on adults to be a reduction of stress, promotion of empathy and compassion, cognitive gains that contribute to emotional regulation strategies, improvement in self-efficacy, improvement in overall well-being of the participant, and a reduction in anxiety and depression. All these factors can be of benefit to special education teachers. Interestingly, many of the factors that contribute to special educator stress and burnout, like self-efficacy, awareness, motivation, and teaching practices parallel the deficits that students with special needs often experience (Dicke et al., 2015; Holzeberger, Philipp, & Kunter, 2014).

The impact of mindfulness trainings on educators and how they relate to students with special needs and the complex needs of classrooms is being researched. Kynaston (2017) details that through the use of mindfulness techniques, “educators have found awareness, focus, present moment responsiveness, and an increase in self-efficacy” (p.125). Utilizing mindfulness training was also found to be an effective method for assisting teachers with handling the stress, anxiety, and burnout that can be the fallout from working to meet the complex demands of the modern classroom (Flook et al., 2013). Roeser et al. (2013) report that teachers who took part in mindfulness trainings displayed greater mindfulness, focused attention, and working memory capacity than their control group counterparts. Lower levels of occupational stress and burnout were also reported benefits in this study. The benefits of mindfulness training and practice with regards to education are extensive. A summary of the benefits associated with mindfulness
training and practice is provided in Chapter Two. In addition, further discussion regarding the effects of mindfulness pertaining to this self-study will follow in Chapter Two.

**Researcher Context**

I have been a secondary school teacher for twelve years, five of which have been as a special education teacher working specifically with students with physical, cognitive, or behavioural barriers in accessing their education. I have often turned to my personal yoga practice to nourish myself and find solace. Even though I have been practicing for fifteen years and teaching yoga for seven of those, it has only been in the last three years that I have added mindfulness meditation to my daily practice. Meditation has deepened my experience of being here on this planet and I am starting to practice letting go and surrendering to what unfolds within each day. However, this is much more challenging when at work. I was, therefore, deeply curious of how this ancient practice of mindfulness affects my professional practice of being a special educator and I wanted to research its effects on me. As a burgeoning practitioner of mindfulness and now as a researcher, my approach is mainly anti-positivist; interpretivist while being ontologically nominalist. Although my research paradigm mainly falls into this category because it is exploratory, and I endeavor to describe a deeper understanding of a phenomenon, at times I could be partially participatory in paradigm approach. I believe knowledge can be transformative and that reality is socially co-constructed through experiences and not just discovered. In my research I wanted to see if I could apply and transform ways of thinking about teaching and being a special educator.

**Statement of Problem**

In my work as a special education teacher at an alternate high school, I have felt and observed many students and staff (including myself) struggle with self-efficacy, stress, and
emotional regulation. When encountering situations and experiences that are multifaceted and complex with other humans, it is often quite challenging to know the appropriate way to respond. The team of teachers, counselors, and educational assistants at our school all have the common goal of supporting student success in their learning and in their lives. Our approach is often one of constant collaboration with each other to service the students who struggle with multiple barriers to their learning and success. Supporting our students is challenging because all the students are deemed at-risk and vulnerable. Most students struggle with resiliency, self-esteem, multiple diagnoses, learning disabilities, and mental/behavioural disorders. In this alternative school setting, learning is often individualized and personalized, allowing students to work at their own pace in a quieter setting than a traditional neighbourhood school.

Unfortunately, meeting the needs of the students and managing the constant collaboration required for team teaching can be taxing. Some teachers and educational assistants hold differing views on how to best support our students. At times, depending upon the circumstance, there can be disharmony within our team as well as between a student and a team member. My position is unique: I am the only special education teacher at two different sites. I have a large caseload with a combined student population of 250 students. Although I am constantly working and communicating with students, subject teachers, counselors, parents, education assistants, and our school psychologists, I feel overwhelmed and often do not feel very effective in my practice. I feel that I am unable to adequately meet the specific learning needs for all the students that are designated with learning disabilities as well as those with underlying disabilities that are often cloaked by other disorders or mental health issues. The problem guiding this research is related to the vital requirement for a deeper look at myself to see if there are more intentional strategies available to better cope with my workload and ultimately, be more efficacious in my practice and
reduce symptoms of burnout and stress. My study focused on researching the effects of mindfulness practices for professional growth in my role as a special educator in an alternative high school.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this self-study was to explore and observe my practice through the lens of mindfulness. The first part of my goal was to explore how mindfulness training and practice affect my work as a special educator. I wanted to find out if it assisted me in being more efficacious in my practice or if I could experience an increase in my emotional regulation associated with interpersonal and intrapersonal growth. The second part of my goal was to not only experience professional learning, but to ultimately be able to share the findings with other educators, support staff, and students. Having the tools to navigate how to build more positive classroom environments, manage behaviours and interactions more effectively, and build more emotional resiliency, will be advantageous to myself and everyone I interact with. These are crucial skills for a special educator working with students with special needs.

**Significance of Study**

Teachers’ sense of stress, feelings of burnout, and teaching efficacy are three areas of research that have received attention from researchers and policy makers over the past decades (Fernet, Lavigne, Vallerand, & Austin, 2014; Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2007; Wilson, 2002). Interestingly, these variables not only relate to outcomes for teachers in terms of motivation, engagement, and commitment, but they also affect students. Teachers who experience lower perceived stress and greater perceived teaching efficacy encourage greater achievement and self-efficacy among their students (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003). Further to this, Boulton (2014) finds
that a special educator’s self-efficacy, belief in the effectiveness of the intervention and training are all necessary when focusing on changing a student’s behaviour and emotional functioning. In fact, the greater the educator’s self-efficacy, the better the teacher-student relationship, instructional practice, and classroom management (Dicke et al., 2015). With the understanding of these findings, it is crucial to provide appropriate trainings to increase efficacy for all educators. Mindfulness could be one such training.

The benefits of mindfulness training for educators has been researched and the findings have shown a positive correlation between mindfulness training and its ability to assuage teacher stress and burnout (Roeser et al., 2013; Jennings et al., 2017). Jennings et al. (2017) have found that mindfulness training can positively impact teacher efficacy, well-being, social and emotional competence; and create a noticeable reduction in time urgency, which can positively impact classroom organization and productivity. Researching and ensuring that mindfulness trainings are part of professional development for educators and staff are two factors that could contribute to greater efficacy, sustainability, and engagement for working with students with special needs.

As previously discussed, it is important to keep in mind the delicate relationship to how teacher effectiveness is directly linked to student effectiveness, learning and growth. Mindfulness trainings and continued support for the practice of mindfulness to be utilized in a professional setting could be essential. As Rudzroga (2018) points out, the current practice of one-off information sessions provided to students and sometimes professionally to teachers are not enough to ensure the effective implementation of mindfulness interventions with teachers and/or students. Providing teachers with “a list of effective practices provides no real benefit to students with disabilities unless the practices are frequently and appropriately used” (Cook & Schirmer, 2003, p. 203). To garner the full benefits of a mindfulness practice, the educators and
support staff working with the students must have a consistent daily formal and informal practices themselves (Crane, Kuyken, Hastings, Rothwell, & Williams, 2010). Support and training are mandatory for establishing a daily personal practice. Gunaratana (2002) adds that “grit” and determination to stay with the practice are also required to receive full benefits (p.4).

It is impossible to implement an effective mindfulness program without making it your own. Mindfulness is experiential, and it must be transmitted and transmuted that way to land effectively with the students (Crane et al., 2010). This is the very reason that a detailed, systematic self-study on the practice of mindfulness as related to special education is essential in discovering the specific techniques involved to add to the growing body of mindfulness research in education. This study will be incredibly beneficial not only for my own practice as a special educator, but for the colleagues, co-workers, and students I work with. Depending upon what is garnered from the study, I could potentially develop and share the information and training with staff and students within the school and with other schools within the district. This self-study focused on the question, “How can a professional learning experience involving mindfulness support my practice as a special educator?” through the exploration of the sub-question, “How can mindfulness help me to be more efficacious in my practice and increase emotional regulation associated with interpersonal and intrapersonal growth?”

**Definition of Key Terms**

For purposes of this self-study, the following terms have been defined:

**At-risk.** The term at-risk refers to the definite probability that the student on their current trajectory will not finish high school (Wignall, 2003). At-risk students have multiple barriers to learning and school success.
**Burnout.** Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, an overall lack of productivity, and detached responses to people at work (Fernet et al., 2014).

**Emotional resilience.** Emotional resilience refers to the ability of an individual to recover quickly from a negative experience and be able to produce positive emotions (Wang, Xu, & Luo, 2016).

**Equanimity.** Equanimity refers to mental composure, calm; evenness of temper toward all experiences or objects regardless if they are seen to be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral (Desbordes et al., 2015).

**Internal freedom.** Internal freedom is defined as the ability to drop my agenda and let things go giving me a sense of internal lightness knowing that all things can be accomplished guided by wisdom (Williams, 2013).

**Mindfulness.** Mindfulness is defined as having moment-to-moment awareness of the present moment without judgement (Germer et al., 2005). It is non-distracted, non-abandoning awareness of the present moment without agenda.

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy is defined by people’s beliefs about their capabilities and that their beliefs directly impact the outcome of what action is being taken. Having a strong sense of self-efficacy has been shown to enhance human accomplishment and well-being (Bandura, 1989).

**Self-regulation.** Self-regulation is an individual’s ability to manage their emotions, focus their attention and inhibit some behaviours while activating others (Rimm-Kaufmann Curby, Grimm, Nathanson, & Brock, 2009). It is also linked with an increase in student achievement (Shanker, 2013).
Overview of this Study

In this self-study, I participated in an online educator mindfulness training course for professional learning and created a mindfulness self-study plan to implement into my teaching practice. Situated in the context of an alternate education high school as a special education teacher, I was the focus of the research. The effects from implementing mindfulness into my teaching practice were investigated and explored. Reflections were made in how my teaching practice changed. The focus was on my stress and burnout tendencies as well as my self-efficacy within the domain of emotional regulation and interpersonal and intrapersonal growth. Data was collected through journaling and applying the self-study cyclical processes of raising, refining and investigating questions, and making the relevant changes in practice. I collected, analyzed, and interpreted the qualitative data gathered. My intention was to critically examine my actions and the context of them as a way of being consciously aware of my professional activity as an established requirement of self-study (Samaras, 2002). Through a lens of inquiry, this self-study systematically assisted me in looking at my practice with a curious and open perspective, so I could not only examine my beliefs and knowledge about teaching and learning but determine if there are better ways of understanding what constitutes teacher’s professional knowledge. The intent was one of growth by deepening experiences and applying and transforming ways of thinking about teaching.

Summary

This initial chapter provided an overview of the current study by discussing what is required to be a special educator in BC and the potential stressors involved. Mindfulness training and practice was suggested as a possible resource to ameliorate affects associated with stress and burnout from the demanding role of being a special educator. An introduction to the benefits and
impacts of mindfulness training for educators was provided and a statement of the problem for this researcher was identified. The purpose and significance of this self-study, definitions of key terms and a review of this self-study conclude this chapter.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a synopsis of pertinent research and theory on mindfulness, review the effects of mindfulness trainings related to educators, understand the importance of mindfulness, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation in special education for students and teachers, and connect my self-study research to the literature. First, there will be an exploration of mindfulness with its ancient and modern conceptual and theoretical underpinnings. Then, a summary and analysis of the effects of mindfulness trainings on educators will be reviewed, followed by a focus on the benefits of self-efficacy and emotional regulation as it pertains to decreasing the effects of educator stress and burnout. Finally, these factors will be discussed in connection to this self-study.

Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings

Mindfulness is the practice of cultivating awareness and acceptance of the present moment (Roemer, Williston, & Rollins, 2015). Mindfulness has moved from a largely obscure Buddhist concept to a mainstream construct that is described as something that everyone can benefit from (Davis & Hayes, 2011). It involves “attending to relevant aspects of experience in a non-judgemental manner” and the goal is “to maintain awareness moment by moment, disengaging oneself from strong attachment to beliefs, thoughts, or emotions, thereby developing a greater sense of emotional balance and well-being” (Ludwig & Kabat-Zinn, 2008, p.1350). The practice of mindfulness stems from eastern traditions and philosophy and it has been woven into the very fabric of western psychology by many psychotherapists, psychologists, and researchers (Didonna, 2009; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). This is mainly due to the success of design and implementation of Jon Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
programs and approaches, as well as mindfulness’ place in behaviour, cognitive and acceptance, and commitment therapy theories (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009; Eisendrath, 2016; Johns, Morris, & Oliver, 2013). The term ‘mindfulness’ has been used to refer to a state of awareness, a practice promoting this awareness, a mode of processing information, and a characterological trait (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Germer et al., 2005). For purposes of this review and this research study, mindfulness will be defined as moment-to-moment awareness of one’s experience without judgement. Furthermore, mindfulness will be viewed as a state of being, not a trait.

Mindfulness is also similar to other western psychology related constructs like mentalization, the development of understanding one’s own thoughts, feelings, and desires (Bateman & Fonagy, 2006). Mindfulness differs from mentalizing because it involves being aware of the formed identity or self (thoughts and feelings) as they arise, and not attaching to these thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Other similar constructs explored in the conceptual psychological research include intersubjectivity and insight. Mindfulness and intersubjectivity are similar in that they both pertain to gaining connection with others (Thompson, 2009) or what Thich Nat Hahn (1987) refers to as ‘interbeing.’ Thich Nat Hahn (1987) defines interbeing as the Buddhist notion of being present and attuned with everything and everyone as the moment unfolds. Siegel (2009) has also proposed a neurological explanation for the relationship between insight, the conscious process of making novel connections (Hill & Castonguay, 2007), and mindfulness which will be explored further in this review and self-study research.

Although mindfulness can be practiced and enhanced in a variety of disciplines e.g. yoga, tai chi, chi gong (Siegel, 2007b), it is important to note for purposes of this self-study that the majority of theoretical writing and empirical research has focused on the formal practice of
mindfulness meditation as opposed to informal practice of moment-to-moment awareness as a state that can be experienced any time. Meditation refers to: “A family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration” (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006, p. 228).

There are many types of meditation, but the one that is focused upon in the empirical research is usually associated with vipassana meditation and is derived from the traditional Theravadan Buddhist tradition which is a practice designed to gradually develop awareness (Gunaratana, 2002). It is cultivated in stages by first becoming aware of breath and body sensations, then of emotions, thoughts, and lastly by awareness of one’s external environment (Germer, 2005; Gunaratana, 2002). Interestingly some research suggests that different types of meditation elicit different types of brain activity patterns (Cahn & Polich, 2006) and mindfulness meditation has been shown to elicit responses in the prefrontal midbrain which is associated with metacognition and self-observation (Siegel, 2007b) and attentional mechanisms (Valentine & Sweet, 1999). Since the empirical research uses the state of mindfulness and the formal practice of mindfulness meditation synonymously, in this self-study I will do the same unless otherwise stated.

**Benefits of Mindfulness**

The benefits of mindfulness are extensive. Table A1 summarizes the main results found from fourteen different studies on the effects of Mindfulness training or practice on teachers and/or adults (See Appendix A). In their comprehensive review of mindfulness research, Davis and Hayes (2012) summarize the theorized and researched benefits of a mindfulness practice as:
increased self-control, objectivity, affect tolerance, enhanced flexibility, equanimity, improved concentration and mental clarity, emotional intelligence and the ability to relate to oneself with compassion, acceptance, and kindness. Mindfulness training was initially utilized in medicine and “has spread into the fields of psychology, healthcare, neuroscience, business, the military, and education” (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 292). In their review, Ludwig and Kabat-Zinn (2008) found evidence that mindfulness improves health and well-being in adults by enhancing positive brain regulation; increasing endocrine and immune function; reducing stress, anxiety, and depression; being better able to deal with pain; increasing motivation to make lifestyle changes; and fostering social connection and enriched interpersonal relations. Many therapists and medical trainees have reported greater levels of compassion (Shapiro, Astin, Bishop, & Cordova 2005) and empathy (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998; Aiken, 2006) as well as being more attentive to the therapy process and more attuned to oneself and clients (Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008). These benefits could extend to special educators in the relationships developed with themselves, their students, as well as the staff and parents they work with.

**Effects on the brain and behaviour.** Mindfulness practices also assist people in being less reactive and having greater cognitive flexibility and attentional awareness which can increase potential insight that someone would have to a given situation (Siegel, 2007b; Cahn & Polich, 2009; Moore & Malinowski, 2009). Evidence suggests that mindfulness can create fewer symptoms associated with emotional stress in relationship conflict (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007) and more ability to react with awareness in social situations (Dekeyser, Raes, Leijssen, Leysen, & Dewulf, 2008). Neuroplasticity, the re-wiring of our brains because of experience, can now explain how mindfulness can affect change at a physical and structural level in the brain (Lazar et al., 2005; Siegel, 2007a). The practice creates thicker
regions of the brain associated with attention, sensory processing, and sensitivity to internal stimuli (Lazar et al., 2005). This can account for the positive cognitive, emotional, and immunoreactive benefits (Vestergaard-Poulsen et. al., 2009). Mindfulness meditation can also increase information processing speed (Moore & Malinowski, 2009) and decrease task effort while increasing the ability of having fewer thoughts that are not related to the task at hand (Lutz et al., 2009). These are all important factors in teaching and learning. However, greater benefits have been found to be directly related to the time the practitioner has been practicing; the greater the longevity of the practice in the individual, the greater the benefits (Siegel, 2007a). In their synopsis of the empirical research, Davis & Hayes (2012) propose that mindfulness, as a metacognitive skill, needs to be made a requirement for psychotherapy training. In my research, I wanted to go a step further and understand if it should be a proposed requirement for special educator and teacher training as well.

Mindfulness and Education

Pressures for educators. We live in a fast-paced, always-on, and increasingly digitized world. As a teacher in modern westernized society, there is the constant demands of being “on” as well as the multi-dimensional layers of social complexity and responsibility inherent in the position. The role that teachers play in their work-life far surpasses that of delivery of curriculum and integrating emerging educational technologies; teachers play a pivotal part in fostering student development and social-emotional well-being. Teachers have pressures from not only the socio-emotional demands of working with 30 or more children or adolescents with varying social, emotional, and behavioural needs at once (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009), but also the heavy work load involved in ministry curriculum changes and the ongoing collaboration and communication with administration and parents. Teaching is a taxing and daunting job (Brackett,
There are often demanding relationships with students and colleagues, time pressures, and the external pressures of scrutinization from administration, parents, and students (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Inclusive educational policy in BC also requires teachers to create classroom environments where students with special needs are not only fully participating members of the community of learners, but they are “entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement, and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs” (BC MOE, 2016, p. 2). These layers of responsibilities can create stress. Some researchers have attributed teacher stress to the uncertain and attention-intensive nature of teaching, where teachers must be flexible, creative, and make informed decisions moment-to-moment each day and all day to remain effective (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012). There is no doubt that managing multiple relationships and student behaviour while endeavoring to work on students’ socio-emotional and cognitive growth is challenging. Teachers require “a great deal of emotional and social capacity and intelligence” to be effective and to regulate themselves, as well as being in touch with how each student is feeling at any given moment to encourage student self-regulation (Weare, 2014, p.14). Although stress affects teachers differently depending upon the individual’s unique personality, values, coping strategies, environment, and circumstances (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005), it is imperative to understand this source of stress and ways to ameliorate it.

An educational survey in the United States, found that nearly 46% of K-12 teachers surveyed reported high daily levels of stress throughout the school year (Greenway, Brown, & Abernavoli, 2016). This is one of the highest daily stress levels reported among all occupations including nurses (46%) and doctors (45%) (Greenway et al., 2016). Teaching has also been cited “as the second most stressed profession, second only to ambulance driving” (Weare, 2014, p.9).
High levels of reported stress are due to several factors. Teachers “experience intense, emotion-laden interactions on a daily basis and have a great number of emotional demands compared to most other professionals” (Brackett et al., 2010, p. 406). High levels of stress coupled with emotional exhaustion over long periods of time can lead to occupational burnout (Guiglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). Maslach, Schaufeli, and Lieter (2001) further define burnout as being comprised of three factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of feeling of accomplishment of one’s work. Adding to this, burnout has been implicated in teacher’s perceptions of stress and their ability to cope with demands, namely their self-efficacy (McCormick & Barnett, 2011).

There is no doubt that chronic stress and burnout can have deleterious affects on teacher’s physical, mental, and emotional health and can, subsequently, result in a diminished capacity to effectively teach and engage students (Roeser et. al., 2013; Dicke et al., 2015). Not only do these effects negatively impact students, the classroom environment and the school, the chronic stress and burnout can even result in high rates of attrition within the profession. Reichel (2013) reports that Canadian teachers are overwhelmed as an associate professor at McGill University’s Faculty of Education, “estimates at least 30% of Canadian teachers leave the profession within their first five years on the job, in line with similar stats reported in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia” (Reichel, 2013). In fact, in the United States, it has been found to be higher. Garner et al. (2018) state that “approximately 50 percent of teachers leave the classroom in the first five years” (p.1). Special education teachers have reported that attrition is due to deficiency in adequate training and support, stress, significant job responsibilities, and feeling overwhelmed by needs of students (Brownell, Smith, & McNellis, 1997). Providing support for teachers’ stress is vital for the stability and effectiveness of educational systems (Kyriacou, 2011). By training teachers with tools for self-care, like mindfulness practices,
teachers could be retained, which could translate into increased self-efficacy, well-being, and emotional regulation (Flook et. al, 2013). These increased benefits could further positively impact student learning and school success (Flook et. al, 2013).

Mindful emotional regulation and developing attitudes of self-compassion and the associated mindfulness benefits, would assist teachers in addressing the stressful aspects associated with their work environments; however, teacher education and teacher professional development programs do not generally address these issues (Roeser et. al., 2012). In fact, what is required is educator programs that develop these kinds of higher order skills and mindsets to assist individuals in functioning effectively in high-stress professions like teaching. Mindfulness school-based interventions are mainly designed for students, but in recent years there has been more research conducted on addressing these issues with mindfulness training programs targeting teachers and support staff (Jennings et al., 2017; Flook et al., 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Current research shows that mindfulness training programs are showing favorable benefits for teachers regarding the effects of stress, burnout, self-efficacy, and social and emotional regulation (Jennings et al., 2017; Sharp & Jennings, 2016; Roeser et al., 2013; Flook et al., 2013, Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

**Effects of mindfulness interventions in education for teachers and students.** Since one of the major stressors identified by teachers is the varying social, emotional, and behavioural needs of students in the classroom, research has been conducted to determine the effects of using mindfulness programs in schools to assuage any maladaptive behaviours and increase positive behaviours, social interactions, academic success, and overall well-being (Bakosh, Snow, Tobias, Houlihan, & Barbosa-Leiker, 2015; Steiner, Sidhu, Pop, Frenette, & Perrin, 2013; Zelos & Lyons, 2012; Kuyken et al., 2013). Weare (2014) posits the need for teachers to have integrated
Mindfulness practice personally by experiencing this non-cognitive, experiential, and paradoxical process from within in order to guide students effectively. “To be experienced as authentic, teachers need to be able to model and embody the particular qualities that mindfulness develops, such as open-ness, flexibility, and non-judgement” (Weare, 2014, p.8). Teachers and specifically special education teachers, require the ability to emotionally regulate themselves, maintain focused attention, and possess positive self-efficacy (Benn, Akiva, Arel, & Roeser, 2012). Unfortunately, this is not always the case and can be quite the opposite. Working with students with special needs is stressful, placing extra pressure on special educators, which can result in educators leaving the profession or being non-responsive to student needs (Dicke et al., 2015; Roeser et al., 2013). Non-responsiveness in educators can hinder student motivation and disrupt classroom climate (Jennings et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important to find methods or modes of being to alleviate these pressures. Mindfulness practices for educators and students could very well be the answer.

As the nature of the teacher-student relationship is intrinsically linked to learning it is important to discuss effects of some of the mindfulness interventions that are being used in classrooms. Many students that require extra attention to assist in some of the maladaptive behaviours and perhaps cognitive deficits evident in classrooms have been identified with special needs and often lack self-esteem, self-regulation, and social skills (Maye, 2012). By definition, mindfulness is the ability to be non-judgemental towards experiences and the ability to self-regulate, which are both factors that can be found lacking in students with disabilities and special needs (Haydicky, Wiener, Badali, Milligan, & Ducharme, 2012). Students identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), and dyslexia are often identified with having emotional, social, and behavioural difficulties as a result of the high
demands of a regular classroom (Groom & Rose, 2005). Building these self-regulation skills are vital for these students’ academic and behavioural success. One way this can be achieved is with the integration of mindfulness interventions into curriculum (Kynaston, 2017). Mindful interventions can be woven into lessons by teachers without losing the knowledge and understanding of academic learning outcomes (Bakosh et al., 2015). As Flook et al. (2013) point out, mindfulness interventions can be short in duration (even as short as one minute was found effective), cost effective, provide academic success, and promote well-being in students. There are many mindfulness practice interventions that can be utilized at any time and drawn into the classroom for use with students. They can also be used on an individual basis as required. Flook et al. (2013) provide a comprehensive list of interventions in the appendix of their research. Similarly, the mindfulness practices that were utilized in this mindfulness self-study can be found within the mindfulness checklist in the Appendix. Currently, there are also many evidence-based programs (some with pre-made curriculum) that can be utilized by educators to assist in teaching mindfulness like: MindUp, GoNoodle, Inner Kids Program, Inner Resilience Program, Learning to Breathe, Mindfulness in Schools Project, Mindful Schools, Still Quiet Place, Stressed Teens, and Wellness Works in Schools (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

Meiklejohn et al. (2012) state that mindfulness can be integrated into the classroom in three different ways: the direct approach, which is using a pre-made curriculum; the indirect approach, where the teacher is embodying mindfulness through a personal practice and models this behaviour throughout the day; and a combination of the two approaches. In their study, Benn et al. (2012) utilized an adapted version of MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) on 38 special educators who all had experience and knowledge of what was required for working with students with behavioural or emotional disorders. The educators completed pre- and post-surveys
as well as at a two-month follow-up of training. After the training, the participants reported diminished self-judgement, increased empathy for their students, more compassion for themselves and their students, and an increase in self perception. Through training educators appropriately in cognitive theory and intervention of mindfulness, Benn et al. (2012) discovered that the educators not only grew in their own self-efficacy, but they were also able to assist their students more effectively.

The educators that participated in the study by Benn et al. (2012) showed significant reductions in stress and anxiety and were able to increase their own mindfulness, including present moment awareness, empathy, and compassion. These effects permeated out into their teaching practice, ultimately having a positive effect on their students. Some researchers (Weare, 2014; Benn et al., 2012) stress the importance of teachers developing their own mindfulness practice to be role models for their students and colleagues. Simply delivering the materials on how to self-regulate and develop non-judgemental awareness of thoughts, feelings, and emotions is not enough for the practice and its benefits to land and take root. It must be experienced on an ongoing basis by the educator and modeled for the students. The evidence of the impacts of mindfulness-based interventions in education thus far are clear; they are effective. Therefore, mindfulness training needs to be an integral part of teacher training and future professional development.

**Mindfulness Trainings**

A leader and researcher in the field of mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zinn founded and developed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programs (MBSR) and approaches to train others (Siegal, 2009; Kabot-Zinn, 1990). The program is based on mindfulness practices and has been further adapted and modified into mMBSR (modified Mindfulness-Based Stress
Reduction), MT (Mindfulness Training), SMART (Stress Management and Relaxation Training), CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education), CALM (Community Approach to Learning Mindfully), and MBWE (Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education) programs to meet the needs of trainings for educators and support staff working in schools (Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Rudzroga, 2018). There are also educator mindfulness online training courses that have been created in correlation with evidence-based research and have been proven to be successful (Mindful Schools, 2018; Mindfulness in Schools, 2018). All the previously mentioned educator- and school staff-focused programs are slightly different depending upon the sample of adults they are applied to, and the format they are presented in. Descriptions of training programs are provided in Appendix B. To guide my research methodology, a framework was developed based on research from the effects of a MT program with respect to teacher stress and burnout and a CARE program with respect to educator social and emotional regulation, as well as studies correlated to them. This framework, in the form of a mindfulness checklist can be found in Appendix C.

**Effects of mindfulness training on teacher stress and burnout.** In their study, Roeser et al. (2013) utilized a mindfulness training program (MT) on a randomized sample of teachers in two different field trials to measure its effects using physiological and psychological indicators of stress and burnout pre-, post-, and three-months after intervention. When compared with the randomized wait-list control group, the teachers in the mindfulness training reported greater mindfulness and occupational self-compassion and the effect was large (Cohen’s d value >.60) for both trials post mindfulness training and at three-month follow-up. The researchers concluded that mindfulness training was effective in helping teachers manage stress and reduce feelings associated with burnout. They found that through the skills acquired by a mindful and
self-compassionate mind-set, teachers could better manage on the job. Further to this, Roeser et al. (2013) inferred that teachers would then be able to deal more effectively with the complexities related to teaching, managing, and learning in the classroom. This study used detailed quantitative analysis on a broad range of qualitative psychological effects and the many researchers involved added validity and reliability to the results. In a similar study with a smaller sample size, less measured psychological effects, and third person observational measures, Flook et al. (2013) discovered similar effects of mindfulness training with educator participants. A modified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction course (mMBSR) was utilized and research results showed that teacher participants displayed significant reductions in psychological symptoms and burnout. They also displayed increased effective teaching behaviour, self-compassion, and reduction in attentional biases.

One remarkable factor in these studies was the inference of educators experiencing greater efficacy in teaching practice after participating in mindfulness training. This research positively correlated mindfulness training with the improvement of teaching and learning in classrooms and adds to the continuing growth of knowledge in the area of mindfulness and how it can positively affect teachers, students, and schools. These results suggest that an eight-week mindfulness training for teachers can increase efficacy of teachers and reduce the feelings of stress and burnout (Roeser et al., 2013). Flook et al. (2013) found that mindfulness trainings for educators can reduce psychological symptoms of burnout and improve classroom organization, affective attentional bias, and increase empathy. The assumption can then be made that mindfulness trainings and practices can help teachers develop self-regulatory processes that can not only meet the cognitive, social, and emotional needs in a classroom, but could help teachers
conserve precious energy for investments in students and teaching rather than coping and defense (Roeser et al., 2013).

**Impacts of mindfulness trainings on educator’s social and emotional regulation.**

Jennings et al. (2017) researched the impact of applying a mindfulness-based program on teachers to alleviate some of the stress associated with teaching, with the focus on the effects of how the program could affect positive change on social and emotional competence and classroom interactions. Jennings et al. (2017) hypothesized that teachers randomly assigned to the CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) program intervention would show statistically significant improvements in emotional regulation, teaching efficacy, and reductions in psychological and physical distress than teachers randomly assigned to the waitlist condition. Through qualitative methods such as teacher self-report measures, questionnaires (Gross & John, 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Kriememeyer, & Toney, 2006; Frank, Jennings, & Greenberg, 2016), and third party observation, the researchers gathered qualitative data to quantify from an ethnically and racially diverse sample of educators. The results of the study indicated that teachers who received the intervention reported a 14% increase in ability to regulate their emotions, an 11% increase in overall mindfulness, and a 7% reduction in the measure of psychological distress to the control group (Jennings et al., 2017). Post program results for teachers also showed an overall 10% reduction of sleep disturbances and a 9% reduction on emotional exhaustion compared with the control group. The effects of emotional exhaustion and sleep disturbances are directly related to job performance, well-being, and mental and physical health (Kuppermann et al., 1995). Finally, CARE for teacher participants also showed a 16% improvement on the observing scale and an 8% improvement on the non-judgement scale (two measures of mindfulness), both directly
related to efficacy in teaching (Jennings et al., 2017). The impact of the CARE training was also measured observationally in the classrooms. It was reported by independent raters that the intervention teachers provided higher levels of emotional support when compared with the control group, but the effects were only modest. “It is likely that reductions in teachers’ psychological distress and improvements in teachers’ social emotional competence and the quality of classroom interactions may change over time” (Jennings et al., 2017). The improved effects may fade or grow over time dependant upon the educator and their continued practice of mindfulness. Interestingly, Roeser et al. (2013) found that educator participants in a MT program reported continued improvements in mindfulness, occupational self-compassion and reductions in occupational stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression symptoms at the three-month follow-up. Longevity of a continued daily practice seems to be a mitigating factor in the effects of mindfulness.

In their study, Jennings et al. (2017) utilize standardized measures to quantify qualitative data (particularly the third-party observation data) substantiating the results. They provided strong evidence for the benefits of teachers taking a mindfulness program to enhance their efficacy and social and emotional regulation. The third-party observation results also demonstrated that mindfulness-based intervention programs can have a direct impact on contextual factors that reflect positive social interactions. The researchers also found that educator participants had increased mindfulness, decreased emotional exhaustion and psychological stress; and increased ability to regulate their emotions (Jennings et al., 2017). All these attributes are correlated with increased teacher efficacy (Collie et al., 2012) and can positively effect teacher-student relationships, classroom environment, student behaviour, and how students learn (Roeser et al., 2013).
These studies each report increased ability to regulate emotions, which is of particular interest in regards my self-study. Increasing one’s ability to adaptively regulate emotions involves the ability to hold space for examining situations where one experiences difficult emotions, and to, then, be able to behave in cognitive reappraisal to respond more effectively for all without repressing one’s emotional expression. Enhanced emotional regulation is an extremely valuable tool for a special educator. In their review of research related to mindfulness and emotion regulation, Roemer et al. (2015), found that mindfulness practices lead to reduced negative emotional responses, enhanced positive emotional responses, and reduced behavioural avoidance while mindfulness-based trainings lead to decreases in emotion regulation difficulties. In fact, “research on the neurobiology of mindfulness in adults suggests that sustained mindfulness practice can enhance attentional and emotional self-regulation and promote flexibility, pointing toward significant potential benefits for both teachers and students” (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 291).

**Connecting current studies to this self-study.** After reviewing the effects and benefits of mindfulness in education, it is evident that mindfulness training for educators has positive impacts on well-being of educators, social relationships between colleagues, staff, and students, the ability to assist in social and emotional regulation, as well as reduce stress and burnout. Increased self-efficacy within educators was also seen to be a by product of mindfulness trainings. Interestingly, the studies found that longevity and continued daily mindfulness practice by the participant to be significant. All these benefits directly pertain to my role as a special education teacher, but the most compelling benefits were the ones related to emotional regulation, decreased reactivity and increased response activity as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal growth. Decreasing stress associated within my special educator role and
enhancing attention, awareness and emotional self-regulation were avenues of further exploration in this self-study. Mindfulness training and continued daily mindfulness practice could be important self-care and professional development strategies in my special educator role.

The literature reviewed provided evidence to support the background information required for this self-study in mindfulness for professional learning. At this time, there were no self-studies completed in mindfulness by a special educator in alternative education school setting located. My endeavor was to fill this gap in the research and determine what specific techniques or in-depth knowledge could be discovered within the backdrop of my own sensibilities and values and how it could be specifically applied within the confines of teaching and learning relationships. This knowledge could then potentially be shared with educators, staff, students, and schools. The list of empirical benefits of mindfulness are vast and across multiple disciplines which directly lends credibility, legitimacy, and strength to my self-study research.

Summary

This chapter provided a synthesis of pertinent research and theory on the role of mindfulness in education. From this discussion on the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of mindfulness and its benefits, the usefulness of mindfulness practices by teachers and students is evident. There are numerous stressors associated with being an educator and particularly a special educator. The impacts of mindfulness trainings and practices on educator’s ability to self-regulate and have better mental health, greater self-efficacy and self-compassion is of importance with respect to ameliorating the pressures. Practices that reduce stress, burnout, and anxiety while increasing empathy, compassion, tolerance, and patience (Weare, 2014) will only enhance an educator’s impact on students and in school communities. Through the literature reviewed, a greater understanding of how educators are trained in mindfulness and how it impacts school
communities was discovered. This information created structure for the foundation of my self-study, allowing me to effectively answer my main research question, “How can a professional learning experience involving mindfulness support my practice as a special educator?” and then address my sub-question, “How can mindfulness help me to be more efficacious in my practice and increase emotional regulation associated with interpersonal and intrapersonal growth?”
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter introduces the self-study research methodology and describes the research design, methods, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. A background defining self-study is provided, followed by how the research was carried out. Researcher context, site description as well as how a mindfulness checklist was created to frame data collection is then provided. Grounded theory, triangulation, and data coding are discussed. This chapter describes how I am going to answer my research question and sub-question all within the context of self-study.

Defining Self-Study

Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) define self-study as “the study of one’s self, one’s actions, and one’s ideas” (p.236). Self-study involved stepping into my own vulnerabilities, values, and beliefs to provide the research in a way that was not only self-reflective, but systematic (Samsaras & Freese, 2006). Although there are diverse approaches to self-study methodology, matters of context, process, and relationships are foundational (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). To alleviate tendencies towards bias, limited perspective and subjectivities, I employed the four-part framework for self-study provided by LaBoskey (2004). The four features include: requirement of evidence for reframing and transformation of practice; the need for interactions with colleagues, students, and educational literature to interrogate assumptions and values; competent use of multiple methods; and formalization of the study so that it is available to the professional community (LaBoskey, 2004, pp. 859-860).

Self-study is like action research in that it follows the same inquiry process cycles of action, observation, and reflection, identifying and examining issues situated in practice and then making changes in practice (Samaras & Freese, 2006). The difference between the two
methodologies is that in self-study, the self situated in a particular context becomes the focus of the research instead of the action. Samaras and Freese (2006) attribute self-study to being more about who a teacher is rather than what they do. The doing is more aligned with an action research approach. Although action is often what is called for in my teaching practice, there needs to be space for reflection, being, and understanding of my very nature, which aligns with the very premise of mindfulness and parallels the self-study methodology. With space comes time to reflect inwardly and not only interrogate my assumptions and values but accept them for what they are and potentially act with more insight. I can then utilize self-study methodology to apply and transform ways of thinking about teaching (Samsaras et al., 2007). If self-study is about who the teacher is, then high levels of transparency, openness, and authenticity must be involved.

**Justification for Methodology**

Employing this qualitative methodology of research enabled me to answer my research question as it allowed me to document, analyze, and reflect on my teaching practice with the intent of growth or improvement. Ritter (2017) points out that “so much of self-study hinges on transparency and being willing to honestly interrogate what we are doing and why we are doing it” (p.32). Self-study simply fits with what I wanted to investigate. It is a method that teachers can utilize “to critically examine their actions and the context of them as a way of operating on a more consciously driven mode of professional activity” (Samsaras, 2002, p.xiii). By utilizing self-study, I discovered how the practice of mindfulness could change my teaching practice while still being informed in a firm grounding of research literature. Self-study helped me ask deeper questions about my practice while investigating how my beliefs and values matched my practice. Important outcomes from self-study methodology is to create better ways of
understanding what constitutes teacher’s professional knowledge and to make it available to other educators (LaBoskey, 2004). I hypothesized that if I could understand how to be more self-efficacious through the lens of mindfulness, I could then make the professional knowledge available to other educators and potentially be less stressed, and more effective in my relationships with myself, my students, and all the people I interacted with at work.

**Research Design**

The timeline overview provided in Figure 1 was followed in my research methodology.

**Educator mindfulness course.** The first part of my research involved me taking an educator mindfulness training course. The Mindfulness Fundamentals course from Mindful
Schools was taken May 4- June 14th, 2018 (Mindful Schools, 2018). Based on my understanding and insights from the course, a mindfulness self-study plan was created to implement into the two school settings where I work. In this educator mindfulness course, the objective was for participants to develop a personal mindfulness practice to increase well-being and deepen self-awareness. The course was six weeks long and each week had a different theme to explore with regards to the participant’s professional development and mindfulness. I explored mindfulness of breath and mindfulness of the body during the first two weeks. Within week three and four, I discovered the importance of mindfulness of emotions pertaining to emotional regulation and learned about the development of the heart and cultivating gratitude and kindness. In the final two weeks, I explored interpersonal mindfulness and learned the benefits of daily mindfulness practices.

**Five-facet mindfulness questionnaire (FFMQ).** The evidence-based self-assessment tool utilized to measure five domains of mindfulness during the data collection periods was the five-facet mindfulness questionnaire developed by Baer et al. (2008). The five specific elements of mindfulness that were measured were: *observing*, defined as staying present with perceptions, sensations, thought or feelings even when they are unpleasant or painful; *describing*, defined as being able to describe or label in words our beliefs, opinions, emotions, expectations; *act with awareness*, defined as staying present with our actions without distraction; *nonjudgement*, defined as being non-judgemental of our own experience; and *nonreactivity*, defined as being able to perceive our emotions without reacting or becoming dysregulated by them (Baer et al., 2008). Each of the scores for each facet ranged on a continuum from one to five. Closer to one indicated less mindfulness, and closer to five indicated more mindfulness.
Mindfulness self-study plan. Utilizing the information gathered from the Mindfulness Fundamentals course, I designed a mindfulness self-study plan that included a mindfulness checklist to provide a framework for my journaling and reflections during the data collection periods. A copy of the mindfulness checklist can be found in Appendix C. The mindfulness self-study plan also consisted of a formal daily practice of 20 minutes in the morning and evening, and informal practices throughout the day utilizing different weekly themes that were covered in the six-week mindfulness educator course. This was my personal self-study plan within my teaching practice, and it was firmly planted in research literature to see if mindfulness affects my practice in a transformative way. My intention was to critically examine my actions and the context of them as a way of being consciously aware of my professional activity (Samaras, 2002).

Research site. Since I work at two school settings within the week, I implemented the mindfulness self-study plan at both sites to garner rich qualitative data to support my research and justify my findings. Each setting has a different student demographic and a different set of staff members to observe whether I act consistently within a different context and if not then to help me determine why. This substantiated the data collected and limited bias and subjectivity when results were analyzed and interpreted. It was also important for me to answer my research questions with respect to both sites as this was the full context of my role as special educator and the very premise of why I wanted to research these questions. The physical setting in both schools was similar. There was a central large classroom surrounded by offices (for counselling and meetings), teacher work stations, and separate study areas on its periphery. These classrooms were staffed with a team of teachers, counselors, and educational assistants who worked collaboratively to facilitate the socio-emotional, behavioural, and academic needs of vulnerable
and at-risk learners. The aim was to support the students through their educational successes and further assist them in building a transition plan into the adult work force or post secondary training/courses. Site A was located at a business office park, was more urban and had a small, quiet ‘store front’ setting. Site B was located at a remodelled rural elementary school, was more spacious and the building also housed numerous community partnerships and programs.

**Researcher context.** As a researcher, my approach was mainly anti-positivist and interpretivist with a small slant towards a participatory paradigm. Utilizing the lens of mindfulness, I wanted to see if I could apply and transform my ways of thinking about teaching. My intention was to critically examine my actions and the context of them as a way of being consciously aware of my professional activity (Samaras, 2002). Ontologically my approach is nominalist as I believe that there are multiple realities and that they are dependant upon the individual that puts together their own understanding of their world and experiences. I also wanted to create better ways of understanding what constitutes teacher’s professional knowledge which is often implied or tacit. The self-study methodology is one of the best ways to do this.

**Data Collection**

During the field inquiry, data was collected in two distinct six-week cycles during the busy start-up season (Sept 10-Oct 18, 2018) and during the period prior to the winter break (Nov 5- Dec 13, 2018). These data periods were purposely chosen to encapsulate a time that was quite busy for both students and staff (start-up) and a time that could be quite challenging (prior to winter holiday break) for at-risk learners. Prior to winter break is often a time where these learners are reminded of how little they might have in terms of social, emotional, and economic support. It is a time when heightened profiling behaviours are often experienced and observed. Qualitative data was collected through journaling and reflections on my application of the
mindfulness self-study plan during this field inquiry period, but I analyzed as I collected data because this assisted me with adjusting my practice as required. Self-observation and reflection on communication and collaboration with colleagues was also included. The five-facet mindfulness questionnaire (Baer et al., 2008) was a source of quantitative data for measuring my mindfulness. This self-assessment was taken before and during the application of the mindfulness self-study plan, to corroborate or contradict qualitative data gathered.

**Journaling and mindfulness checklist.** In the self-study method of cyclical processes of raising, refining, investigating questions, and making the relevant changes, I journaled and reflected on my practice in an organized and organic way. Journaling for data collection “has long been accepted as a valid method for accessing rich qualitative data” (p. 27) and can be used for a variety of reasons such as documenting thoughts, feelings, ideas, experiences, and reflections (Hayman, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2012). Simmons-Mackie and Damico (2001) found that journaling can be used to examine specific experiences in their natural setting and within their natural framework. This was exactly what I employed in my data collection. I utilized the following guiding questions: ‘How did I exhibit mindfulness in my practice this week?’; ‘What is calling for my attention?’; and ‘What is it that the situation and my response want me to know?’ in my weekly reflections. I explored my reflections further by also employing three questions from Pinnegar and Hamilton’s (2009) Framework-for-Inquiry Planner for Self-Study. The questions were: “What do I identify as problems in my practice, where my actions do not seem to represent my values?”; “How could I explore these concerns and issues?”; and “What values do I embody in my practice and research?” (p. 51). My journaling also included goals, endeavors, strategies that I tried, challenges/difficulties I faced, as well as developing themes. I journaled daily (four days/week when students were in attendance) and then reflected weekly. The
mindfulness checklist was embedded within these reflections and created a systematic framework to my journaling process during the field inquiry.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation involves collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings to increase the trustworthiness of the study and to protect the accuracy of the data interpretation (Rumrill, Cook, & Wiley, 2011). The data in this self-study was triangulated by comparing the results from my experiences with the results from the research literature findings. Since the data for this self-study was gathered through my journaling of what I experienced and professionally learned from mindfulness training, it was imperative to reflect on collaborative conversations with colleagues as another source of triangulation to interrogate my assumptions and values. Data was further triangulated by being collected at two different sites with two different sets of students and staff, which increased trustworthiness and reliability of the study. A mixed methods approach was also employed as a source of triangulation. Qualitative data was collected through journaling and quantitative data was collected by the application of the five-facet mindfulness questionnaire (Baer et al., 2008) throughout the data collection periods.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

**Data analysis.** Although self-study was predominantly a qualitative method of research, within this study, mixed methods research was employed to provide a richer and more complete picture of what was occurring. Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches increases the accuracy of the data collected about the phenomenon under investigation and assists the researchers to “develop the analysis and build on the original data” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013, p. 22). Mixed methods assisted in enhancing the credibility and integrity of my research and answered my research questions with more depth. Reams and Twale (2008) posit
that mixed methods “are necessary to uncover information and prospective, increase corroboration of data, and render less bias and more accurate conclusions” (p. 133). For these reasons a quantitative self-assessment mindfulness questionnaire (Baer et al., 2018) was utilized to substantiate the qualitative data gathered through journaling. LaBoskey (2004) also discussed the need for competent use of multiple methods within self-study “to provide us with opportunities to gain different, and thus more comprehensive, perspectives on the educational processes under investigation” (p. 860). A mixed methods approach within a self-study framework will potentially assist in alleviating tendencies towards bias, limited perspective, and subjectivity. Hence, the reason it was chosen for this self-study.

**Grounded theory approach.** Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) state that in the self-study methodology, “data collection-data analysis-data interpretation occur in a recursive process from the onset of a study’s research design” (p. 147). In fact, it may be even quite difficult to distinguish these processes when in the middle of the research. This is one of the reasons why I utilized the grounded theory approach with regards to data analysis and interpretation. Grounded theory has different versions in approach “to suit different theoretical and epistemological frameworks” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 186). The full version of this approach has been deemed by Braun and Clarke (2013) as a “demanding process and only possible in larger research projects (not constrained by time and resource pressures)” (p. 186). For purposes of this smaller mainly qualitative research project the ‘lite’ version is more practical (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In the ‘lite’ version of grounded theory that Braun and Clarke (2013) discuss, procedures for data analysis include the explicit coding of qualitative data to generate themes and interpretation to discover patterns across data sets. The approach was then utilized to interpret the data to generate theory more systematically by using explicit coding and analytic procedures concurrently.
(Glasser, 2008). With this approach the researcher is constructing their data while interacting with it in a reflective process. The constructivist version of grounded theory developed mainly by Charmaz (2006; 2009) is “rooted in pragmatism and relativist epistemology” (Flick, 2014, p. 154) and was utilized during this self-study. This constructivist version assumes that data and theories are not just discovered, but that researchers construct them because of their interactions with others in the study and emerging analyses (Charmaz, 2006; 2009). The researcher in this way co-constructs the data, so it is dependent upon the “researchers’ socio-cultural settings, academic training, and personal worldviews” (Flick, 2014, p. 155). This constructivist approach of grounded theory also provided more flexible guidelines, since data collection and analysis can be conducted simultaneously in an iterative process (Flick, 2014).

**Coding data.** To code data simply means to identify pieces of text that contain ideas or pieces of information (Cohen et al., 2013). It is about “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously, categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). Descriptive, analytical/theoretical, and chronological coding were used to examine data over the two sample periods. I started with descriptive coding to isolate ideas, behaviours, relationships, and feelings (Cohen et al., 2013), and then returned to the research literature to see if there was any correlation or contradictions with previous findings. Codes were clearly defined in my coding memo to ensure reliability and validity. After each week the data was coded. I then cycled through the data a second time referring to my operant definitions and coding memo to ensure analysis and interpretations were consistent as recommended by Saldana (2015). I utilized the literature and theory that grounds my study to discover patterns and identify a list of themes based on concepts that were applicable to my research questions. Common themes were reviewed to find correlations or differences in the data. The themes and theories from pre-
existing research were then imported into the research process as an analytic tool (Flick, 2014) to assist in answering my research questions. Finally, how emergent themes changed were compared temporally between bi-weekly transformation periods and in overarching themes within both data collection periods.

**Content analysis and interpretation.** Interpretation is the process of making meaning from data. McNiff (2016) recommends an organic approach by reading through the entire data base “two or three times” while reminding yourself of your research questions letting the “ideas and patterns begin to emerge from the data and core themes become visible” (p. 177). This was also employed as well as the process of comparing data with pre-existing research as mentioned above. After the data was coded, data with the same code was organized into a table for each week. The tables were then printed out, cut up and glued to large poster paper to get a better sense of which codes grouped together to categorize and identify themes. A table and a poster were created for each of the twelve weeks of data collection. Codes were organized and grouped into similar emotions experienced, reflections of interactions with colleagues and staff, reflections and examples of student support, endeavors, realizations, and reflections of mindfulness practices on teaching practice. The twelve posters provided a visual synopsis of the patterns and themes that emerged from the data each week. To develop and interpret the patterns, I simply wrote about results in narrative form. Braun and Clarke (2013) state that “qualitative analysis is writing. It uses words to tell the story about textual (and visual) data. This means that writing is the process through which the analysis develops into its final form” (p. 249). The three sub-themes of internal awareness, emotional regulation while supporting self and other, and understanding my role were organized under the main theme of self awareness in my role in the
results of this self-study. A further main theme summarizing reflections of mindfulness practice followed.

Since gathering this form of data for self-study is dependant upon the researcher, Rumrill et al., (2011) discuss the importance of qualitative researchers being “aware of how their own experiences and personal characteristics can serve to influence or bias the interpretation of results” (p. 154). This was of significance and taken into consideration during the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Reflections on the conversations I had with colleagues were embedded in my journal entries to ensure that assumptions and generalizations were examined. I also debriefed my findings with a critical friend who assisted me in interrogating my assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning. Being transparent is essential in self-study. Rumrill et al. (2011) point out the importance of qualitative researchers engaging in the process of reflexivity, which they define as “critical self-reflection on one’s biases, theoretical dispositions, and preferences” (p. 170). Reflexivity was also integrated into my data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Summary

This chapter began by defining and justifying the self-study methodology as an appropriate approach to answering my research question, “How can a professional learning experience involving mindfulness support my practice as a special educator?” and sub-question, “How can mindfulness help me to be more efficacious in my practice and increase emotional regulation associated with interpersonal and intrapersonal growth?” I outlined my self-study research design, discussed my educator mindfulness training, explained the development of a mindfulness checklist for data collection, and provided a detailed description of how I coded the data. Mixed methods research within the context of self-study was described, followed by a
synopsis of the grounded theory approach I took. Finally, data analysis and interpretation were discussed.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings and analysis of this mindfulness self-study. Data collected and analysed is presented chronologically while interpretation is woven throughout the analyses. A summary of the feedback from critical friend discussions to interrogate my assumptions while gathering data is included. Analyses and connection to literature regarding the effects of mindfulness training and practice on educators are made by connecting overarching themes between data collection one and two and by comparing between transformation periods within data collection one and two.

Findings

Data Collection One: Fall 2018

This section is split up into three parts: beginning transformations that encompass experiences during week one and two, middle transformations that include experiences in week three and four; and final transformations that incorporate experiences in week five and six. The results for beginning transformations, middle transformations, and final transformations will be discussed within the themes of self-awareness in current role and reflections of mindfulness practices.

The five-facet mindfulness questionnaire (Baer et. al, 2008) was employed through the data collection periods as a self-report assessment to explore five facets of mindfulness: observing, describing, act with awareness, non-judgement, and non-reactivity. At the end of each transformations period there will be a short synopsis on the changes in each of these five mindfulness domains. The scores for each facet ranged on a continuum from one to five. Closer to one indicated less mindfulness, and closer to five indicated more mindfulness.
Beginning Transformations: Week One & Two

In this beginning transformations time, I practiced mindfulness of the breath (week one) and mindfulness of the body (week two).

**Self-awareness in current role.** This section includes findings on internal self-awareness, emotional regulation through supporting self and others, as well as understanding my role.

**Internal self-awareness.** During my formal mindfulness practices (meditation), I was overwhelmed, exhausted, anxious, and stressed. All my journal reflections during this period state similar sentiments: “I felt as though I was absent from the present and was completely lost in my emotions and stories about things” (September 10, 2018). “I was all over with my thoughts” (September 12, 2018) and “I was completely emotionally exhausted. I was feeling high levels of stress and had many thoughts about managing situations and re-living situations and thinking about future ones” (September 13, 2018). In one reflection I wrote:

*During my morning meditation, I felt tender and raw and caught by my emotions.*

*Opening up like this can be a lot as I am used to pushing it down. I was in bits. My formal meditation practice feels like a nightmare right now... my thoughts are running wild with all the care and action I can take with other humans- my students and my family members... There is a suffering that I am experiencing within me and around me. It is like I am acutely aware, but not calm with it.* (September 12, 2018)

These feelings were also reflected in what I experienced during my work day. I had feelings of not being enough and disconnecting from being present to cope with the demanding needs and challenging setting of my workplace and life. I wrote, “I don’t feel I can be enough for the students in the classroom and to the team” (September 10, 2018). During week one, I
seemed particularly devoid of happiness or fulfilment and I disconnected as “I was just going through the motions” (September 11, 2018) and “trying to control and push down the way I was feeling” (September 10, 2018). I had some more positive feelings related to being capable, calm, hard working, and wanting to do well which aligned with reflections from my administrator. In one reflection when the administrator asked my opinion on a situation with staffing and a student, “I then realized how much my administrator relies on me and my perspective” (September 13, 2018). When supporting a student, “I knew at all stages I was responding and doing the right thing for the team, the student, and myself. I was mindful of my breath and body and aware” (September 12, 2018). Outwardly I appeared fine and calm, but inwardly I was suffering somewhat.

In week two there were similar patterns of being overwhelmed, overthinking, and feeling like I was not enough. For instance, I recorded “I get overwhelmed by the emotions of others and expectations of others” (September 17, 2018) and “there is a lot on my plate, and I am having a hard time staying afloat- I am just staying afloat” (September 19, 2018). I further stated, “I want to be a good person and a good worker and again I feel like I’m not enough” (September 19, 2018). However, during week two there were glimmers of more positive emotional states such as experiencing joy and internal freedom in relation to creating connection and supporting others. “I supported students and attended to tasks and action plans required from the meeting. There seemed to be space, freedom, and lightness in me” (September 18, 2018). In another quote, “I laughed so hard with two teaching colleagues about our intention for this year and how we are going to approach it. We really belly laughed and created a whole lot of joy” (September 17, 2018). I also experienced gratitude for the colleagues that I work with. “The competency level of
The team at this site is so high, that I was buoyed” (September 18, 2018) and “huge waves of gratitude of my current situation and work washed over me” (September 20, 2018).

**Emotional regulation: Supporting self and others.** Outwardly I seemed emotionally well-regulated, confident, and competent in my ability to interact with and support others (staff and students) and display interpersonal strengths. In my journaling a colleague of mine reflected to me,

*That she really respects me and the professional leadership and dedication I have. She said she was happy to have me in her life and I am one of those special people. She was very open and honest, and I did not expect it. I had a hard time accepting this praise whole heartedly because in the past I have not done this. I previously would have down played this, but this time I opened to the experience fully, accepted the compliment and felt gentleness in my heart.* (September 20, 2018)

I exhibited mindfulness within my interactions with students and their parents as a lot of my job is about having hard conversations. Caring for others is very important to me. My compassion and commitment are evident in my reflection on one student who,

*Struggled with leaving the school and fought walking up the hill to the bus stop. My administration had prohibited me giving her a ride, so I convinced the student to do it by walking with her. She expressed that she was in pain when walking and she was struggling with her breath. She did stop a couple of times and hit herself. However, once back on track we practiced a moving mediation up the hill together (unbeknownst to her). I felt into my body and knew what we were doing was the right thing. I reassured her that feeling sore in her muscles was a normal thing. She made it up the hill.* (September 20, 2018)
I exhibited care, empathy, and compassion for others. During week two this was a little more apparent as I talked with a newer teacher who was having some classroom management issues. “I supported him and sympathized, and problem solved and gently laughed as it was alright. Tomorrow we begin again as always” (September 19, 2018).

I also noted in my reflection that,

*My tendency to carry and solve problems is so strong that it is difficult to let go when I am not living it... my attention is being drawn to the nature of my work and my proclivity to take on others’ emotions and try to manage situations to make sure things flow smoothly. This is taking a lot of my energy.* (September 14, 2018)

Being overly responsible and “caring too much and taking on too much is not sustainable” (September 14, 2018). “I feel like that when I have all these emotions that I can get caught in stories and judgements of others instead of responding by noticing them and not getting drawn in and choosing to remain present” (September 21, 2018). Feeling overly responsible may be one reason contributing to why I was feeling exhausted during this beginning time period.

**Understanding my role.** I was also acutely aware of the external circumstances I was in and the demands of the job and challenging setting which were likely contributing to my feelings of being overwhelmed. My caseload was too large (enough for 1.6 people) and at two sites, so I often felt splintered and “would start my work day a little unsure of what to do” because there were so many tasks to complete (September 11, 2018). There was also a newer member on one of the teams that some of the staff members negatively commented on. “This is one of the biggest challenges with working on this team. I find it drags me down and I feel a little insecure about my own place and job I’m doing” (September 13, 2018). It is “challenging when
colleagues discuss their triggers or make comments about other staff members” even if the staff member in question “doesn’t always follow-up and get tasks done in a timely manner” (September 13, 2018). This dynamic was also compounded by the complexity of our students. For instance, one of my students in this first week experienced severe psychotic episodes and publicly “threatened to kill herself and to take the life of a baby that was crying in the foyer” (September 12, 2018). As I followed up with the parent from that student situation, “My administrator reflected to me that my skill set was phenomenal and reiterated that I was very capable” (September 12, 2018). This was just one of several situations with students and their parents I dealt with during this beginnings time period.

It is within these complexities of human interactions and relations where I found much of my stress. I struggled to understand the role and responsibilities of my job. Although I am a special educator focusing on learning needs, “I feel like I support more behaviour and emotional needs in my job rather than learning and learning strategies as I am mandated to do” (September 12, 2018). “I am not really teaching curriculum in my current role. I am a resource for others- the administration, the teachers, and EAs. I am also a resource for students, and I lead by example” (September 14, 2018). This felt ambiguous to me. I contemplated that “I feel like a lot of people come to me for answers to solve things or to bounce things off and solve problems” (September 14, 2018). I also felt so much pressure from the administration that “I felt like just walking out the door” (September 19, 2018). However, with my colleagues and administration, “I have started to set clear boundaries about what I was going to let people download on me” (September 20, 2018). The first boundary I set was that I wanted to stay positive and not dwell in discussions about others or how they were performing on our team. When working on a team this way, it requires excellent communication and collaboration skills
by being honest and clear to team members of personal perspectives. This can be challenging, but this is where the interpersonal and intrapersonal growth is and where we can become stronger as a team. However, in my experience, humans often require support time for processing hard situations and fierce conversations so that the results are productive. I started to set boundaries around this as I did not want to stay in conversation loops that negatively impacted the team. I preferred to address the issues, process and act on them if required, and move on.

It was evident from these beginning reflections that I was a people pleaser. “I wanted to make sure everything was alright, and this impedes me from being in the moment and honouring what comes next” (September 19, 2018). During the last day of this journaling period I reflected that “I try to plan how I feel and when I feel it and alter situations to make others happy and at ease” (September 21, 2018).

**Reflections of mindfulness practice.** I found it challenging to practice mindfulness at work during the beginning transformations period. “I did not hear or feel prompts or reminders to be mindful to what I was experiencing” (September 11, 2018). Nor did “Mindfulness feel like it was coming through me” (September 13, 2018). Even though I practiced formally two times per day, “I struggled somewhat to come back to my breath as my mind was trying to solve the problem of the emotions I was feeling” (September 11, 2018). After one formal practice I felt a little more centered and nourished, but on more than one occasion, I found it increasingly difficult to focus on my breath. It felt like my formal practice was a time to bring everything to the surface. I wrote that “meditating was opening me up to all the anxieties, complexities, and nuances of my life experience. It was not relaxing” (September 12, 2018). I reflected:
I still do not feel moment to moment awareness when I am working. I managed to be mindful of others’ feelings and my behaviour this week and I exhibited mindfulness interpersonally when supporting students and their parents. However, it is the intrapersonal piece that needs some adjustment. I believe I was trying too hard in my meditation practice as I was utilizing a lot of focus and firm intentionality. I wasn’t letting myself surrender into the moment. I am wondering if this is the same for work. Could one be reflecting the other? (September 14, 2018)

Two practices that I familiarized myself with during this beginning time period were mindfulness of the breath and mindfulness of the body. I struggled with mindfulness of the breath as I had an overactive mind and found it challenging to practice at work. Mindfulness of the body felt a little more accessible during the second week. On one journal entry, I noted, Several times in the day (upwards of 10 times), I remembered to practice drawing back into my body and being aware with what was happening. I found it challenging to be present with my sensations in my body and using that for making decisions and discerning situations. (September 17, 2018)

I noticed that, The mindfulness practice is helping me realize that I have been thinking when I don’t need to be. I can draw back into my body and breathe by labeling the thoughts and staying with my breath and the sensations in my body to remain calm. (September 20, 2018)

Even though I struggled with mindfulness of the breath during the first week, by the second week I was able to periodically use the breath to draw my attention into my body sensations while at work. It was evident that I started to notice many of my emotions and
thoughts with the practice of mindfulness, but during this time period, I was grappling to be present or remind myself to practice it informally at work. My formal practice also reflected what I was feeling at the work place and in my life—anxiety and the state of being overwhelmed.

**Five-facet mindfulness questionnaire.** Out of the five mindfulness domains measured during this beginning transformations period, I noticed an increase in the observe score (2.8 to 3), increase in describe score (3.6 to 3.9), decrease with act with awareness score (1.9 to 1.3), increase in nonjudgement score (4 to 4.4) and a decrease in non-reactivity score (3.1 to 2.9). My overall mindfulness score stayed the same (3.1).

**Middle Transformations: Week Three & Four**

During the middle transformations period, I practiced mindfulness of emotions (week three) and development of the heart mindfulness practices (week four).

**Self-awareness in current role.** This section includes findings on internal self-awareness, emotional regulation through supporting self and others, as well as understanding my role.

**Internal self-awareness.** Exhaustion, anxiety, and tension were emotions that seemed to predominate how I felt during my formal meditation practice, when I awoke and throughout my work day. One day I was “so tired, exhausted and foggy, and quite unsure if I am fit for much today” (September 24, 2018). “I awoke to crippling waves of tension and anxiousness in my body. My mind was thinking a lot and I felt stressed” (September 27, 2018). I also noticed “when I was so completely overwhelmed that my attention was scattered and all over the place” (October 2, 2018). I was “anxious about staff, students, work, and how I am going to do it all. I feel there have been a lot of hurdles and I must put on a metaphorical armour to face my day and all that is required to move through it” (September 27, 2018). The hurdles were the endless
reams of work and the myriad of tasks presented to me in both my personal and professional spheres. During week four, I even reflected that “I just don’t know if I can take how hard or how many things come at me... so much so that it makes me want to give up this job” (October 1, 2018). Internally I struggled to meet the demands and to deal with this “feeling of being always on, but not being able to complete things no matter what I did” (September 27, 2018), so I “disconnected and pushed forward” (September 26, 2018). I particularly “had the tendency to disconnect with emotions that I feel to be uncomfortable” (September 27, 2018). The need to move forward with task completion often over rode feeling emotions. At one point, “I wonder if I let myself feel emotions at all at work. I seem to be guarded and focused on the next tasks I must complete” (September 25, 2018).

As the weeks wore on and I managed to weave some mindfulness practices into the tapestry of my daily existence, I noticed that at times there were some positive emotions moving through me. When I let those more complex difficult emotions arise and notice them for what they were, they seemed to cease, and glimmers of positivity would shine through in short bursts. At one point I reflected that, “I’m feeling almost overly confident as I move through my day” (September 26, 2018) even though evidence suggested otherwise in that day of journaling. One day, “I felt love, at ease, and a sense of calm even though there were many other things happening around me” (September 26, 2018). I also shared sentiments that I was becoming a little more efficacious at moving through emotions instead of just pushing them down. “I did not get entangled in others’ emotions and moved gently on” (September 26, 2018). There were whisperings of internal confidence as I expressed, “I know it is exactly what I am meant to be doing and I check in with that joy and gratitude that nourishes me” (September 27, 2018). Practicing mindfulness helped me with dealing with some of these hard emotions. For instance,
“Although I was lost in a story for most of the day, I finally find peace and space I need through my breath invoking gratitude and remembering all the things that bring me joy” (October 1, 2018). When I stayed late (until 6:45 pm) to attend a transition meeting for two complex students with their social worker and parents, I noted that, “it feels like things are moving forward. Joy washed over me once again” (September 27, 2018). I found joy in supporting others.

**Emotional regulation: Supporting self and others.** During my formal meditation practice, “I notice that I am calmer after I meditated” (September 25, 2018) and that I had the ability to “soften into the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations and emotions in my body” (September 26, 2018), but “when I try to come back to work and once I am interacting with people and have a large to-do list, it is hard to be mindful of my emotions” (September 26, 2018). One day I reflected that, “When I felt into my body, I could feel tension, emotions, lightness, and ease. It feels like thoughts perpetuate how I am going to feel at any given moment” (September 27, 2018). Thoughts feed into emotions and can even perpetuate them and acknowledging this was the beginnings of strengthening my intrapersonal growth.

Throughout the days, I displayed strong interpersonal skills and externally responded to others with kindness, empathy, and care. “I cared about students and their needs and the needs of my co-workers and administrator” (September 28, 2019). For instance, I utilized mindfulness practices to support a student I had not worked with before:

*I noticed he had answered two of his questions by saying that he was a shithead and that he fucking hates everyone. I sat there and sent him silent positive energy in the form of mindfulness phrases as I worked with the student beside him. I introduced myself again and told him that no matter how he is feeling right now that we care about him here at school and we are glad he is here. I felt into the energy in my body*
and I sent silent positive affirmations of kind heartedness to him. I could feel his angry energy, but I mostly felt his confusion about how unfair things are for him.

(September 26, 2018)

After this student had some breakfast and some time to calm down, I came back to support him with school work, and he was receptive. I learned that mindfulness practices can be of profound benefit for a special educator. When I tapped into my own body sensations and sent kind heartedness to this young man, the energy shifted, and I was able to help him calm down when two educators before me had not been able to. Care, empathy, and kindness were all utilized in this scenario.

During my meeting with our new school psychologist to go over our school’s lists it became apparent that my workload was much larger than I thought. Mindfulness practices and encouragement from colleague reflections assisted me with my frustration and emotional regulation. The news that I would have to academically re-assess five students, as this new psychologist was not in favor of the assessment tool I used upon the previous psychologist’s recommendation, was a source of frustration. I couldn’t believe I had to do this on top of everything else. I felt frustration within me as this would take time I couldn’t afford. My caseload was already too large and there were seventeen students ready for re-assessment whose psych-ed assessments were out of date (done in grade four or before). All these students needed academic assessment prior to being referred to the psychologist as well. I wondered, “What is the point of my work if so many students are going unattended in the mainstream schools and what is the point of paper work and hoops to be jumped that make it seem like so much work?” (October 1, 2018). I practiced mindfulness to help me cope with my frustration, “I breathe and relax into the moment and
practice gratitude for the beauty in my life. I feel into the present moment as much as I can” (October 1, 2018). It was evident that I needed another human to help me with this job and as I headed back into the classroom feeling somewhat deflated, “my administrator looks at me and tells me I am wonderful. He means it and it makes me feel marginally better” (October 1, 2018).

It was apparent that I was overwhelmed with my work load, but it was also obvious in my journaling, particularly in week four, about how important colleague reflections were in terms of creating supportive relationships for myself. “I discuss the outcome of the psychologist meeting with other team members and they also note how frustrating that can be” (October 2, 2018). There were also growing feelings of gratitude for colleagues and for outside professionals I interacted with. My informal practices during this week focused around gratitude, so it made sense this would be reflected in my work day. For instance, when I connected with a colleague regarding a shared student, I noted, “I am overjoyed with gratitude and all that I learn from her. I feel into that and I am buoyed” (September 26, 2018).

When I was at an Integrated Care Meeting (ICM) for a complex student on my caseload, I practiced silent gratitude for all the professionals there as we updated the parents on how the student was doing. When I finished my portion and I got up to go back to school the behaviour interventionist who was a more experienced and mature individual gave me words of encouragement and they, “help lighten my load. I send peace to this man silently and thank him. How did he know I was struggling inwardly? (October 3, 2018). I was grateful for these sentiments.
It was clear that I was bogged down with my work load but creating supportive relationships with colleagues was an important aspect to consider when looking at being more efficacious and increasing emotional regulation with mindfulness practices.

**Understanding my role.** Within the confines of this ever-changing job, I still struggled with the ambiguous nature of my duties and responsibilities as a special educator at an alternative high school. During this time period, I found that I somehow took on even more responsibilities: the role of Staff Committee Chair as well as the role of Teacher-In-Charge (TIC) when the administration was away at meetings. These extra responsibilities placed me in the position where I was required to have difficult conversations and I found balancing the needs of the staff as well as the needs of the administration challenging. For instance, when I was asked by my administration to create a short report on another teacher, I experienced discomfort. “I feel the grey that often epitomizes my job again. Giving this report makes me feel not that great, but I know that it is the right thing to do for the students” (September 24, 2018). I did not feel like this was part of my job, but I was unsure how to respond to the request as I was the TIC for that day. I acquiesced to the duty but did not enjoy it because it created some stress and anxiety within me.

During this time period, I was still working at two sites with a large caseload. However, instead of receiving acknowledgement for what I was doing to keep the school running, my administration decided to add new processes which would add extra meetings with increasing complexity. This made me quite stressed and I experienced some symptoms of burnout. I noted, “there is now an extra meeting at school that I must organize and accommodate throughout this year. I am unsure how I am going to do it” (September 25, 2018). I also wondered, “how much longer I could do this job and find meaning in it” (September 26, 2018). Increasing an
employee’s work load when it is already too high is not of benefit. Clearly, there were some communication issues regarding my roles and responsibilities and what I was meant to be doing.

Another factor that was demanding my time and energy was working so closely with colleagues on a team in this setting as well. As we worked together and shared students, there was inevitably large ranges of emotions from members of staff. This seemed to be the case no matter how strong the working relationships were. I reflected at one point that it is “frustrating when people don’t help as quickly as they could” (September 26, 2018). There was one member of our team who was not doing her job. As a result, some of the responsibilities were falling on to my work load and communications from staff regarding frustration were also being expressed to me as I was Staff Committee Chair. It was evident that I was sometimes finding the interpersonal dynamic at work challenging. Within this back drop of a little low-level discord amongst the staff, I started to notice emerging albeit fleeting feelings of surrendering to environmental circumstances. Mindfulness practices must have been starting to help somewhat as I exclaimed at one point in my journaling that “I felt like I was surrendering to the day” (September 25, 2018).

Reflections of mindfulness practice. The main ideas that seemed to come up during the week three reflections were that “When I am feeling overwhelmed by intense emotions, I often just ignore it and push forward to get things done” (September 28, 2018) and I seemed to sacrifice my time and energy because of this. Instead I would like to learn to relax and soften into the feelings. I wondered in my journaling “if I slow down and be mindful if I would accomplish more and feel more connected and alive in my life and this experience of it. Will I lose my job if I do that?” (September 28, 2018). I also wondered if I could move into my body and feel sensations instead of just experiencing tension and agitation and disconnecting from
them. Could I “let my body and nervous system inform me of how to ethically be and behave?” (September 28, 2018). Could I “practice mindfulness of feeling emotions, so I can let them go?” (September 28, 2019). These emerging transformations within my mindfulness practice certainly had me contemplating how I am in the world with myself and others. When I practiced mindfulness of emotions, I noticed the emotions, but I was swept away by them and the stories and thoughts created instead of feeling them in my body first to help digest the experiences.

During week four there was some small shifts that emerged in my meditation practice. Although I still experienced overthinking and anxiety, on one occasion I wrote “my meditation practice afforded me some space from the relentless thoughts as I breathed and found beauty in the dark, rainy morning” (October 4, 2018). This emerging spaciousness in formal practice could be found in my heartfulness practice at work that week too. “I send myself heartfulness in the form of mantra” (October 3, 2018) “by using prompts and silently saying to myself: may I be happy, may I be at ease, may I be healthy, may I accept things as they are, and may I be at peace” (October 1, 2018).

However, during the first staff mindfulness training my value system was compromised and I was not feeling spacious or kind. I wrote,

At the end of the week I am annoyed with some poorer behaviours by some staff members... one of the staff members has her phone out the entire time of the training. I felt it was disrespectful to our mindfulness teacher and distracting for many of us in the class. (October 5, 2018)

Although I have shared with another colleague that I felt “my mindfulness practice is enabling me to not be as reactive with others and giving me time to respond before I react and get lost in my emotion” (October 1, 2018), this was clearly not the case when my value system
was compromised. With regards to this cell phone scenario, “judgement arises and when it arose, I didn’t act on it publicly” (October 5, 2018) although I really want to. However, I journaled about my frustrations around this co-worker because she “says she is one thing, but really behaves in a different way... and I am challenged in trusting her and her decisions. It is hard for the team when we have a member who is not team-oriented” (October 5, 2018). What has arisen is what the educator mindfulness course called ‘the inner critic’ or judgement I feel on how people should behave and how I make things right or wrong. In my reflections upon practicing mindfulness with my judgements or ‘inner critic’, I wrote:

The inner critic emerges, and I make something right and something else wrong. I am learning that if I take my mindfulness practice out into my life and practice noticing whenever I make a judgement- what I find is space around those thoughts and feelings. (October 5, 2018)

I had further insights regarding my judgments when I noted that, It is about surrendering into situations instead of trying to fix them. It is about noticing and finding that spaciousness between feeling and response. It is important to recognize that coming up with solutions and thinking are important only when I need to. It usually is not of benefit to fret or overthink afterwards. (October 5, 2018)

**Five-facet mindfulness questionnaire.** Out of the five mindfulness domains measured during this middle transformations period, I noticed an increase in the observe score (2.9 to 3.1), decrease in describe score (3.9 to 3.4), increase with act with awareness score (1.5 to 2.4), slight decrease in nonjudgement score (3.5 to 3.4), and an increase in non-reactivity score (2.7 to 3.1). Overall mindfulness score increased (2.9 to 3.1).
Final Transformations: Week Five & Six

In weeks five and six, I practiced interpersonal mindfulness focusing on skillful listening and communication with others and everyday mindfulness in my special educator role.

**Self-awareness in current role.** This section includes findings on internal self-awareness, emotional regulation through supporting self and others, as well as understanding my role.

**Internal self-awareness.** Week five reflections were marked with internal stress and anxiety around clear communication and self-advocacy with regards to my position. My administrator wanted to make some changes about my job, and I believed her intention was to assist me and lighten my workload. However, she was directive, unclear, and not collaborative and I struggled with this. I wrote, “her last words on Friday afternoon were that I wouldn’t be working at Site A anymore and that she was going to get another special educator as my caseload was too large and too hard to manage” (October 9, 2018).

Although I agreed that we needed another special educator to help me carry the load, I would have preferred clearer communication on how we were going to disseminate the responsibilities of my job and how we were going to manage it appropriately. I requested this by email even though it made me feel incredibly anxious. All I wanted was more input into the situation and in my email, I included the fact that I had asked a senior teacher to attend the meeting as I was unsure what I could do in my current contract. We organized a meeting after school and “she is verbally saying the right things, but I know she is cross with me for wanting to have clear communication and collaboration about this. She is tense and her body language tells a different story” (October 9, 2018). I was surprised at how strongly I reacted to her body language if what I was communicating was not pleasing to her. There was a power differential in
this conflict, and it made self-advocacy even harder for me. “Emotionally I need a bit of support to help stand up for myself” (October 9, 2018). At lunch, “I have a brief chat with a strong and seasoned colleague who re-affirms that I am doing all the right things” (October 9, 2018). I noted in my reflections, “It was an interesting week to be working with the theme of interpersonal mindfulness because what arose was an awkward and uncomfortable meeting about me discussing my rights at work with my administrator” (October 12, 2018). No better time to practice my mindfulness! I approached the meeting “with kind open heartedness and right away I see that my administrator is a bit annoyed that I invited in the senior teacher even though I communicated that kindly in the email” (October 9, 2018). I could visibly see she was not happy with me in this meeting and I was fine with the outcome as I had agreed to go full-time at one site in semester two. However, my perspective of the administration had changed somewhat. Feeling intense pressure to shift in my position, knowing that it would create more work for me was hard. I found it challenging when changes were made to my role without collaboration.

Other than journaling about my anxious feelings regarding the above scenario and being disappointed and hurt by her reaction to it, I found myself exhausted and heavy during week five. “I awaken exhausted from the night of little or no sleep” (October 11, 2018) and “I still feel tired and heavy and... feel the pressure to get things done” (October 11, 2018). These sentiments seeped into week six reflections as well. “I feel wrung out with not much to give today with all the demands in my personal and professional life” (October 18, 2018). I further explained:

I awoke in the night and wrestled with thoughts of sleep and consciousness... waves of anxiety washed over me as I was coming to about work... as I sat and breathed it was the same emotional waves of anxiety, stress, and left overs from previous
experiences... I carry these (emotions of others) and take them on to try and solve problems to better suit the team, flow of the school, and solve things in a more appropriate way for students. (October 17, 2018)

However, there were sentiments expressed where I was moving through some of these intense emotions:

I sometimes feel like I am creating more problems and I wonder if by overthinking I do this. It is about applying just the right amount of thinking when I need it, or the situation requires it and not carrying it away with me to analyse how I could have been better or what I could have done better. I realize I have high expectations and judgements on myself and my behaviour as a human being. Part of the practice of mindfulness is being gentle. Although I am not harsh with myself, I still hold a high bar and perseverate on behaviours/actions of myself and others. (October 17, 2018)

On this occasion, I followed up with a practice of mindfulness before heading into work, which helped lift my spirits:

I arrive and send ease to the administrator and repeat kind heartedness phrases to all the staff silently and then to myself. I take a few moments to send this to some of the students I find most challenging - hoping they feel that I care. I walk out into the beautiful October sunshine and with lightness begin my day. (October 17, 2018)

After another difficult situation with a student and a debriefing with staff involved, “I feel re-affirmed in my beliefs about what to do next and positive about my ability” (October 18, 2018). Although I was overwhelmed, it was evident that I had high self-awareness because I reflected sentiments like, “I feel into the emotions in the room and I can feel they are palpable sometimes. Perhaps I feel too much and think too much”
(October 18, 2018). During the final transformations period there was a burgeoning self-efficacy developing that could be attributed to mindfulness practices. On one occasion, “I notice these feelings of being overwhelmed and then I quietly enter back into my office to soften into them and bring in joy” (October 18, 2018).

**Emotional regulation: Supporting self and others.** As I moved through my working life in week five, I practiced skillful listening when working with others to see if my emotional regulation was affected. For example,

*I worked with a student on my caseload who was feeling pains in her mind and in her hands. She was completely shut down, but I know if she does ten minutes of art that she sometimes re-engages with her academics. We went into my office and I talked with her, she drew and taught me to draw, and then we did some math questions. More than she has ever done at one time... Even though she struggled and had quite a few blocks about walking out the door, it was a good day for this student. My mindfulness practice comes in handy with her as I pause and wait and listen. I delve deep into my compassion and interactions with her. (October 9, 2018)*

In week six, there are examples of parent and student meetings where mindfulness of skillful listening, being present, and kind-heartedness were practiced. For example, during a meeting,

*I chat with the parent and daughter. This student cries uncontrollably when spoken to. We tread very gently in the meeting as her daughter silently weeps. She has big issues with expressing herself. I get her to do to it a few times and then we (her mother and I) speak of all her strengths and interests. It is very informative for the*
team. I send this young lady courage and kindness silently as we sit there and hold space for such raw sensitivity. (October 18, 2018)

The positive impact of skillful listening on interpersonal and intrapersonal emotional regulation was evident within these examples.

In my reflections upon working with and supporting staff, I noticed with regards to my administrator “that there has been some micromanaging happening between me and her and that I am becoming more and more uncomfortable with it” (October 12, 2018). On one occasion I practiced mindfulness by skillful listening with my interaction with her. She approached me and let me know that she would like to come up with a behaviour plan for a complex student on my caseload. Instead of feeling criticized and micromanaged by her directive approach, I found that when I applied interpersonal mindfulness (skillful listening), I felt something quite different:

*It is a useful conversation as I really use my whole body to actively listen. I am not threatened or worried about pleasing her anymore, something has shifted. I listen and can practice mindfulness and be calm within the conversation with her. I do not feel overwhelmed, but I understand through asking for clarification what I can do better. My administrator believes I shouldn’t be working with the student, but an EA should. So, she wants me to teach the EA what to do. This is challenging as I am not sure what I do. I try different strategies and it all changes moment to moment with the student. I always accept this student where she is at and send kind compassionate energy to her. I know she feels it as I can get her to calm down and move on.*

(October 10, 2018)
Mindfulness practices such as skillful listening with my administrator can shift internal feelings of being micromanaged to important understandings and feedback for increased external awareness on how best to support a student. This is powerful.

Supportive colleague reflections also played an important role in terms of my emotional regulation with regards to others. For example, in reflection with a colleague we,

*Discuss the struggle involved in working in a fish bowl like classroom where all your mistakes and practices are magnified and how self-regulation is of importance and how feeling not enough or worrying about what others think is often at the fore.*

(October 15, 2018)

This colleague’s recognition and reflection made me resolve to shift these things within myself as much as I could:

*We also talk about the fact that I might have to leave this site, both of us are saddened somewhat and she also talks about other options where I don’t have to. I could always advocate for the other person to go part-time at the other site. I hadn’t thought of that. She says for me to be careful not to fall into any of the negative conversations that can take place.* (October 15, 2018)

With a different colleague we reflect upon my high expectations and judgements of others’ behaviour (particularly adults) and the disappointment when expectations were not met. “*I reflected with this colleague how judging behaviours is not in my best interest. She concurred and I move onward, upward, and outward feeling a little freer*” (October 16, 2018).

I also felt encouraged by the fact that I was not the only one feeling overwhelmed:
A colleague reflected to me words that resonate. She expresses that she struggles to move forward with anything whatsoever in this job as it is so complicated and layered with the idiosyncratic nature of human beings and what they need and want.

(October 18, 2018)

I couldn’t agree more. However, this was where mindfulness practices could help the most in building emotional regulation skills. Even though I was feeling overwhelmed and micromanaged, I had the ability to see my emotions more clearly when they were reflected through the eyes of supportive colleagues. This helped me find more patience and compassion for others.

I also experienced some positive feelings of empathy and compassion when working with students and parents. For instance, I communicated with one parent who was experiencing a significant loss of a loved one. “We go through what forms I need signed for his child and I scan them to him. I send him compassion and caring silently and convey it through my tone of voice and my words” (October 10, 2018). Upon meeting with an incredibly anxious student and his parents regarding the results of his private psychological assessment, “his father told me about how anxious his son was coming in today ... It takes time to hear these things about ourselves and for them to land. I feel empathy for this young man and his troubles” (October 16, 2018).

Understanding my role. With regards to my self-advocacy with my administration, I just wanted to be heard and understood. I care about the students and staff at the Site A, and I found it challenging that I was just expected to move to a potentially harder position without any collaboration around it. Carrying the two sites was too much for me, but I felt grief about leaving the students and staff at this site. “I feel nourished and light at Site A and I will miss the students and team that I have built a strong connection with” (October 10, 2018).
Although I appreciate the team at Site B, it was clear that “Site B has heavier needs including generational trauma, more complex students, and an inexperienced team member” (October 10, 2018). There was a higher work load at Site B and an extra layer because of a challenging work dynamic with a team member who wasn’t always able to meet the expectations of her job. On one occasion, “We identify fourteen students that need daily check-ins during the first learning zone to ensure that they work and don’t shut down. Unfortunately, this colleague communicates that this is too much for her and she asks me what to do” (October 9, 2018). We discussed possible solutions including organizing different teachers, educational assistants, and myself to check-in with the students. There are also two community counselors available, but it required this colleague to communicate and organize it with the team. There was no doubt that this distribution of services could be managed effectively. However, this colleague was not interested in hearing this nor in trying to solve the problem with the team.

In addition to this, there was sometimes conversations that could be characterized as negative with regards to students and staff at Site B. This undercurrent of discord did not make me feel better about moving to this site full-time. However, I agreed to it, so that it was easier for my administration to manage our school and it seemed that was what she wanted. It was evident from my reflections that advocating for my needs in a clear and professional manner was required. Recognition of setting appropriate boundaries at work was a form of intrapersonal and interpersonal growth. At this point, I had started to set these boundaries with my administrator and colleagues. However, I still noted “I find it challenging to set boundaries within the confines of a working relationship as I want to help, and it sometimes burns me out a little. I do too much” (October 18, 2018). There is always room for growth in boundary setting and self-advocacy for an individual like myself.
**Reflections of mindfulness practice.** Mindfulness practices such as skillful listening and sending kindheartedness phrases assisted me in finding empathy, patience, space, and increased emotional regulation during the middle transformations period. I had begun the people pleaser’s journey of self-advocacy as “I clearly expressed my needs, how I wanted it to look, and set a boundary. For the first time I realize that my boundary regarding work has not been that clear” (October 12, 2018). This was powerful learning for me within the framework of mindfulness. “I practiced mindfulness with many of my interactions with my colleagues this week” (October 12, 2018) and I also recognized “that I was so patient with students and what they need but sometimes carry judgement to staff” (October 12, 2018). In response to this “I practiced kindheartedness towards those people I find frustrating and I don’t agree with” (October 12, 2018). “My patterns of wanting to please others so that things go smoothly for everyone… this constant trying to smooth things over so there are less conflicts” (October 12, 2018), are clearly not effective. It created internal emotional dysregulation and although outwardly I appeared calm, inwardly I was placing energy into things that I couldn’t control or manage. I was beginning to understand that “being gentler on myself will soften my experience with others” (October 12, 2018) and will hopefully free up some energy so that I am not so exhausted or overwhelmed. I also recognized in my musings that mindfulness does not simply mean surrendering and doing nothing. I had to advocate for myself or “I would have had to do a lot more work and would have likely needed to go on a stress leave to manage the load” (October 12, 2018).

All during week five I practiced “kindheartedness and listening attentively with my students as well as noticing the present moment as best as I can. I am tuning into myself and I know it is helping me stay more open with others” (October 12, 2018). In week six, I wrote about the increasing feelings of self-efficacy. “I am proud of the way I responded compared to what I
was feeling in my body and mind. In the intense points where I am communicating with parents and students, I found the courage to show great care and interest” (October 19, 2018). I was beginning to realize that “to practice mindfulness I need to tune into what my needs are” (October 19, 2018) and “that the insight of being mindful does not just mean pleasing others and doing more than is expected of you just because you can make others feel that their needs are met” (October 19, 2018). It involves “listening in and balancing your own needs and wants to ensure that all people are being respected and honoured where they are at” (October 19, 2018).

During week six, there was space to journal and reflect extensively about the mindful practices that I was able to do at work. This indicated that I was getting better at drawing the practices into my work day and my interactions with others. For instance, I practiced feeling love every time I went through a doorway. “I tap into the feeling of love in my body and I notice that I am hurried and am a little adverse to doing this. I smile inwardly at my habitual patterns at work” (October 15, 2018). At one point, I felt that I was able to “soften into all my experiences today and feel love as I walk through doorways about fifty percent of the time” (October 18, 2018). It reminded me that “a gentler approach to life is necessary even in a workplace that is action focused and achievement oriented” (October 17, 2018). I really wrestled with balancing the achieving and getting things done mentality and the surrendering and accepting what is. “Can I really maintain both things simultaneously?” (October 17, 2018). I wondered if the practice of mindfulness would afford me this at work and assist me in opening to my emotions, surrendering to them, and then letting them go without getting lost in some righteous belief on how I feel others or myself should be. I noted, “There is a righteousness to how I feel, and this is what I question and want to explore. How can mindfulness help me look at this through softer eyes?” (October 19, 2018).
In my formal practice during week six, I felt like “I noticed that I was distracted, but I am finding more space and noticing more when I go off into story and catching myself sooner” (October 15, 2018). Being aware of my environment and my emotions as well as others during the day is part of the practice and it is evident that I was highly self aware during this period, but equanimous feelings as I moved through my work day were not prevalent. I journaled about this and wondered if: “My equanimity can get into balance with my awareness so that the sense of being out of alignment with my deepest values begins to fade” (October 19, 2018). I understood from my educator mindfulness course that “as equanimity matures, I won’t be as over run with the intensity of being human” (October 19, 2019). It was about:

Feeling into this immenseness and being able to surrender to whatever arises and leaning into the fear, loss, disappointment, judgement, and hurt to acknowledge that it is all part of being human, just as much as emotions of joy, love, peace, and contentment are. (October 19, 2019)

I wondered what I would discover regarding equanimity during data collection two.

**Five-facet mindfulness questionnaire.** Out of the five mindfulness domains measured during this final transformations period, I noticed the observe score stayed the same (3.1), increase in describe score (3.4 to 3.8), decrease with act with awareness score (2.4 to 1.8), increase in nonjudgement score (3.4 to 4.1), and a slight decrease in non-reactivity score (3.1 to 3.0). My overall mindfulness score increased slightly (3.1 to 3.2).

**Data Collection Two: Winter 2018**

This section is split up into three parts just like data collection period one: beginning transformations that include experiences during week one and two, middle transformations that include experiences in week three and four; and final transformations that incorporate
experiences in week five and six. The results for beginning transformations, middle transformations, and final transformations will be discussed within the themes of self-awareness in current role; and reflections of mindfulness practice. In addition, the scores from the five-facet mindfulness questionnaire (Baer et al., 2008) are presented at the end of each transformation period.

Beginning Transformations Week One & Two

In this beginning transformations period like in data collection one, the two foci for mindfulness practices were mindfulness of the breath (week one) and mindfulness of the body (week two).

**Self-awareness in current role.** This section includes findings on internal self-awareness, emotional regulation through supporting self and others, as well as understanding my role.

**Internal self-awareness.** During week one of this beginning transformations, I still felt emotions related to overthinking, managing situations, and heaviness. “Again, a heaviness arises as I realize all the work I must get done” (November 6, 2018). It was interesting to notice the shift from being incredibly overwhelmed in previous entries to more sentiments about how I am just noticing my busy mind. “I realize I have been lost in thoughts and problem solving for some time” (November 7, 2018). What is important is that I began noticing some space around these emotions and thoughts:

*This morning I move outside to meditate, and I am distracted in thoughts, images, and stories of the work day and people I have interacted with. I once again practice using anchor words to draw back to presence. I am problem solving and planning my past to inform my future. Interactions swim across my mind in image and thought*
I am constantly trying to navigate why people behave and react the way they do and how on my team at work I can process it with more ease, instead of taking it on and wondering what I could have done different to make it go a different way.

That being overly responsible and over managing situations is there again.

(November 8, 2018)

The fact that I can be overly responsible in situations was also evident when I reflected with colleagues about circumstances pertaining to students not getting services that they required. In this instance, a colleague reminded me to follow “the process and bring the names to learning services meetings and have the conversation there. She was telling me that it was not up to me to figure it out. I realized I was taking ownership of the situation” (November 8, 2018) and “that this is not beneficial. I thank her silently and am grateful to this amazing colleague” (November 8, 2018). I am left to wonder: Why do I do things like this? Why do I take on more than I need to?

Most of the reflections during week one were extremely positive and relayed emotions related to enhanced self-efficacy and increased mindfulness, such as more present moment awareness, equanimity, internal freedom, and gratitude. I wrote,

I felt light, spacious, and aware of all around me. Self-efficacy felt high and there wasn’t feelings of stress or guilt about not doing enough. I reminded myself several times during the day of my breath. It was a natural process and I didn’t feel like I couldn’t manage my day. I arrived at work and felt there was a lightness and steadiness to how I was approaching it… I was feeling like I was exactly where I was meant to be at this moment in my life. I wasn’t wishing I was somewhere else or thinking about decisions I had made to get me there to this point. I was just grateful
to everything that I had in my life including this fantastic job that intrigues me, stretches me, and never ceases to amaze. It is all the nuances of the humans I work with. (November 5, 2018)

I further reflected, “There was a lot of present moment awareness and space and underlying this was pure happiness” (November 5, 2018) and the joy seemed to continue when I wrote “I am encouraged by all the hard work the students are doing and it helps me find joy and presence in my job” (November 6, 2018). On another occasion I expressed, “There is high present-time awareness and for the first time, equanimity” (November 5, 2018). “I feel more at ease with these external events than I felt so far” (November 6, 2018). My equanimity and self-efficacy continue when, “I feel really contented even though there is a huge work load and I know I may not make it through my to-do list ... it suddenly feels manageable” (November 6, 2018) and when at another point, “I really feel like I accomplished a lot today as I solved many problems and feel like I am back with my job instead of being overwhelmed by it” (November 7, 2018).

After practicing some breath awareness, internal freedom arrives and “I feel once again at peace as I return to my duties” (November 6, 2018). Mindfulness was being embedded into my work day and the internal awareness of emotions are predominantly positive in my reflections.

During week two, I notice a few occasions where I felt overwhelmed, exhausted, agitated, or tense. I wrote, “I am finding it a lot and sometimes do not feel enough as I am spread pretty thin” (November 13, 2018) and with regards to work pressures and duties I noted I was “feeling quite reflective albeit a little inadequate” (November 15, 2018). When I felt into my body sensations, “there was tension in the form of dull pain in my neck, right shoulder, and
“middle of my back” (November 13, 2018). I also couldn’t always let things go. “My mind and thoughts were very much on work and I transition into my home life feeling a little deflated, tired, and not enough” (November 14, 2018). In most of my reflections, however, I felt an increasing ability to practice mindfulness of the body during my work day. Feelings of joy and high self-efficacy were pronounced within my journal entries. For example,

I consciously went about feeling joy in my body, heart and mind. I recalled all the things that made me feel light and joyful. This is a powerful practice and I practice this about 6-7 times during my day. It is useful for drawing back to my body and noticing sensations again. I am utilizing the sensations to move through situations and intuit what or how to proceed. (November 14, 2018)

I felt more efficacious within my practice particularly in challenging situations with students and parents. In one meeting scenario, a traumatized student had wanted to take her life and her parent was upset, angry, and afraid because she was getting counselling from an outside agency. Generational trauma was present here regarding residential schools as the mother was fearful that a social worker was going to take her child away. With the support of our indigenous counselor, we helped this parent understand that the counselling was for the suicide attempts and nothing else. High self-efficacy was noted during this situation when I reflected, “in the past, this has overwhelmed me, but I continued to feel calm after these exchanges and I felt joy in my body and that I could manage everything with ease” (November 13, 2018). In these instances, mindfulness practices were clearly assisting me in accessing more joy and higher self-efficacy in my role as special educator.

**Emotional regulation: Supporting self and others.** A growing sense of mindful awareness is present in my practice as I care and support myself and others. Not only did I
experience equanimity as I moved through my work day and when I was meditating, I was also experiencing clarity. I wrote, “in my morning practice I am outside in nature and I feel more connected. I observe more keenly my attention and thoughts. ... I see my mental and emotional afflictions and fluctuations more clearly” (November 7, 2018).

Another important aspect that came into my external awareness is the theme that less is more. On one occasion I received an email from a distraught parent where there has been some domestic abuse. The student’s family member had physically assaulted his mother and this student was currently binge drinking. I wrote that the student, “has blocked his parents on social media and will not respond to them and has left their house. The parent does not know where he is and wants help” (November 7, 2018). This student has a good relationship with our community counselor, and after this email we both met with the administrator to get all the facts and create a plan of action and outline what each of us was going to do. I,

email the parent back in a calm yet clear email... I am starting to have less explanation in my emails and am finding them far more powerful. Less is more when dealing with this demographic. This is a challenging situation, but I feel calm throughout and capable to deal with it... It is intuitive, and I feel into my breath and body and know what must be done within our team for this student’s crisis.

(November 7, 2018)

I felt high equanimity throughout this situation, and I have discovered through my reflections upon it that clarity and conciseness when communicating with humans that are in complex social situations is beneficial.

Along with growing mindful awareness, has come an increased amount of empathy and kindness in my journal entries. When I met with the student whose mother is terminally ill, we
talked about learning goals for this year with her dad. I wrote, “It is a tender and gentle meeting and I feel and embody empathy for these people. I can not believe the reminder they are getting about the impermanence of life” (November 14, 2018). When I worked with another student whose anxiety about writing was so profound that he was visibly shaking, I practiced mindfulness of body sensations. We spoke about his experience that he was writing about and then I,

feel into my body and know that supporting with calmness is the best thing I can do right now. We discuss writing and how hard it can be. I feel his anxiety as he is shaking somewhat. I silently send calmness and re-assure this student with positive sentiments. (November 15, 2018)

A third example was when a colleague and I were planning for a student who had not been attending. It was evident that outreach was necessary as she was refusing to leave the house. I wrote, “I feel into my heart and find empathy for this young girl who has a very challenging family dynamic with flexible boundaries” (November 15, 2018).

During this time period there were increasing references in my journals to students and how I was supporting them with their learning, directing them to counseling needs, contacting outside services, and meeting and connecting with their parents. With one student I reflected,

She does not look happy, but we talk about the assignment and it involves a TED talk, which I learn this student hates. I encourage her to listen to it and we discuss future job prospects. It was a positive and present human interaction where I placed all my attention on the student and silently sent joy, kind heartedness phrases, and enthusiasm for learning. I think it worked as she engages in the task. (November 6, 2018)
With another student who has a brain-based disability, I am responsive as I noticed he was having a rough day with his focus. We also had a meeting that day with his mother, so I presumed this was what was causing this lack of focus as he was very much on guard. I told him some stories about myself to lighten the mood and we discussed transitioning into the adult world and that he needed to pick up the pace to make it to graduation. At the meeting,

_We discuss self-regulation strategies and I am open and kind with this family sending them silent heartfulness phrases as we speak. I let the student know he is perfect right where he is at, we discuss all his strengths, but it is just that he needs to focus on his work a little more and then he will get there. I have no doubt of this._ (November 15, 2018)

This student was receptive and more open after this discussion and this outcome could possibly be linked to my increased responsivity through feeling into the present moment with my mindfulness practices.

I also found buoyancy in my practice from reflection with colleagues. “I am uplifted by these reflections and conversations and feel I could carry on in this profession for some time” (November 6, 2018). For example, with one colleague, I reflected about our work load this year and how we were managing. I let her know that I saw that she was carrying more like myself and that we could support each other. We discussed the importance of keeping ourselves nourished and healthy when supporting such concentrated challenges. Our interaction, “makes me feel lighter in my practice and I feel buoyed by her” (November 15, 2018). Connections with colleagues such as this, created a supportive environment within which to grow, be efficacious, and find internal freedom.
In another interaction with my administrator, I saw a growing development of intrapersonal and interpersonal efficacy through mindfulness practices. In this situation she had asked me about the new School Based Team meetings and how I am going to organize them. I wrote:

*I try to explain what I am thinking, but I feel interrogated and she keeps at me because I am not clear enough. I was internally agitated, but I didn’t get swayed by the agitation as in the past. I breathed into my body and understood that these were her emotions not mine and I tried to relax. It feels as though I am being interrogated for a charge instead of collaborating about creating a meeting time and agenda that fits all. She does not like what I have done… In the end she says it is fine although her body language says something else.* (November 8, 2018)

I was able to maintain mindfulness practices throughout this interaction and they were beneficial as my agitation and anxiety were dissipated.

*Understanding my role.* During week one there were a few environmental circumstances that lead me to make shifts in how I perceived and performed in my role as special educator. An additional special educator was hired this week to assist with Site A. I was meant to mentor her with the prospects of shifting to Site B full time during semester two. I realized I have now taken on another new role within my job: mentoring new staff. Clearly my boundary setting attempts during the last data collection were not working well. Fortunately, I felt that this new colleague will be of benefit to the students and team. I wrote, “*it is a relief and a joy that I will have some assistance and perhaps grow because of it*” (November 6, 2018).

Another external circumstance that was still calling my attention is the work dynamic at Site B. I noted, “*how things don’t function as well as they could*” (November 8, 2018). There
was one colleague that was struggling to manage her roles and responsibilities and as a non-enrolling teacher some of the duties that this colleague would perform if she was at her full capacity, fall onto my workload. With the ambiguity of my role and responsibilities at this school, this has ended up increasing my work load. Yet, another thing to manage. I was further questioned regarding this from my administrator. We were discussing student issues and she segued into asking me a few questions regarding this colleague and how she was managing. I was uncomfortable with these conversations, but I tried to be mindful and uphold the teacher code of ethics yet give enough information to make sure students were supported. This lack of support was felt by quite a few staff members. I reflected, “there is an undercurrent of discord and fracture on this team, but I will put forth cohesion and problem solving as the answers” (November 7, 2018). My propensity to be overly responsible was evident here as well. Even though I was annoyed by this colleague’s behaviour, I still endeavored, “to support her nonetheless and work with her as that is my job” (November 13, 2018).

This challenging work dynamic created a space for me to practice mindfulness regarding my interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions, but also an opportunity to do too much or be overly responsible. This dynamic was also compounded by the fact that Site B has more complexities with the students. When I reflected about this with a colleague who also works at both sites, we concur on the difference in student demographic. I wrote, “at Site B the poverty and neglect are palpable” (November 15, 2018).

Reflections of mindfulness practice. During week one, there was a marked increase in the focus of breath awareness in my journal entries. For example, “I skirt outside and look at the sky and feel wonder and beauty amongst the autumn colours. I practice focusing on my breath for a few minutes and feel centred once again” (November 6, 2018) and on another occasion, “I
encourage myself to draw back to the breath and utilize anchor words of ‘thinking’ and ‘distraction’” (November 7, 2018). I also found that, “there is a contented feeling as well as a feeling of joy in my practice as I feel into my breath once again” (November 8, 2018).

As I became more aware of my breath, there was an increase in attention to the present moment. I reflected that, “I truly believe that my formal practice is leading to more moments of mindfulness in my day and an elevated trait-level mindfulness” (November 7, 2018). More equanimity and mindful awareness were experienced during this beginning transformations period than in previous reflections in data collection one. I wrote that, “I had increasing attentional awareness to what I was doing and why I was doing it as well as an openness towards my feelings towards how I wanted to move forward in my role at work” (November 9, 2018). Clarity combined with organizing my time better so that I was not so readily available to everyone could be a possible solution. I journaled about how,

I could take an hour of my time with the closed office door to focus on the tasks I need to get done. This time could even be before or after school because the nature of the job is to be always ‘on.’ (November 9, 2018)

This increased attentional awareness persisted within my journal entries. I found, “as I move through my day and experience, I notice more often the causes of stress, anxiety, or even happiness or joy in my day to day experience” (November 7, 2018). I noted that, “my attentional awareness was quite high as was my ability to be equanimous” (November 7, 2018) and that “the mindfulness practice assisted me several times today to draw back to my present moment and the task at hand” (November 8, 2018).

During week two as I practiced mindfulness of the body, I was more connected with my actual experience and it felt as though awareness of my physical responses helped decrease my
attachment to outcomes. I noted that “I saw and felt emotions in other people, but I didn’t take it on as my own backpack to carry” (November 13, 2018) and that “I am also feeling less attached to outcomes as the outcomes on most things do not solely depend upon me and me carrying them and changing and shifting situations” (November 14, 2018). Regarding mindfulness of the body practices I wrote,

> When I am more connected to my body than I am better able to connect to my actual experience and take care of myself physically and emotionally. When I do this, it radiates out to others as I am in better shape to support and care for all those who need it.” (November 13, 2018)

The mindfulness of the body practices were simple and they “can have such a profound effect on the way I manage my stress given my natural predisposition/formed identity how that plays out in my habits of response and reaction” (November 15, 2018). I reflected further that mindfulness, “is really a kind of a meta-learning with regards to my teaching and learning. Learning how I am in situations and being more conscious of the positive states as well as the negative has a profound effect on my behaviour and interactions” (November 15, 2018). When I was aware of how I was feeling and what I was doing, I could increase my efficacy and equanimity, and gain a deeper understanding of how to shift things that were not of benefit to myself and others within my teaching practice. Focusing on positive emotions like joy to re-write some of the negative narratives was also of benefit during this beginning transformations period.

Mindfulness practices also assisted with my self-care and feelings of ease. “Being outside was and is powerful for me in my mindfulness practice-particularly when I went for a walk” (November 16, 2018). When I practiced a body scan in my formal meditation, I found it to be
A powerful tool for me to get into my visceral sensations and I felt heaviness in my body and a deep relaxation. When I came out of it, I felt refreshed and able to move into the rest of my day with ease. (November 13, 2018)

It seemed there was something to mindfulness with respect to caring for self and others in an impactful and fulfilling way.

**Five-facet mindfulness questionnaire.** Out of the five mindfulness domains measured during this beginning transformations period, I noticed an increase in observe score (3.1 to 3.6), describe score stayed the same (3.8), increase with act with awareness score (1.8 to 2), increase in nonjudgement score (4.1 to 4.3), and a slight decrease in non-reactivity score (3.0 to 2.9). My overall mindfulness score increased slightly (3.2 to 3.3).

**Middle Transformations: Week Three & Four**

Mindfulness of emotions (week three) and development of the heart practices (week four) were the main mindfulness foci explored during this time.

**Self-awareness in current role.** This section includes findings on internal self-awareness, emotional regulation through supporting self and others, as well as understanding my role.

**Internal self-awareness.** There were occasional emotions related to being exhausted and points where I felt tension and heaviness, but I was able to be gentle with myself and I found several instances where I experienced mindful awareness, joy, equanimity, and high self-efficacy. At one point I became aware of my work load professionally and personally, and I found, “*there is a part of me that recognizes the weight of responsibility*” (November 19, 2018). I alluded to this tiredness and imbalance between work load and nourishing myself in other domains as I wrote, “*I often don’t want to do extra outings or social events because my job*
requires high attunement socially, mentally, and emotionally that I am often drained” (November 19, 2018). During my formal meditation practice my mind felt “spacious, but there was tension and constriction in my shoulders and the back of my heart” (November 21, 2018).

When I was frustrated about a circumstance, I noted that the emotion “continually provides constriction in areas of my body- shoulders, back of my heart, and neck- and makes me stuck in my story of how I think things should be” (November 19, 2018). I was beginning to feel into my body and emotions more to make sense of the complex emotional landscape that I found myself in.

The sheer joy and equanimity that I felt during my work day was ubiquitously woven throughout my week three journal entries. On one occasion, “I feel so much positivity and joy today that it is almost as though it is bursting out my body” (November 19, 2018) and on another I wrote, “I really feel like I am working in the right job for me and this brings me a lot of joy” (November 22, 2018). Even though I was tired on one day, “I managed to remain equanimous through the work day despite this” (November 20, 2018). I also noted in one circumstance that “I maintain calm although the parent is actively stressed” (November 22, 2018) and further reflect after we have had our meeting, “I know I have done the right thing for this family. I am becoming more and more confident in my skill set and communication skills with managing others. I feel efficacious, equanimous, and strong” (November 22, 2018). My self-efficacy continued another day when I recorded, “Even though I have a lot to do today, I feel a lot less stressed about it; I know I can manage whatever comes my way in a mindful and effective way” (November 20, 2018). Perhaps one of my greatest personal accomplishments this week was that on one occasion I softened towards myself and practiced gentleness when I neglected to attend a meeting because I was seeing to a meeting at the other site. I went to go through my habitual
emotions of feeling not enough and apologetic but stopped when I noticed how the counselor responded to me. “He does not think it is a big deal and is gentle with me” (November 19, 2018). This made me pause and practice gentleness instead of berating myself. I reflected that,

_I was trying to accommodate two sites and with all the changes had forgotten about the meeting... when I was gentle with myself, I felt more positive ... It also helped me be gentler with others, particularly the ones that were triggering me the most that day._ (November 23, 2018)

Gentleness towards self is an important attribute to begin to develop with respect to my teaching practice especially if I was usually hard on myself and had feelings of not being enough. It could potentially help me by increasing my responsivity towards all circumstances I encounter when I interact with others.

In week four, my mother was having uncontrollable seizures and was hospitalized, therefore, this personal circumstance created some emotions such as distraction, low focus, and low efficiency that might not have been normally present. I wrote, “it was difficult to focus on work” (November 26, 2018) and although I only had five IEPs to update with easy minor changes I felt like, “I move forward with the efficiency and efficacy of a slug” (November 26, 2018). I also experienced low focus and exhaustion when I had been overcommitting myself, “I have been covering for others and I am behind in my own job this week (November 29, 2018) and “I was exhausted and a little unfocused today and I feel like my attention is divided in a lot of different directions” (November 29, 2018). In the first situations, I practiced self-compassion and gentleness by sending myself loving kindness and patience which also enabled me to feel into my emotions at a deeper level and process them:
I utilize the practice of sending myself heartfelt phrases and the practice of feeling kindness in my body... this assists in calming my mind and helping me find some spaciousness. I could feel the positive emotion just pass through me and could feel it wash over me and lighten me. I felt centered. (November 26, 2018)

In the second situation, I felt into the feelings of extra work and I moved through the emotions swiftly and became full of ease. “It feels heavy and I am finding the lightness with each breath. Finding the ease to move through even when there are tough situations and energy around me” (November 29, 2018).

Emotional regulation: Supporting self and others. I reflected that “I exhibited mindfulness by being kind, compassionate, and caring to all those I worked with—students and staff” (November 23, 2018) during this time. According to my journals, I was able to feel into my emotions more fully. In one instance when I was reflecting with a colleague on a situation, I wrote about how I was sometimes tired of the unending situations that seem to present themselves and then:

I breathed in and found some presence and proceeded to feel into the sensations in my body. I had some tension and pain in my back and shoulders. I knew I was holding on to things and perhaps being over reflective because of my master’s work of applying mindfulness to my practice. I felt into the emotional terrain of my body and feel like I am carrying a lot of burdens or things I no longer need to try, and problem solve. Although this is my job, I am perhaps taking on too much responsibility... I remind myself to find that open awareness and tap into my own inner strength and confidence. I do not need to think my way through everything.
Feeling is just as important with experience. This practice is a powerful one at work.” (November 20, 2018)

I was able to practice mindfulness of emotions, gain insight, and then feel more efficacious and calmer to skillfully support students and staff. I actively practiced feeling into my emotional terrain in my day and using what arose as a resource to respond. I wrote:

It is as though I was digesting experiences in order to release them or let them go... I sometimes have a dull, vague, and achy feeling in my body, and I don’t know what it is. Today I practiced feeling into this on a few occasions... on the first occasion the sensation turned into something a bit faster that might be defined as anxiousness about situations... on the second occasion my attention was brought to my stomach that could be defined as an excited nervousness... I finally felt tension in the front and back of my chest and then it softened into lightness and a feeling of joy. I felt as though I was moving through the emotions instead of practicing aversion or constriction of them. (November 20, 2018)

Simply by understanding what the sensations were and acknowledging the feeling by labeling it helped dissipate the feeling and allow more positive emotions of lightness and joy to flood in.

In a scenario with a parent and student meeting, being present assisted me again with decompressing the situation. The mother “tells me afterwards that herself and the student had an argument before the meeting, I breathe and actively listen to her even though she is quite dogmatic and demanding. I compliment her on her advocacy skills for her son and I can feel her decompressing” (November 22, 2018). When another student, who has mental health challenges,
expressed to me that she was struggling in her cross-enrolled class because she could not get a partner for the group work, “I am empathetic to my student and I send a kind but pleasant email requesting support from the teacher” (November 21, 2018).

Creating meaningful connections and relationships with students was also a by-product from being more mindfully aware. I noted on one day, “When I arrive my student with complex needs comes to find me. She has created these beautiful figurines of characters in the graphic novel she has been writing. I am touched and realize how wonderful our connection is” (November 27, 2018). With another student, mindful awareness gave me courage to attend to her even though she was angry, “I try to connect with a prickly student... she is closed off and has huge walls. I am kind to her and silently send kindness to her... I feel like I am digging a lot deeper today with tougher students” (November 29, 2018). I checked-in with a third student on my case load where I listened and cared for all his troubles in life- his complex and toxic family dynamic and his prolific use of substance. I focused on his strengths and what he had accomplished since grade nine and remained present and mindfully aware. When I reflected after the meeting, I realized that mindful awareness made me re-affirm what nourishes me the most-helping adolescents see their potential. I wrote, “I feel good after this connection because helping others and adolescents really nourishes me” (November 27, 2018).

I continued to feel gratitude for my colleagues with respect to creating supportive relationships and insight on how to manage different situations. Our staff was now about half way through a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction course we were taking together and some of the insights and reflections from the others were of benefit to my teaching and mindfulness practice. I related after one challenging student situation, “I am awed at this administrator’s skill set and abilities. I am humbled and grateful once again” (November 22, 2018). I further
recorded how I, “checked in with colleagues and laughed heartily at work” (November 21, 2018) and how,

I commend this teacher for all her knowledge again. I feel like I do this all the time and can not stop myself. The way she assists me in growing in my job and in mentoring me in the way I behave with others is indescribable and I am grateful.

(November 20, 2018)

With still another colleague I wrote,

She listens to me and supports me with kindness that makes me feel strong... I am grateful for her...I speak with her about how much empathy it gives me for the human condition and our students who go through this and worse things at a younger age... I feel empathy and compassion for all of them and all beings.

(November 26, 2018)

These sentiments were of high praise and the gratitude and connection led to compassion and empathy for others. I really experienced high amounts of gratitude for my colleagues and understood the power and value of working on a team.

This realization was further solidified at a district meeting I attended for other special educators. After listening to a few of the other special educators’ teaching scenarios of how they were overrun with duties and responsibilities in the main stream settings, “I realize that I am blessed to be working where I am with such a supportive staff that provides wrap-around support for complex students” (November 28, 2018). I further reflected about how our role as an alternative school is different in the system and that I was,

Doing a lot better in my mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health than I thought... I attribute my sense of well-being to my non-negotiable daily formal
mindfulness practices. I am humbled in gratitude for this ancient practice that helps me approach my life in a more manageable way. (November 28, 2018)

Understanding my role. Within my role as special educator at this alternative high school, I exhibited quite a lot of flexibility in terms of moving between sites and accommodating other people’s schedules and the administration during week three. I covered for one of the English teachers for one zone as she could not find a Teacher On Call; I was Teacher-in-Charge for a day and half; and I moved between sites on two days to accommodate the psychologist’s schedule as well as having a late afternoon IEP meeting for working parents and their daughters.

I wrote regarding my flexibility, “My schedule feels like it has changed weekly between the sites to accommodate the needs of my administrators and the school” (November 19, 2018). I wondered, “If I am being too flexible and need to exercise the practice of saying no” (November 19, 2018). It appeared that being too flexible was detrimental to my work load. This was compounded by the fact that being Teacher-in-Charge added extra responsibilities. I reflected regarding this and my mindfulness practice, “I am not finding it easy to tap into that spacious wonderment of being present and breathing. There are a lot of demands when you are the Teacher-In-Charge and trying to get your own work done” (November 20, 2018). The evidence in my journal entries showed an extensive amount of individualized and personal support for students and when extra duties were added, it made my work load high. Although I at times felt drained from my work, there was an underlying positivity and efficacy that wasn’t there before.

“It is apparent that I will work on setting my boundaries a bit better next week to stay on top of everything... I will do it, be efficacious and find ease as I move through it” (November 29, 2018). “I practice sending kindness to myself and I feel good and efficacious at my job even though I must travel between sites quite a bit today” (November 28, 2018). I finally defined my
role with more clarity when I wrote, “I am realizing my role is one where I am part counselor, social worker, teacher, and administrator” (November 29, 2018).

The challenging work dynamic was still ongoing, but I only mused about it on a couple of occasions in my reflections. At our weekly check-in meeting regarding students, the colleague left early and was unavailable. There were students on her caseload that were really experiencing difficulties. One student had been sexually assaulted, another had suicide ideation as a theme in her writing assignment, substance abuse, and some psychiatric difficulties, and a third was “very frustrated and angry and drew guns all the time in his work” (November 20, 2018). Another colleague was concerned that this third student was at a breaking point and may come in and shoot up the school. All these students were on the first colleague’s caseload. The team had all mindfully let the colleague know at different stages what was happening and what was required, but it appeared she was unable to meet these expectations and; consequently, the extra work load fell onto myself, and the other team members.

**Reflections of mindfulness practice.** During week three, there were rich and abundant reflections where mindfulness of emotions was practiced throughout the work day. The results were that I was feeling into my emotions more and experiencing increased moments of joy, equanimity, and internal awareness. On one occasion I practiced while driving between sites, “I drive with full body consciousness to the next site and realise that my body is home to so much data regarding my emotions” (November 19, 2018). On another when I was speaking with a parent on the phone regarding her son, “I sign off with a smile and when I pause at my keyboard all day today not knowing what to do, I resolve to practice feeling into my body with mindfulness of breath. I feel so much positivity and joy today” (November 19, 2018). I also noted at one point
that I “practiced mindfulness in the last block quite a few times—upward of eight different times for a minute or two while I plowed through some paperwork and emails” (November 21, 2018).

Perhaps the most profound realization from my mindfulness practice was that I noticed:

_I have a natural proclivity toward the negative as my brain, like all our brains, is hardwired to the negative evolutionarily. Bringing mindful awareness to the positive and neutral experiences is important because it can bring balance to the more negative ones that I sometimes feel like I deal with day to day._ (November 19, 2018)

On another occasion I wrote regarding feelings of frustration and challenge:

_I have consciously noticed these feelings and felt them and am choosing to respond in a different way. This is changing a long deep-seated habit. Once the emotion has moved through me, I choose to focus on the positives and what comes are waves of solutions to move around this._ (November 21, 2018)

From these examples, mindfulness assisted me with attenuating to my own emotional terrain, acknowledging and feeling the emotions and providing spaciousness to the positive and neutral experiences of my life. This created internal freedom and lightness in several journal entries. For example, “_I could feel the moments of internal freedom however fleeting they were prior to the next demand coming_” (November 20, 2018) and I also expressed “_lightness feels like it is coming_” (November 19, 2018). These positives were experienced even though in my personal life I felt drained or as if my self-regulation pool was depleted on a few occasions. I wrote:

_I laid horizontally for upwards of an hour feeling all sorts of undigested emotions and concerns in my body, mind, and heart. I utilized the breath to soften my experience... I later felt into my emotions and all I felt was anger and constriction in_
my body and heart. I am pretty sure I had reached the point of self-regulation depletion and all out tiredness. (November 21, 2018)

Fortunately, I had received important messages from others. I further reflected, “keeping myself nourished is essential. My critical friend, supervisor, and husband all recognize this in my writing, reflections, and being” (November 23, 2018). Self-care came up as an important theme during this process particularly because of my demanding work load and personal stresses of having four children and sick, elderly parents to care for. Seeking balance was crucial. I practiced self-care by feeling into a sense of gratitude and silently sending heartfulness phrases to myself. I reflected, “I was grateful for my strength, my emotional and intellectual intelligence, my family, my beautiful yoga and meditation practice, and my life” (November 28, 2018). I also found time for an extra restorative yoga practice one night a week and I noted, “this is of benefit. I can feel it nourish and restore me” (November 28, 2018). Mindfulness practices assisted with enhancing my well-being.

In week four I wove kind-heartedness practices into my formal and informal daily practices. The intention was to be attentive and open to the present moment to observe what was happening instead of judging it. I followed the steps for this from the educator mindfulness course of observing, recognizing, accepting, breathing, and then caring for myself and others in these instances. This combined with sending myself and others kindness via silent phrases were of particular benefit for helping me create spaciousness between my reaction and my responses. I reflected that when I was struggling with high work load and exhaustion,

My mindfulness practice assisted me in dealing with it. I realized ... I was becoming more equanimous with what was being presented as I moved through situations. I felt
the internal inadequacies, but I was still balanced and strong as I performed my and others’ work duties.” (November 30, 2018)

Practicing empathy and gratitude assisted me in finding compassion for myself and others.

**Five-facet mindfulness questionnaire.** Out of the five mindfulness domains measured during the middle transformations period, I noticed a decrease in observe score (3.6 to 3.4), describe score stayed the same (3.8), slight increase with act with awareness score (2 to 2.1), increase in nonjudgement score (4.3 to 4.5), and a slight increase in non-reactivity score (2.9 to 3). My overall mindfulness score increased slightly (3.3 to 3.4).

**Final Transformations: Week Five & Six**

During the final transformations period like in data collection two, interpersonal (skillful communication) and daily mindfulness practices were practiced.

**Self-awareness in current role.** This section includes findings on internal self-awareness, emotional regulation through supporting self and others, as well as understanding my role.

**Internal self-awareness.** While I wove interpersonal mindfulness into my day, I noticed the main emotion as I awoke was tiredness. Tiredness was also felt on occasion through the work day. I noticed “once again, I am tired” (December 6, 2018), but underlying this feeling was often some buoyancy, “I am tired but feel quite bright regardless” (December 5, 2018). I had feelings of over thinking in my formal practice when I related, “I was thinking about problem solving what must be done in my personal and professional life and how I was going to manage it” (December 5, 2018). I was feeling overcommitted, “It feels like my life is full of tasks that might never get done” (December 4, 2018), but I found “an inner joy and buoyancy as I moved
through my work day” (December 5, 2018). Feelings of joy and increased well-being were noted. Mindfulness practices were woven throughout my days and there was a stronger sense of being connected to the present moment instead of being anxious about what would come. “I breathe in the air and feel joy and happiness radiate through me. I also feel a deeper connection to what I am doing. It is as though I am exactly where I am meant to be” (December 10, 2018). Efficacy and equanimity were prevalent within my interactions with others, but also in my reflections of self. “I feel strong, buoyant and efficacious at what I do” (December 5, 2018) and “I feel calm and connected and…like I can accomplish quite a lot while maintaining a high degree of attenuation to what I am experiencing in my interactions” (December 4, 2018). I also experienced joy, empathy, compassion, and gratitude for and with others on several occasions. There were many references to high attenuation to student support in my journal reflections for this time period.

Emotional regulation: Supporting self and others. The high degree of emotional regulation that I exhibited during this time period while supporting others could be attributed to mindfulness practices. While working with students I practiced using skillful communication techniques associated with interpersonal mindfulness. At one point when I was working with a student, I noticed,

She is shaking and visibly distressed. I practice skillfully listening to her with my heart. I check my body awareness, eye contact, listening for underlying significance, and then ask for clarification in efforts to mindfully listen and respond to her present experience. I believe this helps her. We don’t get too far as she hits her head on the desk, but I move away gently, and I see that she begins working again. (December 5, 2018)
On another occasion, I practiced this again with this student when she was banging her eyes with her fists and running her hands through her hair. “I sit with her calmly and silently send her support, kind heartedness, and empathy…she tries working on her art again and her mood seems to stabilise. I silently send her empathy and kindness” (December 6, 2018). I also utilized interpersonal mindfulness and kind heartedness with a student who was explosively angry, outwardly berating himself, and being disruptive and rude in class when he was brought into my office. I did not know this student well, but gently let him know that the behaviour was not acceptable and then quickly moved to discuss all his strengths. I was reading from his IEP and as we discuss his interests, he visibly started decompressing. I wrote, “throughout this interaction I feel a strength and confidence in my own abilities and that I would listen and say the right words. As he heads back to his next class, I silently send him kindness and good will” (December 12, 2018). My efficacy in this situation was evidently high.

During an IEP meeting with a student and his parents, we went through his private psych-ed assessment and “I breathe and feel into the present moment while I practice listening deeply to what they need for their son” (December 11, 2018). His father had strong opinions on how his academics should be and what he wants the school to deliver in terms of a program. Actively listening and being present assisted me in maintaining a high amount of emotional regulation when I conversed with them. Being kind and displaying compassion for others’ struggles and suffering were also prevalent in my journal reflections. In one instance, a student was suffering from severe paranoia and he was once again rude and defensive. “I still greet him with kindness and be compassionate to his struggles and he softens for a moment and says hello to me” (December 6, 2018).
During this time period, I was also assigned to lead short sessions on the core competency of social responsibility: contributing to community and caring for the environment. I decided to turn this into a mindfulness lesson on self-compassion and displaying compassion for others. After the fifteen-minute lesson, “I invite the teenagers to brainstorm ways they can show their friends and themselves more compassion. They are left with the goal of spreading some kindness and reflecting on how that makes them feel” (December 10, 2018). I reflected that I stayed present when I gave the lesson and I felt like the students and teachers were receptive. “I got feedback from the teachers of what a great topic it was. I am realizing that teaching mindfulness is something I really enjoy” (December 10, 2018). It was wonderful to share some mindfulness practices with staff and students and it assisted me in feeling more efficacious in my practice.

When I collaborated with teachers and an educational assistant to assist a high needs student with his math, “I pause and stay quieter a little longer which can change the flow of conversations and I practice being fully present with the interactions. When I work with the student, I practice being present with our interactions as well” (December 5, 2018). Interpersonal mindfulness can assist in increased effective teaching behaviour; creating relationship with colleagues and students alike; and, fostering social connectedness.

Creating collaborative relationships with my colleagues were of importance in my experience of gratitude and joy. I felt gratitude for a colleague who assisted me with preparing a lesson. I wrote, “She has been rock-solid... I am so grateful for her energy, consistency, strength, and sense of fun... it is so amazing to see all her strengths shining. Gratitude washes over me and I really feel it on a visceral level” (December 5, 2018). I experienced joy with colleagues in two situations where I had made some errors and discovered that, “joy and laughter are
important aspects in finding and practicing self-compassion” (December 10, 2018). At a staff meeting, I was grateful for my colleagues and all the collaboration we do for these complex students and I noted, “I feel a deep openness... there is joy and happiness present... I am thankful” (December 12, 2018). Gratitude was present again for a colleague who reminded me not to over-commit to more duties at the staff meeting. “She is right. I sometimes get carried away with all the opportunities for growth. I must stay focused on the ones at present—my masters work, my family and this job. I am grateful for her reflection” (December 12, 2018). Joy, gratitude, efficacy, and compassion were all significant by-products of creating strong relationships through the practice of mindfulness.

I also found practicing interpersonal mindfulness in communication with my administration incredibly powerful and highly effective. When my administrator approached me with strong directive assertive statements regarding students on my caseload, I took a deep breath and listened calmly and attentively for underlying significance while making eye contact, instead of becoming internally agitated or feeling like I was not enough. She expressed her frustration that a student we had was aging out without the appropriate outside agencies in place. In the past I would have taken this as my fault, but now when “I practice clearer communication and slowing down and listening to understand” (December 3, 2018), I see that she was frustrated because more work was being put on us that should have been done earlier at the mainstream school. It had nothing to do with me personally or my efficiency in task completion. With another interaction she was strong and forceful in her communication of what she would like, and “I calmly practice bodily awareness, eye contact (with a small smile) and listening for underlying significance. I clarify with questions about what she requires” (December 4, 2018). She does not want me spending time on students that are aging out of the system. I feel a little
micromanaged, but I comply by stating that I will look after the younger ones first, but I reminded her that part of our requirements for getting alternative education funding was to make sure we have directed the family or student towards a transition plan. “She listens to my response but is not happy about it. Her body language says so” (December 4, 2018). Even though the pressure from her was significant, I didn’t get wrapped up in it or let it affect me. I continued to feel strong and efficacious at what I was doing. I wrote, “I am beginning to attribute these feelings to my mindfulness practices as that is the only thing that has significantly changed over the last few months” (December 4, 2018). My daily formal mindfulness practices were now non-negotiable due to my feelings of improved well-being, self-efficacy, social connectedness, and emotional intelligence. This was further re-affirmed after reflecting with a colleague about my progress since beginning my mindfulness self-study. “She has reflected some pretty big stuff back to me about how things have changed for the good” (December 5, 2018). She reflected that she was impressed by my growth because my self-advocacy within my position with my administration had shown clear leadership skills. I really felt like I could handle my interactions with administration more skillfully without getting drawn into the emotion. I trusted myself more.

Understanding my role. One area where growth in mindfulness was required was my growing frustration with the team member who was not able to complete all the duties in her position. It seemed my patience was running out. Even though my intention was “to be kind and compassionate even with individuals that might trigger me” (December 3, 2018), I found myself, “picking up the pieces and it is frustrating” (December 5, 2018). I felt that this team member was not supporting students effectively and I wrote, “It is also affecting the students in a large way and this is making me even more frustrated. They are not getting the help they need”
(December 7, 2018). I decided to sit with my fiery emotions and, “I realized it was just my value system getting compromised again. I just want to stand up for the students and myself, but I want to do it in a mindful way” (December 6, 2018). It was the injustice in this situation that really triggered me. Mindfulness practices were beginning to teach me to stay with these emotions, feel them, and find some spaciousness around them to dissipate intensity. I practiced sending this team member compassion and kind-heartedness, but at times I struggled with it. On one occasion I seemed to manage it as I noted, “I know I don’t have to like someone, but I can always send them love... This practice helps me to release the thoughts and feelings and I move on into the present moment” (December 7, 2018). When I reflected with a colleague regarding this, “she notes that I have been positive and patient with this colleague, but it is just so challenging because it is affecting my work load the most” (December 7, 2018). On another occasion I reflected,

I try to stay in empathy and compassion for this colleague... and I feel less anxious about the situation... I practiced staying with the spaciousness and I noticed my frustrations instead of acting upon them and have been kind and mindful to this struggling colleague even though I find it challenging. (December 10, 2018)

Mindfulness practices assisted me in exploring interpersonal dynamics with more responsivity and awareness of how my own emotions and reactions were affecting the circumstances.

Meeting situations where I was triggered provided important items to reflect upon. I reflected on the concept of compassion in the context of schools and the role empathy and compassion play in my day to day interactions with students. I wrote, “One of the worst parts of emotional suffering is how personal it feels” (December 3, 2018). In my educator mindfulness
course, I learned that personalization of suffering reveals a very early wounding pattern that often goes unnoticed. This could provide insight into my own early wounding pattern. My value system was compromised when others didn’t meet my expectations for taking responsibility.

**Reflections of mindfulness practice.** During this time period there were several reflections regarding practicing kindness, compassion, and interpersonal mindfulness. I noticed how utilizing silent phrases in the form of mantra and breath awareness were of significant benefit. “*Listening actively, providing space, and practicing compassion for myself and others is an extremely useful lens to place on my professional practice*” (December 3, 2018). I reflected how meeting the demands of my work load was easier to manage. I wrote, “*I am meeting it with strength, ease, and grace. I am open hearted and can hold space for all these things. I am seeing things with more clarity in my personal life and with interactions with staff and students*” (December 6, 2018). I attributed this growing clarity or insight to “*the intrapersonal growth and the reflection that is enabling me to be calmer and clearer no matter what must get done*” (December 6, 2018). I was also filled with happiness regarding this and I further noticed, “*I can deal with anything if I have support of community with others. It is these pivotal relationships that keep me buoyant towards life and how I approach my work*” (December 6, 2018). Clarity and creating connection through meaningful relationships were still more important benefits of my mindfulness practice and how it affected my role as a special educator.

I continued to feel this efficacy within my ability to regulate my emotions, experiencing spaciousness and feeling increased well-being. I recorded:

*There is this internal strength present and that sense of being out of alignment is fading. I feel more certain and less ambivalent about my life choices. Although things*
are complex, I feel like I can move through them with ease and I attribute this to my mindfulness practice. (December 10, 2018)

I recognized the intense emotions but noticed that “they just don’t last as long and take me over. Recognizing these emotions creates a lot of space so I can respond in a way that is more inline with my values” (December 10, 2018). I practiced minding the gaps as I moved through my days as was encouraged in the educator mindfulness course. Minding the gaps meant that regardless of how triggered I had felt about a situation there was always some point where there would be a break of and ending to it. In the course, I was encouraged to notice these spaces, dive into them and extend them if possible. I reflected, “I tend to steam roller over the gaps or spend time in emotion that is not of service to me. Usually it is a story that is created” (December 11, 2018). However, after practicing minding the gaps by weaving the practice of sending myself silent kind heartedness phrases in these gaps, I wrote, “I believe that this and other mindfulness practices are making me feel lighter and less stressed. I do seem to be getting the same amount of work done in the day” (December 11, 2018). Other mindfulness practices such as staying present through daily routines such as brushing my teeth or making my tea; focusing on my breath; practicing conscious awareness while driving; finding those moments of awareness while checking my email and responding and checking in with staff; and moving and eating mindfully all assisted me in feeling more joyous and less stressed about what was arising within me and in my outside circumstances. I reflected, “It feels there is less intrapersonal struggle than before this reflection and application of my self-study in mindfulness. I am identifying my own feelings quicker while maintaining professionality” (December 13, 2018).

The power of mindfulness was further reflected to me after our final staff mindfulness training. There was a palpable positivity present and “I am amazed at how connected this group
of educators feels... the training has been impactful” (December 13, 2018). There were sentiments of gratitude expressed and appreciation was expressed for our teacher and towards me for getting us going in this direction for training. All that were present were grateful for the experience and “two colleagues on different occasions reflect how much positive growth and change there has been with the staff this year” (December 13, 2018). This was further testament to the positive impact that mindfulness could have on me in my role as special educator. I reflected,

Mindfulness is making a significant difference to how I approach my job. I am aware of the beauty in the moments more; I feel less stressed and more confident and efficacious in my work; and how I learn, lead and teach best. (December 12, 2018)

Five-facet mindfulness questionnaire. Out of the five mindfulness domains measured during this final transformations period, I noticed a slight increase in observe score (3.8 to 3.9), an increase in describe score (4 to 4.3), increase with act with awareness score (2.3 to 2.6), increase in nonjudgement score (4.8 to 5), and an increase in non-reactivity score (3.3 to 3.7). My overall mindfulness score increased (3.6 to 3.9).

Summary of How Feedback From Critical Friend Shifted My Journaling

Data collection one. Reflecting with my critical friend as I journaled and prior to starting data collection two, I discovered many things that might have shifted how I gathered my data. One of the main things she expressed was wondering if journaling was a negative or positive thing. She wondered whether too much reflection could be a bad thing and pondered if it was setting me up for a terrible sleep as there were big indications that there was not enough in my life. Perhaps journaling was providing me too much time to dwell on situations. I couldn’t agree more. She wanted me to think about tracking data another way or doing my journal entries
earlier in the day like after work instead of before bed. I journaled earlier during data collection two on a few occasions which could possibly have affected my results.

My critical friend also questioned my word choice in some instances. Did my word choices solidify my beliefs even when they may not be accurate? For example, I used words like ‘control’ or ‘coerce’ and really, I was just ‘managing’ or ‘shifting’ students, staff, or situations which are necessary processes for being effective at my job. Being too hard on myself was also feedback she offered. This is something that I tried to shift when journaling during the second data collection period. Also, in the course of our conversations, she noticed the way I was comparing Site A to Site B. She believed that Site B is more positive than I gave it credit for as there were higher opportunities for student connection time, higher staff interactions, a nice office space, and the permaculture garden project that was taking place that was a source of joy for me. She thought that perhaps I could look at what was causing the digging in regarding my perceptions of Site B. I mulled this over prior to starting my data collection two and it quite possibly affected the way I framed my journaling. I reflected on being outdoors a few times and she recommended that I make time for this as well as practicing more yoga to nourish myself for my students and family. She said she could feel grief in the loss of these activities, and she knew by the way I reflected that these practices kept me light. During data collection two, I subsequently, started walking the dog daily in the forest near my home and joined a weekly restorative yoga class to supplement my short daily asana and mindfulness practices. These shifts could have also influenced data collected during period two.

One of the other pieces she noted in my journaling was that when my values were not respected that these were the times that were most upsetting for me. This was a profound reflection for me regarding my mindfulness practice. I didn’t realize how triggered I could
become when my value system was compromised. She also noted that what was happening in my personal life affected school discussion for Monday reflections. For me this was an acknowledgement that how I felt at home and school goes both ways. Finally, she wondered if I could practice mindfully saying no without judging myself and practice acceptance as she believed I got caught in rut thinking. In our final sentiments we talked about summarizing weekly entries with two stars and a wish to bring out more positives and I decided to do this during data collection two.

**Data collection two.** To assist in my analysis between the two data collection periods as well as the changes that occurred temporally over the two periods, my critical friend provided important feedback to interrogate any assumptions made. During and after data collection two there were some significant discoveries made from my discussions with her. She discussed how with data collection two there was a positive reframe compared to data collection one. I could not agree more with this. I felt that in data collection one I was working through some of my more intense emotions. By the time I had reflected, practiced extensive mindfulness, and discussed my reflections with her, I was in a better space to provide a clearer experience of what mindfulness was like for me in my work day in data collection two. Instead of being overwhelmed, anxious, and consumed by not being enough in data collection one journals, I moved to being mindfully aware, more equanimous, and joyous in data collection two. There was also a significant focus on the importance of building collaborative and effective relationships with colleagues and students to provide the best support possible for the at-risk youth we were working with in data collection two.

She also noted that there was a large amount of reflection on the theme of connection towards others, self, words, and my environment. Connection to others was most evident when I
practiced certain mindfulness practices. After our discussion, I realized the ones that were the most powerful and created the most insightful reflections were breath awareness and the silent use of positive phrases and words. In particular, she noted my connection to these phrases and words.

There was some clarity taking place within my practice as she recognized a theme of less-is-more in my journal entries and intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions during data collection two that was not evident in data collection one. She wondered if I could apply more clarity and simplicity to my job by simply going for a walk at break time and not taking on so much. What I learned through this process and from these discussions was that I am enough, and that even though I am a hard worker, there was no need to over commit to tasks as this was leading to increased stress and risks of burnout.

We further addressed the ambiguity in my role and how with a high work load the importance of structure within my day would be essential. Working within a system there are several approaches I could take, but she suggested that I try to have strict office time to complete my paperwork and other duties and therefore, decrease the draw on my time others place. She noted at one point during the middle transformations period in data collection two how I was experiencing exhaustion and self-regulation depletion in my personal life due to the demanding nature of my job and that a more balanced approach to work/life could be called for. Self-care was essential through this process and I did experience positive benefits from that when I consciously embedded more into my routines during the data collection two period. We finally discussed my proclivity to be overly responsible and she noted direct references to transference from my role as a child in my family dynamic. I wondered at one point in my reflections if I was carrying more responsibility like I did as a child. When applying mindfulness to this insight by
noticing it, feeling it, and pausing when it came up, I gathered a deeper understanding into my formed identity behaviours and how some of them, like taking on too much and pushing through my emotions, do not serve me or others at all. They were just emotions from my childhood experiences that shaped my behaviours now. Noticing them and accepting them for what they were provided spaciousness, awareness, and increased responsivity.

Analysis

Comparisons of Transformations and Connection to Literature

Data was collected at two different sites and in two distinct six-week data collection periods. The student demographic was quite different at each of the sites. Site B student demographic had a higher concentration of students with more complexities than Site A. There was more poverty and a higher indigenous population at Site B. There was also a more challenging work dynamic at Site B as a team member was struggling to perform her duties. I worked at both sites during both data collections and on several days, I travelled between sites fluidly sometimes even during a given day to meet the demands of the work load and to assist the administration. I often worked on Site A paperwork at Site B and vice versa depending upon what was called for. Site A also felt a bit lighter and more synergistic with how it operated than Site B. I, however, had higher opportunities for student connection and staff interaction at Site B. The two different sites provided triangulation for data collection as well as diversity and depth to what I was experiencing in my work day. It may have compounded my work at times, making me appreciate the value of mindfulness practices in assisting me to calmly approach what was coming next. My results may also have been impacted since I was writing my masters while working full time as a teacher and being a parent to four school-aged children. It was one of the
most demanding experiences of my life and consequently, emotions may have been experienced more intensely or amplified.

**Connecting overarching themes to literature: Data collection one and two.** During data collection one, I was strongly identifying with my emotions which was causing me quite a bit of internal stress. Outwardly, my self-regulation appeared to be fine, but inwardly, I was struggling with anxiety, stress, and being overwhelmed with demands of my job. During the final week of data collection one, there was growing evidence that I was beginning to be able to practice more mindfulness during my work day and receive some of its benefits within my emotional regulation. During beginning transformations and through the other transformation periods in data collection two, there was a stark contrast between how I was journaling, reflecting, feeling, and processing my emotions compared to data collection one. Although my critical friend reflections could have played a part in assisting me to positively re-frame my journaling, the evidence from my journal entries showed that my mindfulness practices were positively benefitting me across several domains within my role as special educator.

When I look at the overall period between the beginning of data collection one until the end of data collection two, mindfulness helped me respond with more kindness, empathy, and compassion to self and others. These findings are consistent with mindfulness research conducted with educator/adult participants by Benn et al. (2012), Davis and Hayes (2013), Kynaston (2017), Roeser et al. (2012) and Weare et al. (2014). Flook et al. (2013) and Kynaston (2017) found increased self-compassion in the participants in their mindfulness studies. In both these studies, the researchers found that there was an increased ability for participants to be gentler and kinder to themselves and what they were experiencing. I also experienced this over the duration of my data collection. I realized that I was quite hard on myself, so practicing self-
compassion became a constant companion in my work day and evidence in my journal entries indicate it assisted me in being more efficacious. I also exhibited reduced symptoms of being overwhelmed or stressed and I felt increased self-efficacy as I was better able to manage the demanding nature of my work even though that had appeared to increase over the duration of the data collection. Comparable results regarding lowered stress and increased self-efficacy were found in educator/adult participants of mindfulness research conducted by Kynaston (2017), Benn et al. (2012), Davis and Hayes (2013), Jennings et al. (2017), Jennings et al. (2013), Meiklejohn et al. (2012), Roeser et al. (2013), and Weare et al. (2014). Roeser et al. (2013) found that through the skills acquired by mindfulness, teachers could manage better on the job and, then the researchers inferred from this that teachers would then be better able to deal more effectively with the complexities related to teaching, managing, and learning in the classroom. This was analogous to what I experienced during my mindfulness self-study.

I also experienced greater present moment awareness, enhanced self-awareness, and increased equanimity over the course of data collection. These attributes are all associated with state mindfulness and its practices (Brown et al., 2007, Germer et al., 2005). In their study, Benn et al. (2012), report increased mindfulness among their participants associated with more present moment awareness with their surroundings, physical sensations, and internal mental processes. I found similar results in my self-study. My findings of increased present moment and self-awareness also parallel participant research results in Jennings et al. (2013), Moore and Malinowski (2009), Roeser et al. (2013), and Schussler, Jennings, Sharp, and Frank (2016). The increased equanimity, calmness, and mental composure I experienced over the data collection period was consistent with results found by Davis and Hayes’ (2013) mindfulness research.
Over time I also experienced an increase in my well-being which translated to more joy and happiness for me. This increase in well-being was consistent with the experience of participants in mindfulness research conducted by Jennings et al. (2018), Jennings et al. (2013), Davis and Hayes (2013), Meiklejohn et al. (2012), Moore and Malinowski (2009), and Weare et al. (2014).

This sense of well-being could be correlated with the enhanced emotional regulation I experienced as well. I had more ability to process my emotions instead of pushing them away and subsequently, found less negative emotional responses to situations and more positive emotional responses. I experienced an increased sense of internal freedom associated with acceptance of circumstances of my own and others’ emotions instead of getting carried away with my own or others’ stories, thoughts, and feelings. This contributed to enhancing my emotional regulation. Increased emotional regulation was also seen in teacher and adult participants of mindfulness studies completed by Davis and Hayes (2013), Jennings et al. (2017), Meiklejohn et al. (2012), Roemer et al. (2015), Schure et al. (2008), and Schussler et al. (2016). There was an enhanced responsivity and increased clarity to what I was experiencing within my interactions with students and staff; my attention seemed to be more well regulated. Mieklejohn et al. (2012) and Roeser et al. (2013) found similar results in their mindfulness studies with educator participants. My social and emotional competence felt higher at the end of the data collection period than at the outset which parallels mindfulness training effects on educator and adult participants in research conducted by Davis and Hayes (2013), Jennings et al. (2017), and Schure et al. (2008). I also experienced greater social connection with colleagues. Social connectedness was found to be a positive benefit correlated to mindfulness training and application in Davis and Hayes’ (2013) research as well.
Analysis and comparison between transformation periods. During the beginning transformations data collection one, as I settled into a new school year, the tone of my journaling and reflections were predominantly related to stress and anxiety. I was struggling to understanding my role and responsibilities as a special educator in an alternative school setting and caring for self and others was at the fore in my reflections. I am a people pleaser, a hard worker, and I had feelings of not being enough. Unclear job expectations, a heavy work load and a team member that was mismatched in her position could create a perfect recipe for burnout. The setting created for my data collection meets four out of six of the domains mentioned by The Mayo clinic, stating that,

Job burnout can result from various factors, including lack of control (an inability to influence decisions that affect your job- such as schedule assignments or workload), unclear job expectations, dysfunctional workplace dynamics, extremes of activity, lack of social support, and work-life imbalance. (Mayo Clinic, 2019)

During the middle transformations data collection one, I was wrought with doubt, exhaustion, anxiety, tension, and feelings of not being enough. I wrestled with these emotions amidst challenging circumstances in a work place, including taking on too much. When I practiced mindfulness of emotions and development of the heart throughout my work day, I noticed that I tended to disconnect from feelings and push through being focused on tasks. When my value system was compromised, strong emotions around judgement arose. Heartfulness practices during this time helped me find spaciousness to notice the intense emotions and work towards feeling them instead of pushing them away. Noticing my complex emotional landscape was a significant part of mindfulness practice during this time period. When I was overwhelmed, I noted I was unfocused, and I even spoke of leaving my job because the work load seemed too
high. There were, however, burgeoning feelings of joy, calmness, a little more confidence in my role, as well as emerging feelings of surrendering to environmental circumstances. Some feelings of gratitude were also evident, but mostly in relation to my colleagues and their reflections. The latter findings of joy, calmness, and efficacy as well as surrendering to circumstances could be the product of applying mindfulness to my personal routines as Benn et al. (2012) and Davis and Hayes (2013) found with participants in their mindfulness research. There were some emerging positive feelings of joy, efficacy, and confidence and there were some very positive reflections related to supporting students utilizing mindfulness and creating connection and relationships with colleagues.

During final transformations data collection one, I was in a mire of emotions and the predominant themes were a workload that was too high and my struggle to manage it effectively. I found it increasingly difficult to meet the demands of the work and of the high expectations I placed on myself. I was anxious and uncomfortable with self-advocacy, yet I managed to clearly and professionally communicate my needs with my administrator and started to set some healthier boundaries around communication with co-workers. Emotions of kindness, joy, empathy, and compassion were found to be available for supporting students and parents. Creating connection with colleagues and processing my emotions more effectively created internal freedom on a few occasions and started to help me feel a little more efficacious in my role. I also contemplated Seigel’s work (2007) in *The Mindful Brain* where he found: body regulation (balanced nervous system), self awareness (important when building social connections and relationships), emotional regulation, and fear modulation (ability to calm ourselves and unlearn our own fears) to be key aspects that were positively affected through
mindfulness. By the end of data collection one, it seemed these positive changes were beginning to happen within me as well.

Within beginning transformations data collection two, I experienced some negative emotional states such as overthinking, exhaustion, distraction, heaviness, and feeling not enough, but there were more positive reflections made than in the previous data collection period. These emotions were associated with high self-efficacy, mindful awareness of the present moment, emerging equanimity, internal freedom, empathy, compassion, clarity, and general happiness. Other patterns that emerged were being overly responsible about the undercurrent of discord at one site, experiencing a high work load, and an increased reference to supporting students. I really wanted to see if I could solve the problem in the work dynamic, but I learned that it was about a colleague not being able to do her job and how I was carrying the extra load in terms of demands because of this. During this time period, I seemed more balanced and calmer as I approached these extra demands than before. Jennings et al. (2017), Jennings et al. (2013), and Meiklejohn et al. (2012) discovered similar results with educators in their mindfulness research studies as greater efficacy was reportedly found in participants.

I also whole heartedly practiced breath awareness at work during this time as there were extensive references to this in my journal entries. I reflected about feeling overwhelmed and experiencing tension in my body. In comparison to the first data collection period at the beginning transformations time, there was more reflection about mindfulness and feeling into the sensations in my body/embodied nervous system. This is consistent with findings in Schussler et al.’s (2016) research, where they identified that after mindfulness training and implementation that teachers had a greater sense of self-awareness including somatic awareness. Due to this increase in self-awareness, I was; consequently, able to focus on being more present with what I
was experiencing and encountering in my work day. This increased attention and awareness were found to be by-products of mindfulness training and practice by participants in mindfulness research by Meiklejohn et al. (2012) and Moore and Malinowski (2009).

Feeling joy in my body was a powerful practice for me in shifting some of the negative thought tracks that arose within me and my thoughts during the beginning transformations time. Baumister et al. (2001) discuss how the brain is hardwired to threats or perceived negatives because evolutionarily they were critical to our survival. They further explain how negative experiences were stored in our memory via the amygdala and this feature was used and is still used to keep us safe and avoid situations that make us fearful or unhappy (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkaenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Utilizing mindfulness practices to bring awareness to the positive emotions as well as the neutral ones, can balance out the predominant negative attention bias. The result of bringing attention to emotional patterns can lead to greater understanding of ourselves. This was what started to happen to me during this time and what continued to happen through the remainder of this mindfulness self-study; my sense of well-being increased. Improved well-being was also found to be a benefit for educator participants in mindfulness research by Jennings et al. (2017), Jennings et al. (2013), Rudzroga (2018), and Shure et al. (2011).

Caring for students was of high priority for me during this time period and there was an increased responsiveness to the way I was supporting students. It is plausible that I had worked through many of my harder emotions in the first data collection period by reflecting with mindfulness practices and now there was more space to write and reflect about my interactions. However, the increase was noticeable, and it was now my focus as I continued forward with my
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practice and research. Increased responsivity as a by-product of practicing mindfulness is consistent with educator mindfulness research conducted by Kynaston (2017).

The middle transformations period data collection two, was marked with an increased attunement to being internally aware and more ability to process my emotions instead of pushing them away. Neuroscientists, Tang, Hölzel, and Posner (2015) suggest that “mindfulness meditation includes at least three components that interact closely to constitute a process of enhanced self-regulation: enhanced attention control, improved emotional regulation, and altered self-awareness (diminished self-referential processing and enhanced body awareness)” (pg. 2). I experienced improved emotional regulation and increased self-awareness which is consistent with results found in mindfulness research conducted by Davis and Hayes (2012), Benn et al. (2012), Jennings et al. (2013), and Meiklejohn et al. (2012). High mindful awareness assisted me in processing my emotions and attenuating to my own emotional terrain. I acknowledged the feelings, and this provided spaciousness for the positive and neutral experiences as well. The result was a feeling of increased efficacy in my work and; consequently, there were many reflections regarding mindful awareness, joy, and equanimity. I also experienced gentleness towards myself when I made an error. This is not something I have been able to do easily in the past.

Mindfulness of emotions and development of the heart practices were explored during the middle transformations time. I was able to focus on these practices quite a bit more in my reflections compared to data collection one, as I was not as lost in my narratives and emotions as much. If attention control, emotional regulation, and self-awareness are all posited by neuroscientists Tang et al. (2015) as avenues for understanding how self-regulation and mindfulness work together, then it appears my self-regulation abilities increased. My propensity
to have fixed views in how things should be started to shift. Through mindfulness, I was slowly becoming less preoccupied with my own thinking and self-referential processing and therefore, became better at regulating my emotions which in turn enhanced my self-regulation. This is consistent with research conducted on a cognitive perspective of mindfulness by Holas and Jankowski (2013). Even though on a couple of occasions, I experienced self-regulation depletion and expressed that my window of tolerance for others was quite low in some personal circumstances outside of work, mindfulness and its benefits assisted me with managing the demands of my work and personal life more effortlessly. It was the noticing of these negative emotions that shifted the narrative and me back into the present moment. Thoughts are just thoughts; they are not who I am. There were also several references to practices of kindheartedness to myself and others and there was an increased reference to the level of student support I was giving compared to data collection one and previous transformations periods. Once again colleague reflections and connections were of importance and these reflections mostly seem to be associated with a deep sense of gratitude. This was most likely due to practicing gratitude within my mindfulness plan. Practicing gratitude has been shown to have profound effects on people. This is consistent with Emmons and McCollough’s (2003) research on the effect of keeping gratitude journals as their subjects reported higher levels of well-being. There was also a focus during this time of the importance of self-care practices. I was endeavoring to find more work/life balance and I had a greater understanding of the requirement and benefits of self-care. Schussler et al. (2016) also found that their participants in mindfulness training and practice developed a great awareness of the need to practice self-care.

During the final transformations period I experienced emotions of being tired and over committed on a couple of occasions, but these were overshadowed by the joy, internal freedom,
compassion, and efficacy I felt. I had high self-awareness and was attuned to the myriad of demands that were coming into my work life. Interpersonal and daily mindfulness practices were utilized during the final transformations period. I successfully practiced interpersonal mindfulness on several occasions with staff and students and displayed increased skillful communication and responsivity compared to the final transformations period in data collection one. When my value system was comprised, I experienced some intense frustration, but through mindfulness practices was able to effectively self-regulate to maintain professionality. This frustration was mainly due to the high expectations I have for myself and others. Many daily mindfulness practices were also practiced during this time and contributed positively to my well-being. The evidence in my reflections showed decreased levels of stress compared to the outset of the first data collection and this can be attributed to my mindfulness practice. Results were similar for educators in mindfulness research conducted by Weare et al. (2014) and Benn et al. (2012). Clarity, efficacy, empathy, and the development of compassion to self and others created interpersonal and intrapersonal growth according to my journal entries. This growth was directly related to my mindfulness training and practice as was found with educators/adults in mindfulness research by Davis and Hayes (2013), Flook et al. (2013), Roeser et al. (2013), and Weare et al. (2014).

**Five-facet mindfulness questionnaire.** The five-facet mindfulness self-assessment questionnaire (Baer et al., 2008) was applied and although there were a few fluctuations throughout the data collection all five mindfulness attribute scores increased. My ability to observe increased (3.1 to 3.9), my ability to describe increased (3.6 to 4.3), my ability to act with awareness increased (1.9 to 2.6), my ability to be non-judgemental increased (4 to 5) and my ability to be non-reactive increased (3.1 to 3.7). My overall mindfulness score also increased (3.1
to 3.9) which corroborates my qualitative results of increased mindfulness over the data collection periods. The numerical values were not dramatic increases since I already had a mindfulness practice prior to beginning this research. The scores increased, nonetheless.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview in narrative form of the results and analysis of data collected during this self-study research and connected key findings to literature and research on the benefits of mindfulness trainings and practice with educators and their teaching practice. The focus of the analysis were the effects that mindfulness had on my practice as a special educator in an alternative high school. The entire section was constructed within the understanding and premise of the research question, “How can a professional learning experience involving mindfulness support my practice as a special educator?” and sub-question, “How can mindfulness help me be more efficacious in my practice and increase emotional regulation associated with interpersonal and intrapersonal growth?”
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the value and purpose of this mindfulness self-study related to the research question and sub-question. Following summaries of findings, conclusions and significance of the study, as well as recommendations based on my own self-reflective practice are provided.

Readdressing the Purpose

There is no doubt that teaching and managing the demands of the inclusive and diverse composition of a classroom can be taxing and stressful. Teachers play a central role in creating the appropriate learning climate to meet this diversity effectively (Flook et al., 2013). When working with students with social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural deficits as a special educator, the demands and the stress can be amplified because needs are concentrated. Many special educators experience high levels of stress and low-self efficacy when assisting these students to overcome their cognitive, emotional, and behavioural deficiencies (Burrows, 2011). This can result in educators leaving the profession or being non-responsive to student needs (Dicke et al., 2015; Gallup, 2014; Roeser et al., 2013). Educators’ sense of stress and their ability to cope with student demands and work load are suspected to be causes of burnout and attrition (McCormick & Barnett, 2011). Lack of appropriate strategies around managing the stress associated with teaching and managing behaviour in the classroom is found to be a causal factor for burnout (Flook et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2013; Garner et al., 2018). Teachers and, specifically special education teachers, require appropriate strategies to emotionally regulate themselves, maintain focused attention, and possess positive self-efficacy (Benn et al., 2012). Fortunately, researchers and educators, like myself, have found that mindfulness training and
practice has the power to create: enhanced self-efficacy and emotional regulation; increased well-being, empathy, compassion, social intelligence, and mindfulness; and a reduction in stress and symptoms of burn out in educators (Jennings et al., 2017; Jennings et al., 2013; Davis & Hayes, 2013; Flook et al., 2013, & Roeser et al., 2013).

Many educators have taken mindfulness trainings with positive results in their teaching practice. In efforts to understand how mindfulness training practice could positively affect my teaching practice, I embarked on this in-depth exploration into self-study research. While completing this self-study with its recursive cycles of action, observation, and reflection around the mindfulness strategies utilized, I was interested in how I could transform and apply ways of thinking about teaching. I wanted to ascertain how I could be more effective in my role and decrease symptoms of stress and burnout while increasing efficacy and well-being all within the confines of observing my emotional regulation and intrapersonal and interpersonal growth. Mindfulness helped me explore the personal benefits of practice and provided me with meta-cognitive and meta-emotive tools to pay attention to my teaching practice. My endeavor was to discover the specific techniques involved to add to the growing body of mindfulness research in education and to better understand what constitutes teachers’ professional knowledge; and, then make it available to other educators. My future aspirations include leading and teaching mindfulness trainings for educators, staff, and students at schools in my school district.

Findings

I discovered that mindfulness practices were of benefit for me as a special educator in an alternative high school setting. Summaries of what I discovered, and the lasting implications will be provided within the domains of the question and sub-question guiding my research.
Within the parameters of the research question, “How can a professional learning experience involving mindfulness support my practice as a special educator?”, I found that mindfulness practices were a vital resource in decreasing my stress levels and emotional exhaustion and helped enhance my self-efficacy and overall well-being. The latter often registered as pure joy and happiness in my journal reflections. As I began my research, my journal entries were heavy and weighed down with feelings of being overwhelmed and not being enough. Re-living and re-playing scenarios in a ruminative fashion was my modus operandi and I was constantly exhausted by the emotions and expectations of myself and others. As I practiced mindfulness strategies, the focus on these emotions lifted and I experienced greater present moment awareness, and mindfulness; and, increased emotional regulation, empathy, compassion, and social connectedness resulting in increased social intelligence.

What I learned at a deeper level was the importance of practicing spaciousness around all moments that I experience within my day. When I did this, I often found an equanimous state and high amount of internal freedom to handle any circumstance. Through mindfulness practice, I had a deeper insight into how I am not obligated to absorb everyone’s suffering and pain and carry it as if it were my own story or emotion to solve. I discovered I am enough just as I am. What seemed apparent in my practice was my capacity to take on too much and to be overly responsible in my role. This was apparent in my habits, particularly, when I was already faced with a large work load, I would continue to take on more duties and responsibilities! I learned I am a people pleaser. For this trait not to become detrimental, it is crucial for me to maintain a suitable level of work load by setting appropriate boundaries with others and self-advocating when the work load placed on me is too great. Development of kind-heartedness practices and practicing self-compassion throughout the day assisted me in being gentler with myself and...
others and lowering my high expectations that seemed to be the culprit for frustration, overwhelm, and stress. As I developed greater awareness and practiced staying with spaciousness as it arose, what I found was clarity and wisdom which where utilized in my teaching practice and subsequently, increased my responsivity towards others, particularly the students.

Within the parameters of the research sub-question, “How can mindfulness help me be more efficacious in my practice and increase emotional regulation associated with interpersonal and intrapersonal growth?” I experienced higher emotional regulation, self-awareness, and attention control all culminating in higher self-regulation when mindfulness practices were applied in my teaching practice. At the beginning of the process, it seemed that I did not feel into my emotions to digest my experiences. I just pushed emotions down and moved forward in a task-oriented fashion. Self-awareness increased as I practiced mindfulness of the body and mindfulness of emotions.

While I moved through my mindfulness self-study plan, I was clearly processing my emotions more effectively and was better able to digest my experiences near the end of the data collection time. This was intimately linked with the development of interpersonal mindfulness skills associated with skillful listening and communication. In more challenging conversations with colleagues or working with youth that were clearly distraught, I always silently sent kind-heartedness phrases to the other individual. I then would focus on my own body awareness, maintaining eye contact, listening for underlying significance, and asking for clarification when required. This practice was powerful as in all circumstances I came to the realization that my tendency to get embroiled in the emotion and drama of myself and the other person was strong. The noticing was what was compelling. I was able to pause, breathe, and respond appropriately
instead of reacting. In some instances, particularly with colleagues, I had totally misread what their needs were, and this had the power to shift how I felt about the interaction.

As I practiced, I learned that my sense of being out of alignment faded and that past interactions and experiences felt complete, more digested and less charged because I had greeted the emotions of myself and the other with awareness and tenderness. This was incredibly insightful. Near the end of my research data collection time there was an enhanced social connection to staff and students that can be attributed to my mindfulness practices, emotional regulation, and intrapersonal and interpersonal growth. Mindfulness as a methodology for combating burnout and fatigue helped me to start to transform some deep-seated mental habits that were holding me back and affecting how I responded to professional aspects of life.

Siegel (2007a) posits in his research that practitioners of mindfulness develop a more refined understanding of how the mind works (thoughts, emotions, and habitual tendencies) and gain heightened awareness so that “it becomes possible to intentionally alter the flow of mental experience” (p.259). He even goes one step further and attests to mindfulness practice being able to transform the brain and mind physiologically. He wrote in terms of neuroplasticity,

If we can disengage old habits of neural firing from creating their automatic and engrained emotional reactions… we can reduce mental suffering and enhance the growth in our internal world… This shift in the focus of attention-the way we use the mind to channel the flow of energy and information through the various circuits of the brain- changes the patterns of activity in the brain. With repetition, such mindful practices can create intentional states of brain activation that may ultimately become traits of the individual. In neuroplasticity terms, this is how new patterns of repeated
neural circuit activation strengthen the synaptic connections associated with those states that lead to synaptic strengthening and synaptic growth. (p. 259)

If Seigel (2007a) is correct, then with the qualitative data I have garnered from this research, I acknowledge that mindfulness practices have likely started to physiologically change how I respond to my professional life and other experiences as well. As my equanimity increased through the duration of my research, I began feeling less overwhelmed with the intensity and demands of my work load and this had spillover affects on my personal life. The intrapersonal growth I experienced fed into my interpersonal growth and had positive impacts on my emotional regulation and relationships with others. Anodea Judith (2016) aptly describes how I was beginning to feel at times internally,

As you spend more time in your inner temple, things that used to bother you seem less significant. Slowly the distinctions between inner and outer worlds begin to fade and you realize there is no separation. What is within shapes what is without and vice versa. (p402)

The increased ability to regulate myself emotionally led to higher self-efficacy and overall well-being. I learned that by staying present with all moments, that I could develop a deep awareness to respond with clarity and wisdom. Mindfulness had given me courage and confidence to appropriately advocate and care for myself as well as others more effectively. Mindfulness completely changed how I approached my work and my life as this ancient practice provided me with a way to live life more fully with wisdom and grace.

Conclusions: Significance of the Study

The reflective design of this mindfulness self-study has the potential to impact the researcher (myself), other educators I work with, school staff, and students at our school. The
study began with researching the empirical validated results on the effects of mindfulness training and practice on educators and their teaching practice. Motivated by what I discovered, I took an educator mindfulness training course and encouraged the administration to offer it to the staff at our school. Our entire staff participated in an adapted version of a MBSR training and it is with these colleagues that I reflected about my practice as I moved through my self-study. This supportive setting provided a perfect backdrop for reflections of mindfulness on my teaching practice. The personal discoveries I made regarding mindfulness and its benefits in a school or team-oriented workplace could have far-reaching effects in terms of efficacy and well-being of staff and students and the creation of positive learning climates within our classrooms and our school.

From this self-study, potential benefits of mindfulness training and continued practice include enhanced self-efficacy and emotional regulation; increased well-being, empathy, compassion, social intelligence, and mindfulness; and a reduction in stress and symptoms of burnout. Increased self-awareness and noticing spaciousness within circumstances provided me with high levels of internal freedom and an inner wisdom and clarity to more effectively support students and staff. This self-study research provided an excellent resource and example of how simple practices of mindfulness can vastly transform how educators teach, lead, and learn. The practice of teaching is often implicit and creating knowledge of how an individual can be more efficacious in their teaching practice requires the magnification of personal teaching practice through the lens of self-study design. Then, the research can significantly contribute to the pedagogical research knowledge base.
Recommendations

The findings from this self-study demonstrate the positive benefits of mindfulness training and practice within a special educator’s teaching practice and the effectiveness of utilizing a self-study design to gain insight on how to transform one’s teaching practice. When I became more mindfully aware, creating spaciousness within my interactions, my empathy, compassion, and social connectedness with others increased. This enhanced my feelings of well-being and decreased symptoms associated with stress and burnout. Self-efficacy and equanimity increased, and enhanced emotional regulation associated with intrapersonal and interpersonal growth followed. The benefits of mindfulness are vast and sharing it with other educators for professional development and with staff, students, and other schools in the district is recommended.

At the outset of this research, I also wanted to go a step further and understand if mindfulness should be a proposed requirement for special educator and teacher training. With the positive impacts of mindfulness discovered from this self-study, it is recommended that some form of mindfulness-based training be part of the pre-service teacher qualification process to appropriately prepare pre-service teachers for the social and emotional demands. Garner et al. (2018) researched the effects of mindfulness-based social-emotional learning (SEL) programs with pre-service teachers and found participants exhibited increased mindfulness and improved dimensions of emotional competence. Their findings are consistent with my recommendation as they propose that integrating mindfulness-based SEL programs “into teacher training may provide an important opportunity to build the personal and professional emotional resilience of emerging teachers who, from all accounts, will face enormous challenges in their teaching roles” (Garner et al., 2018, p.10).
With regards to data collection and this self-study design, I would make some changes if I were to undertake this research again. Although I garnered rich and extensive data from the way I designed it, I feel that the journal entries could have been condensed further with the same results. This would have reduced the amount of time I spent on coding and analysing the data and made my research less cumbersome. Changing how I collected the data, by concentrating each journal reflection into two well defined variables or analytics would be of benefit. I would also narrow the sub-question even further by making it more specific to further focus my journal entries.

Summary

This chapter readdressed the value and purpose of this mindfulness self-study and showcased the benefits of a mindfulness practice for a special educator in an alternative school setting. The study as recorded in this thesis answered the research question, “How can a professional learning experience involving mindfulness support my practice as a special educator?” and also addressed the sub-question, “How can mindfulness help me be more efficacious in my practice and increase emotional regulation associated with interpersonal and intrapersonal growth?”

The benefits of mindfulness were multiple, with deep impact. They have the great potential to not only positively impact the researcher, but also positively impact the staff, students, and school with which she works. This self-study contributed to the knowledge base of mindfulness research in education and will potentially contribute to better understanding of what constitutes teachers’ professional knowledge.
References


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http://www.mindfulschools.org/training/mindfulness-fundamentals/


doi:10.1177/00224669030370030901
### Benefits of Mindfulness for Teachers/Adults

**Table A1.**

*Benefits of Mindfulness for Teachers/Adults*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benn et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Significant reductions in stress and anxiety;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased mindfulness, self-compassion, and personal growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis &amp; Hayes (2013)</td>
<td><strong>Affective:</strong> Increased emotional regulation; decreased reactivity and increased response flexibility;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Interpersonal:</strong> Empathy and compassion; fosters emotional intelligence and social connectedness; decreased stress and anxiety reported;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Intrapersonal:</strong> Increased immune functioning, enhanced functioning in middle prefrontal lobe area of brain such as self-insight, morality, intuition and fear modulation; improved well-being and reduction in psychological distress, increases in equanimity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flook et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Reductions in psychological symptoms of burnout;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased self-compassion;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased effective teaching behaviour;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduction in attentional biases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennings et al. (2017)</td>
<td>Higher levels of efficacy and well-being and social and emotional competence;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Noticeable reduction in time urgency which could directly impact classroom organization and improvement on teacher and student productivity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jennings et al. (2013)</th>
<th>Positive effects on well-being, efficacy, burnout/time pressure and mindfulness; Increased ability to regulate emotional activity and positive effects on learning, mindful self-observation, and self-regulation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kynaston (2017)</td>
<td>Increase in empathy, motivation, self-efficacy, and compassion towards their students and themselves; Participants viewed their mindful practice to be the reason for students making academic, social, and emotional gains; Increased resilience with regards to coping with feelings of burnout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meiklejohn et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Enhancement of attentional and emotional self-regulation and promotion of flexibility; Increases in sense of well-being and self-efficacy; Positive effects on management of classroom behaviour and establishing and maintaining supportive relationships with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moore &amp; Malinowski (2009)</td>
<td>Increases in measures of attention and levels of mindfulness; Linked with attentional functions and cognitive flexibility which in turn affects well-being and mental balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roeser et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Greater mindfulness, focused attention, working memory capacity, and occupational self-compassion; Lower levels of occupational stress and burnout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schure, Christopher, &amp; Christopher (2008)</td>
<td>Positive physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and interpersonal changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schussler et al. (2016)</td>
<td>Development of greater self-awareness, including somatic awareness and the need to practice self-care; Improvement of ability to become less emotionally reactive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weare (2014)</td>
<td>Reductions of stress burnout and anxiety; Improved ability to manage thoughts and behaviour; better mental and physical health; Greater self-efficacy and self-compassion; Increased empathy, compassion, tolerance, and patience; Increased cognitive performance and enhanced job performance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Comprehensive List of Evidence-Based Mindfulness Training Programs for Educators

**mMBSR (modified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction)**

This program targeted elementary school teachers and was adapted to focus on integrating skills in the classroom (Flook et al., 2013). Adaptations from the MBSR included: extending the number of sessions; providing a variety of guided practice time options varying in length from 15-45 min; and providing specific school-related activities and practices (Flook et al., 2013). The course lasted eight weeks (two and a half hours/week) plus an all-day immersion (six hours at the end) totalling twenty-six hours of practice and instruction. Participants were encouraged to practice daily.

**SMART (Stress Management and Relaxation Training)**

This was a mindfulness professional development program for K-12 teachers and administrators. It was developed through the sponsorship of the IMPACT foundation and its curricular aims are concentration, attention, and mindfulness; awareness and understanding of emotions; and empathy and compassion training. The training was piloted in Vancouver and Colorado (Meiklejohn et al., 2012) and consisted of eleven sessions over eight weeks including two-day long sessions (thirty-six hours in total). Participants were assigned a personal daily mindfulness practice (10-30 mins in duration).

**MT (Mindfulness Training)**

This program was adapted from the SMART program and targets K-12 teachers. In one study it was utilized with parents and teachers of special needs students (Benn et al., 2013). In an eight-week program, participants met for a total of thirty-six contact hours in eleven sessions (Roeser et al., 2013). It was experiential in nature and used five main activities to teach
mindfulness and self compassion to teachers: guided mindfulness and yoga practices; group discussions of mindfulness practice; small-group activities; lecture and guided home practices; and homework assignments.

**CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education)**

This training program targeted pre-K-12 teachers and was delivered by the Garrison Institute and has been offered in Denver, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and New York (The Garrison Institute, n.d.). It is based on the Prosocial Classroom model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) and aims to improve teachers’ overall well-being, effectiveness, teacher-child relationships, classroom climate, and increase students’ prosocial behaviour. There are several formats including: two two-day sessions; four one-day session retreats; and a five-day intensive retreat. CARE facilitators provide support via email, and individualized coaching over the phone in between sessions.

**CALM (Community Approach to Learning Mindfully)**

This is a brief daily school-based intervention to promote better stress management, and social emotional competencies to enhance educator well-being (Harris, Jennings, Katz, Abenavol, & Greenberg, 2015). The target group was teachers and school staff. The intervention/training sessions included sessions in gentle yoga and mindfulness practices four days/week for sixteen weeks lasting about 20 minutes each. Participants were encouraged to attend at least two days/week and to use weekly personal practice cards provided outside of sessions.

**MBWE (Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education)**

This program was created at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, University of Toronto in 2000 in response to reports of teacher stress and burnout. It is a program that targets
human services professionals (Poulin, Mackenzie, Soloway, & Karayolas, 2008) and it is taught within the teacher education program in a nine-week (thirty-six hour) course.

**Mindful Schools**

Mindful Schools (Mindfulschools, 2018) is a non-profit organization in the US that has trained over 25,000 educators, parents, and mental health professionals that work with youth and has the goal of integrating mindfulness practices into the everyday learning environment of K-12 classrooms. They offer five different online options to get mindfulness training and to even become a mindfulness teacher. The training options are:

**Mindfulness fundamentals.** There is an expert guiding teacher providing ongoing participant feedback available; six-week course (two-three hours/week). In this course, the basics of mindfulness mediation is learned through readings, videos, reflections, and guided mindfulness practices.

**Mindfulness educator essentials.** There is an expert guiding teacher providing ongoing participant feedback available; six-week course (two-four hours/week). In this course participants learn how to integrate mindfulness into their classrooms and work with children and youth. Curriculum for all levels provided, plus manuals on facilitation and research.

**Mindful communication.** This course is for deepening mindfulness practice by exploring the realm of interpersonal communication. It is eight weeks long (two-four hours/week). The facilitator of the course draws upon mindfulness practices, the internationally used system of non-violent communication and the science of nervous system regulation. Videos, exercises, and lecture notes guide students through the course materials.
**Difficult emotions course.** Through videos, readings, and exercises, this six-week online course (two-four hours/week) offers the opportunity to deepen participant mindfulness practice and enrich your approach to emotional regulation.

**Mindful teacher year-long certification.** This program is offered on a blended format and is book ended by two in-person week long retreats. The ten-month intensive training in between the retreats involves three-five hours/week doing: online content, live group calls, cohort group participation, daily sitting, a teaching lab, and expert taught workshops and talks.

**Mindfulness in Schools**

The Mindfulness in Schools Project (Mindfulness in Schools [MiSP], 2019) is a non-profit company in the UK that was developed in 2009 to research, encourage, and support the teaching of mindfulness in schools. Training courses are:

-.begin (pronounced ‘dot’ begin). This is an introductory course on mindfulness that is done over the course of eight weeks via small group session of approximately ninety minutes per week. The course is delivered via video conferencing by a highly experienced instructor.

**Teach .begin (11-18 yr. olds).** This is a four-day course that trains participants to teach the ten-lesson .b curriculum to youth (11-18 yr. olds) in schools or other youth-related organizations.

**Teach paws .begin (7-11 yr. olds).** This is a three-day course which trains participants to teach the Paws .begin curriculum to youth (7-11-yr. olds) in schools or other youth-related organizations.

**School mindfulness lead.** This six-day residential intensive training teaches participants how to teach the .b Foundations to others (staff, parents, and other adults in the school
community). Participants also learn how to develop systems of support for students and adults that practice mindfulness in the school community.

**Teach .b foundations.** This is a three-day course that targets trained MiSP teachers who wish to teach the eight-week .b Foundations course for teachers and other adults in their school community.
Appendix C

Mindfulness Checklist Utilized in Data Collection

Mindfulness Checklist

This checklist was created from the Mindfulness Fundamentals online educator course (Mindful Schools, 2018). It was utilized as a framework for journaling during data collection.

Week One: Mindfulness of the Breath

- **Guiding question**: What is mindfulness and how can mindfulness of the breath assist with being attentive, open, and honest to what is happening in the present moment and observant of the experience (instead of trying to control it)?

- **Practice focus**: Guided meditations: counting the breaths, and mindfulness of the breath using anchor words such as ‘thinking’ or ‘feeling’ to label present moment experience. Avoid labeling what arises as good or bad. Practicing breath awareness throughout the day. Set an intentional space for mediation that is quiet and free from distraction.

Week Two: Mindfulness of the Body

- **Guiding question**: What role does the body have in mindfulness and how can paying attention to the body give me the opportunity to address my moods and emotions in more skillful ways?

- **Practice focus**: Practice bringing awareness to movements of the body, for ex. daily activities like walking, practice feeling joy in the body, keep practicing mindfulness of the breath. Explore mindfulness of the body alone through guided body scan. Practice mindful movement in daily life, for ex. washing the dishes, typing at the keyboard, opening the door.
Week Three: Mindfulness of Emotions

- **Guiding question:** *How can I gradually train myself to meet my emotional life with more clarity and equanimity?*

- **Practice focus:** Focus my attention on emotions during the day, write down what I notice and become familiar with my emotional terrain, continue to practice daily meditation, practice distinguishing between emotions and thoughts as they arise. Practice guided meditation: feeling emotions in the physical body noticing what sensations arise. Practice finding space between difficult emotions and response or reaction. Pay attention to positive or neutral experiences in practice and in daily living to balance negative cognitive bias.

Week Four: Development of the Heart

- **Guiding question:** *How can the mindfulness practices assist me with increasing capacity for gratitude, compassion, equanimity and help me digest and integrate intense emotional experiences in more effective ways?*

- **Practice focus:** Keep a gratitude journal to record three things grateful for every day. Practice guided meditation to develop equanimity and practice bringing kindness into our awareness by observing, recognizing, accepting, breathing, and caring during emotionally intense experiences. Practice guided meditations for heartfulness and gratitude. Practice working with the ‘inner critic’ or judgements made to soften into experiences instead of being hard and rigid.

Week Five: Interpersonal Mindfulness

- **Guiding question:** *How can mindfulness practices assist me with skillful communication and skillful listening intrapersonally and interpersonally?*
• **Practice focus:** Practice guided meditation on compassion and apply when I see someone having a rough time, in need of empathy or when I am having a difficult time with a relationship. Avoid separation habits with communication with others, ex., mean or gossiping, fabrication or exaggeration, or being passive by not speaking up. Practice skillful communication utilizing body awareness, eye contact, listening for underlying significance and asking for clarification. Practice guided meditation on compassion and practice with self and others.

**Week Six: Everyday Mindfulness**

• **Guiding question:** *How can I integrate mindfulness into all moments of my professional and personal life to make my experience more meaningful?*

• **Practice focus:** Continue to meditate daily and practice weaving mindfulness into my life and ordinary routines. Be a kind observer of the mind, letting thoughts come and go. Bring all mindfulness practices that have been developed in the course to my experience. Practice utilizing heartfulness phrases with self and others, do not steam roll over the gaps in our experience of life. Notice the spaces in between experiences. Practice guided meditation on mindful eating.